

The role of marketing leadership in directing key internal stakeholder alignment
to evolving customer centricity in a South African retail bank

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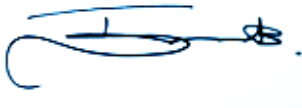
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Abstract

The South African financial services industry holds a relatively high ranking in global competitiveness reports, yet operates in the realities of an emerging market, meaning retail banks are not immune to the changes required to remain successful. Marketing leadership, as customer custodians, can play a vital role by directing their key internal stakeholders' alignment to evolving customer centricity. A case study design conducted in a major bank with a national footprint and various international subsidiaries in broader Africa and beyond, explored the potential broadening of the role of marketing leadership in the studied context. The qualitative research employed an interpretivist philosophical stance and a deductive research approach, providing a rich and meaningful understanding of the main phenomena and their interdependence. A mono-method was used with a longitudinal time horizon of five years. Data was collected using semi-structured discussion guides in two rounds of individual interviews in 2018/9 and 2022/3. Purposive sampling was used to select executive and senior marketing leadership and key internal stakeholder (such as Chief Executive Officers and Chief Financial Officers) participants. Findings, recommendations, and implications were based on an extensive literature review of phenomena with practical applications and thematic analysis of primary data, revealing emerging themes, to achieve the primary and secondary objectives of the study. Findings included that marketing leadership could broaden their role to include the direction of key internal stakeholders' alignment to evolving customer centricity, they must have a clear vision for customer centricity and be able to articulate it to their stakeholders, to ensure all are aligned on the vision for customer centricity and their roles in achieving it. It is important for marketing leadership to measure the impact of customer centricity initiatives. The study concludes that by broadening the role of marketing leadership to include the direction of key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity, marketing leadership can play a critical role in improving overall customer centricity. A conceptual framework created to depict this broader role the bank's marketing leadership could play was an added contribution to the body of knowledge. Recommendations for future research include conducting more related studies in the region, in order to advance the discourse.

Keywords: Customer centricity, marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment, retail banking, qualitative research, case study.

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(Psalm 63:3)

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
BASA	Banking Association of South Africa
CC	Customer Centricity
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
Chat GPT	Generative Pre-trained Transformer
CMO	Chief Marketing Officer
CoFI	Conduct of Financial Institutions
Covid-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CVP	Customer Value proposition
ECD	Early Childhood Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
KIS	Key Internal Stakeholders
ML	Marketing Leadership
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NDP	National Development Plan
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
PH	Product Head
RB	Retail Bank
RFP	Request for Proposal
ROI	Return on Investment
SA	South Africa
SARB	South African Reserve Bank
SoW	Scope of Work
TCF	Treating Customers Fairly
WEF	World Economic Forum
WMA	Windows Media Audio
4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
5IR	Fifth Industrial Revolution

1. CHAPTER ONE

STUDY CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction

The potential to modernise the current role of marketing leadership (ML) in an organisation was examined, by exploring the potential of marketing leadership to direct key internal stakeholders' (KIS) alignment with evolving customer centricity (CC). The researcher gained extensive experience in the marketing and business leadership activities of a South African retail bank's head-office through being employed by and actively participating in the organisation over more than two decades.

1.2 Background to the research problem

To provide the background to the research problem, the realities, challenges and opportunities presented by each of the main phenomena as these relate to the research title will be discussed at a high level. The main phenomena of the research study included marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity. The interdependence of the phenomena will also be examined in the sections to follow.

1.2.1 Marketing Leadership

Marketing leadership emphasises the dynamism of marketing and the need to have a holistic view of the enterprise and to understand how the various functions of the organisation depend on each other, according to Felton (1956). Challenges faced by marketing leadership include a lack of board support (Whitler, Lee & Young, 2022), sub-optimal inter-disciplinary collaboration (Moorman *et al.*, 2019:2; Malhotra, 2002), declining influence (Key, 2020), dwindling credibility (Katsikeas *et al.*, 2016), low agility (Kalaignanam, Tuli, Kushwaha, Lee & Gal, 2021) and lack of accountability (di Laurea, 2021; Habel *et al.*, 2020; Umemoto *et al.*, 2019) to deliver against its performance

criteria and keep up with the complex and fast pace of change in the world and in their organisational ecosystems.

To promote the marketing discipline's dynamic evolution and transformation, Moorman, van Heerde, Moreau and Palmatier (2019) propose: "let's not become sea squirts". Moorman *et al.* (2019:2) therefore challenge the marketing community to stay curious and keep exploring: "This marine animal begins life as an active creature with a 300-neuron-sized brain. However, after swimming around during its early life, the sea squirt ultimately attaches itself to the ocean floor, where it happily stays for the remainder of its life. Remarkably, in the absence of the need to wander and explore, it has no use for its brain and eats it".

According to Pless and Maak (2011:4), responsible leadership is essential to enact a vision for a sustainable future through co-creating futures with key stakeholders. Marketing leaders also have an opportunity to act as responsible leaders. Responsible leadership must ask a core question: "What is the role of leadership and of leaders in a network of stakeholders, and how can a leader lead responsibly across various, potentially conflicting needs and interests?" (Pless & Maak, 2011:6). Leadership is about change, whether on the individual, team, organisational or societal level, or a combination thereof. Leaders, intentionally or as a by-product of going about their business, influence followers, and *vice versa*, which enables goals to be met. "Reaching the objective means a transformation took place", according to Pless and Maak (2011:8).

The role, specifically of marketing leadership, will be explored further. Bernhard and Olderog (2014:20) state that the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO), and by extension the role of marketing leadership, is "to make listening to customers possible across organisational boundaries" (Ananda *et al.*, 2016; Veldsman & Johnson, 2016; Bernhard 2014). Hearing what customers have to say is a critical part of marketing leadership's role (Eriksson *et al.*, 2020; Deloitte, 2018; Jaworski *et al.*, 2016). Internally, opening up interdisciplinary communications emphasises the need for semantic coordination as specialist groups frequently resort to shorthand jargon that may be indecipherable to outsiders (Brønn & Brønn, 2017:300).

To be customer centric, the organisation needs a customer centric vision (Coetzee, 2014:999&1012). Marketing leadership cannot operate in a silo, and it is essential that their steer is valued and incorporated during future planning of activities related to the vision and direction of the organisation (Haapio *et al.*, 2019; Gulati, 2007). Marketing leadership's accountability stretches beyond the creation of positive opinions about the company in the market; delivery of results against a strategic vision and a host of pre-agreed (Katsikeas *et al.*, 2016:6) and realistic (Zubaly, 2020:447) financial and growth performance measures which are integrated into the role's deliverables (di Laurea, 2021; Habel *et al.*, 2020; Umemoto *et al.*, 2019; PwC, 2018; Bernhard & Olderog, 2014:7), together with acquiring prospective customers (Sharma, Raney & Luhar 2021) and motivation of employees (Patzner *et al.*, 2018:339). Marketing leaders need to find ways to motivate and build trust with employees and to encourage leaders to listen and act on employee feedback, as explained by Berg, Buesing, Hurst, Lai, and Mukhopadhyay (2022:4). Key *et al.* (2020:155) cautions against a loss of marketing leadership's decision rights: "Robust issues related to integrating strategic decisions associated with operations, procurement, and logistics now fall outside of marketing". "On an ongoing basis, the structure, measures, and decision rights must be architected correctly", adds Whitler (2022:110).

1.2.2 Key internal stakeholder alignment

The importance of stakeholder alignment is expressed by Burger and Pelsler (2018:145); O'Keefe *et al.* (2016:422); Coetzee (2014) and Van Riel (2011). A lack of strategic alignment among internal stakeholders can be caused by several factors including the different thought worlds in different disciplines and the challenge of finding shared vocabulary between different stakeholders (Whitler 2014). Furthermore, authors Kesler and Kates (2017:10) state that alignment is required on core principles, not broad-brush generalities, to ensure teams can make progress and exert a positive impact over a short and longer period to sustain the advantage.

Large corporations with dynamic workforces and diverse functional capabilities face the ongoing challenge of getting all the moving parts to work in unison to realise their

purpose and meet their objectives in fast-paced and ever-changing environments (Boris, 2020; Deloitte, 2020; EY Global, 2020; PwC, 2020; BASA, 2019; Moorman *et al.*, 2019). Such organisations cannot afford prolonged or frequent misalignment in strategic orientation or execution. Given high inter-dependence between workers in these ecosystems, a shared understanding of purpose, philosophies, processes and other aspects are necessary for the sustainability of the operations (Kalaiganam *et al.*, 2021; Eriksson, Robertson & Näppä, 2020; Burger & Pelsler, 2018).

Misalignment in an organisation (Corsaro & Snehota, 2011) at any stage, but certainly also during a period of significant transformation (Pless & Maak, 2011), whether based on economic or political reform or even a public health crisis, can present challenges. In this study, the alignment of key internal stakeholders (including Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), Chief Finance Officers (CFOs) and Product Heads) to evolving customer centricity, as well as the role of marketing leadership in directing the alignment of their key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity, was explored.

The different “thought worlds” (Zubaly, 2020; Brønn & Brønn, 2017; Whitley, 2014) from which employees with different academic and professional backgrounds approach the world of work can have a negative impact on organisational alignment. The negative impact will transpire if the different thought worlds are not carefully managed through concerted effort and mindfulness of the different angles from which strategic intent, challenges and opportunities are approached. The potential to derail an organisation’s effectiveness in fulfilling its purpose and achieving its objectives must be acknowledged, understood and managed.

Al-Sumri, Cao and Duan (2020:39) explains that collaboration between cross-functional or trans-disciplinary areas, such as marketing strategy supporting business strategy, is where customer custodians scan for gaps in the market that may reveal developments that may either help or harm the organisation and then propose unique and optimal placement and promotion of the organisation, to ensure it stands out as a supplier of market leading solutions. Al-Sumri *et al.* (2020:39) further state that “while strategic alignment generally enhances an organisation’s performance, it is also one of the most difficult challenges facing managers”. Leaders and managers operating in complex,

dynamic and highly connected and competitive environments, such as those found in the financial services industry, are faced with the ongoing responsibility of orchestrating strategic and operational alignment between cross-functional key internal stakeholders in an ecosystem. It is important to understand the relationship and interdependency between the business and marketing specifically.

In terms of opportunities, optimised collaborative engagement between internal stakeholders in an organisation, on the other hand, can have a very powerful impact on the purpose driven, high performance ecosystem. There is a quest for a “Symphonic C-Suite” where all stakeholders perform in harmony and unity (Saha & Katha 2018). “Silo-busting” (Deloitte, 2018; Naidoo, 2018); internal collaboration (Gartner, 2022; Malik *et al.*, 2021; Al-Sumri, Cao & Duan, 2020; Moggi & Dameri, 2020:2831-2832; Zubaly, 2020); coordination (Bolton, Logan & Gittell, 2021; Halevy, Halali & Zlatev, 2019); cooperation (Freeman *et al.*, 2021; Phillips, 2021; Moggi & Dameri, 2020); employee engagement (Moggi & Dameri, 2020 & Velter *et al.*, 2020); and agility (Kalaighnam *et al.*, 2021; Eriksson *et al.*, 2020 & Deloitte, 2018) can all serve to increase internal alignment.

An optimal internal orchestration through ongoing alignment efforts in an ecosystem should benefit clients and the organisation at a strategic level over the long term. Such an orchestration will require reform beyond organisational structures, processes, vision and mission statements, but will need to radically transform internal stakeholders’ traditional thinking, attitudes and behaviours that are not aligned to and supportive of a chosen strategy. To optimise positive impact over the long and short term, role players need to work in unison to realise the desired benefits (Smith, 2017:37).

1.2.3 Customer centricity

“The concept of customer centricity and its benefits have been discussed for more than 50 years. Despite this fact, many firms are still struggling to fully align themselves to the customer centric paradigm. In his seminal work, Theodore Levitt proposed that firms should not focus on selling products but rather on fulfilling customer needs”, according to Shah, Rust, Parasuraman, Staelin and Day (2006:113).

Kotler (2018) pointed out the main weakness of this consumer-oriented marketing era in that companies view consumers only as targets of their promotional campaigns. Ignoring ethics, promotion easily slips into the propaganda that emerged as a war skill (Resimić, 2022:61). In the age of digital media, the way consumers think and interpret marketing messages through their emotions, moods, perceptions, desires and demands are highly diverse. Organisations must understand that these differences in consumer behaviour have a major impact on consumer intentions to purchase (Kotler, 2018). When companies do not evolve into spiritual marketing and neglect to be a company that speaks with a human spirit (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2010:34), maintaining competitiveness in the market can prove challenging. Spiritual marketing is defined as a valuable marketing concept that focuses not only on the mind and heart of the consumer but also on the spirit of the consumer (Kotler *et al.*, 2010). This approach to marketing appeals to the human spirit or spiritual marketing (Kotler *et al.*, 2010:21).

Fader and Toms (2018:12) observe that, “customer centricity is a strategy that aligns the development and delivery of a company’s products and services with the current and future needs of its highest valued customers to maximise these customers’ long-term financial value to the firm”. Customer centricity is an evolving phenomenon and almost 70 years after the initial discussions in the 1960s (Shah *et al.*, 2006:13), Osakwe (2020:1) states, “in theory, customer centricity is about understanding and satisfying the needs, wants, and resources of individuals rather than those of mass markets or segments. Practically, this means that because not all customers are created equal, they don’t all deserve an equal share of the organisation’s valuable time and resources”.

A study by Habel, Kassemeyer, Alavi, Haaf, Schmitz and Wieseke (2020) was conducted across a range of industries quantitatively measuring customers’ perceptions of organisations’ overall customer centricity, as well as customers’ perceptions of the same organisations’ salespeople’s customer centricity, as a specific sub-group. The study by Habel *et al.* (2020) measuring perceived customer centricity was reviewed to establish whether its methodology could be used, in part, as an adapted foundation for the primary research. The study by Habel *et al.* (2020) aimed to produce a validated scale to measure the extent to which customers perceive a firm to be customer centric and

showing that perceived customer centricity positively affects a customer's loyalty, as well as the revenue a firm generates from this customer.

Inversini, De Carlo and Masiero (2020:2) state that: "in a services industry, customer value might be perceived from the perspective of usage of products or service offerings. In the context of customer centricity, customer value can be understood as the ability of organisations to engage effectively with customers in delivering the desired experiences and assessing and managing the customer's evaluation".

The findings of the study indicate that customer centric banking is primarily influenced by intangible (or perceived) factors. Among six bank selection criteria analysed in this study, corporate image, commitment, compassion and consistency are the four significant intangible factors that drive corporate customer satisfaction. The two tangible factors, namely cost-benefit and convenience, were not significant determinants of satisfaction for corporate clients (Andaleeb, Rashid & Rahman, 2016).

Additional points to note from the review of this contribution includes the identification of a research opportunity or gap. According Habel *et al.* (2020), current research generally conceptualised organisations, rather than specific functions or individuals within these organisations as the entities that display customer centricity (Habel *et al.* 2020:28).



Figure 1.1 Extant research on perceived customer centricity

Source: Habel *et al.* (2020:26)

Customer centricity may be viewed as wide reaching by giving customer interests priority and putting them at the centre of all the actions in the organisation (Habel *et al.* 2020:28). This is in contrast with Scheinbaum and Wang (2018:9) who view customer centricity in a more limited manner as they state: "While a broader customer orientation refers to businesses' belief of putting the customer's interest first and focuses on

developing a long-term and profitable enterprise for a business, customer centricity more specifically entails components of communicating with consumers”. Culture and implementation focus are important, since managers need to remind themselves that actions speak louder than words. As such, managers are encouraged to “walk the talk” when it comes to fostering perceptions of customer centricity (Habel *et al.* 2020:38).

The challenge is that since “marketing only evolved from a transaction-orientation (focused on how to make a sale to being relationship-orientated, how to keep customers coming back and buying more) to inviting consumers to participate in the company’s development of products and communications”, according to Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2010:11), having a customer-oriented mindset is a relatively new phenomenon to many organisations. Lamberti (2013:589) points out further challenges such as leadership and employees’ understanding of the conditions for successful implementation of customer centricity.

Locally, the need to align to the evolution of customer centricity in retail banking remains relevant as banks are not immune to the accelerated rate of transformation required to remain successful (EY 2020). Chief Marketing Officers in retail banks in emerging economies such as South Africa are also exposed to a rapid rate of change. Schwab (2016/7:324) observes that “although the financial services industry in the country enjoys a high ranking in a global competitiveness report, it also operates in the realities present in an emerging market economy, such as a large gap in wealth distribution, high rates of poverty and unemployment, sub-optimal infrastructure (especially in more rural areas), skills shortages and more”.

There are many opportunities for customer centric organisations. According to a report on banking in the new decade by EY (2020:14), outperformers are customer centric. Many outperforming banks identify a clear customer segment and plan their entire strategy around understanding and meeting the needs of these target customers. Virtually every significant decision is geared to this goal, from developing and marketing products, allocating investments in capital and ensuring that all management behaviour is driven by a focus on the customer. Outperformers focus on developing high quality, hyper-relevant services and experiences for target customers, rather than pushing

products through traditional sales and markets. They continuously explore and create new offerings that better meet the needs of customers, regularly assessing service quality to ensure exceptional client experiences and drive retention.

Banks need to consider how they can remain relevant as customer preferences change. Customer centric banks outperform their peers (EY, 2020:23). Three areas of focus can help deliver the outstanding experiences that consumers expect. FinTechs and BigTechs have raised the bar for customer service, but high-performing incumbents are maximising two competitive advantages, namely deep customer insights and the ability to use their size to lower costs (EY 2020:23). Building on consumers' higher levels of trust in their primary financial services provider, delivering easier and more intuitive experiences and supporting customers to achieve wider goals can help banks leverage these advantages to grow revenue. As banks head into a new decade, analysts forecast that profitability will remain a challenge (EY, 2020:23). Given this challenge, the question is whether banks double down on cost control or commit to driving transformation. High-performing banks know that both are key to lifting profitability and that a focus on the customer is a smart place to start (EY, 2020:23).

1.2.4 Interplay between marketing leadership, key internal stakeholders and customer centricity

According to Ananda *et al.* (2016:178), "The components of an organisation and its interdependent relations can be transformed; the components interact and intersect one another, leading to interconnected dimensions. Consequently, this transformation leads to not only less defined, but also more flexible and dynamic functional groups or elements of the marketing organisation". Figure 1.2 below, created by the researcher, seeks to demonstrate the challenge that organisations face when the main phenomena of the research study are not optimally aligned to create dynamic interaction and interdependence, with the result that while they may be moving or show activity, each revolves around itself in isolation, losing out on the energy and outputs that could potentially flow from aligned interaction towards a common goal.



Figure 1.2 Misalignment: marketing leadership, key internal stakeholders and customer centricity are only revolving around themselves and evolving in isolation

An opportunity exists, however, to create a more optimum alignment of the phenomena at play to ensure a more desirable outcome, which is depicted in Figure 1.3 below, whereby using the analogy of a vehicle’s steering system, the steering wheel represents customer centricity and the pinion represents marketing leadership directing key internal stakeholders, depicted by the wheel in the figure, towards improved customer centricity. In essence the pinion ensures that the wheels maintain the intended direction of the steering wheel, which is customer centricity in this analogy.

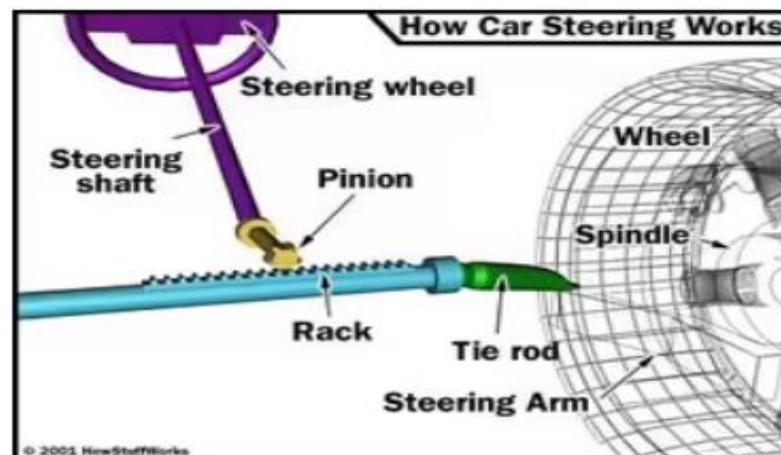


Fig 1.3 Rack and Pinion – Proposed conceptual framework: Revolving and evolving as part of system enjoying mutual benefits of integration

Source: Adopted and applied to this study based on the idea originating from <https://auto.howstuffworks.com/steering2.htm>, accessed 22/8/21.

Analogy:

Steering wheel: Customer centricity

Pinion: Marketing leadership

Wheel: Key internal stakeholders

1.3 Research problem

Although marketing leadership is seen as customer custodians (Durmaz, Hawrami, & Hamasaeed, 2022:117), they alone cannot drive customer centricity in an organisation. If a CMO is presented with absurd expectations for growth, it would leave the marketing team carrying responsibility when nobody could have delivered what was expected. The board must play a role by agreeing to clear, sensible expectations grounded in some understanding of the function, as explained by Whitley (2022:107). Collaboration from marketing leadership's key internal stakeholders is required to optimise the drive to align the organisation with a customer centric orientation (Malik *et al.*, 2021; Moggi & Dameri, 2020:2831/2; Velter *et al.*, 2020:4; Zhelyazkov, 2018). Even with the full commitment from these key internal stakeholders, marketing leadership has several challenges, including dwindling influence (Moorman, 2019; Varadarajan, 2010) and perceived lack of accountability (di Laurea, 2021; Habel *et al.*, 2020; Umemoto *et al.*, 2019), and it will need to address these prior to being able to optimally direct key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity. In the absence of organisational alignment to customer centricity, it risks customer attrition, growth stagnation or decline (Whitley, Krause & Lehmann, 2018:86; Bernhard *et al.*, 2014:2; Luo, Kauri & Rajendran, 2012:8). Other concerns may include loss of competitive advantage or position (Islam, Furuoka, & Idris, 2020), or even a threat to organisational sustainability (Pimpan, 2022:2) given the challenging environment in which organisations operate. Optimised interaction between trans-disciplinary stakeholders can be undermined by organisational silos (Shah *et al.*, 2006) and challenges presented by the different thought worlds (Kalaiganam *et al.*, 2021; Zubaly, 2020) of stakeholders, to note two examples. Getting all stakeholders to work in harmony (Saha & Katha, 2018) will aid in achieving alignment to evolving customer centricity.

Based on the above, the research problem formulated for the study emphasises the need to examine how the relatively narrow perceived role of marketing leadership in the case retail bank hampers marketing leadership's direction of their key internal stakeholders to address their potential misalignment to evolving customer centricity.

1.3.1 Research question and sub-questions

The research question and sub-questions of this study relate to gaining a rich and deep understanding of the current and potential role of marketing leadership in directing key internal stakeholders to address potential misalignment to evolving customer centricity in a retail bank's national head office.

The research question is the following:

What is the current and potential role of marketing leadership in directing key internal stakeholders to address potential misalignment to evolving customer centricity in the context of a large retail bank's national head office?

The research sub-questions are:

- 1) How could marketing leadership direct key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity?
- 2) How could the dynamic interaction and interdependence of each of the three main phenomena of the study, marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity, be better understood and optimised?
- 3) What might be a useful design of an integrated conceptual framework for marketing leadership direction of key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity?

1.3.2 Research objectives

The primary research objective is to propose an integrated conceptual framework whereby the future role of marketing leadership includes directing the alignment of their key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity, in the context of a large retail bank's head office in South Africa.

The secondary objectives are to:

- 1) Provide a deep understanding of customer centricity, marketing leadership and key internal stakeholder alignment perceptions and perspectives;

- 2) Examine and describe the antecedents and potential consequences of key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity; and
- 3) Evaluate and explore the potential future role of marketing leadership in directing key internal stakeholder alignment to customer centricity.

1.3.3 Research Proposition

A systematic and chronological review of the literature can help to demonstrate the accumulation of a distinctive body of knowledge. Furthermore, the outcome of this literature review phase is likely to be the development of a theoretical or conceptual framework and the formulation of research propositions that are to be tested in the research (Pease, 2021:96). Marketing scholars including Kohli (2009), Moorman *et al.* (2019) and Rust (2006) have repeatedly called for developing more organic marketing theories.

Encouraging the emergence of homegrown theories in marketing requires a concerted effort on multiple fronts (Ulaga, Keinaltenkamp, Kashyap & Eggert, 2021:2). An important milestone on this path is the proper development of thorough research propositions; these are novel statements specifying relationships between concepts. Advancing marketing theory takes many shapes and forms. Theory development may involve new concepts and theories, but it can also frequently focus on new ways of linking existing concepts through novel research propositions. The problem with poor propositions is that they do not move anything. “The basic idea is that some stakeholders need to be moved in order to change behaviour”, according to (Ulaga *et al.*, 2021:2).

The research propositions for the study are the following:

- 1) That the role of marketing leadership should include directing key internal stakeholders’ alignment to evolving customer centricity;
- 2) That the interplay/dynamic interaction and interdependence of each of the three main phenomena of the study (namely marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity), could be better understood and optimised, specifically in the context of the case bank;

- 3) That an integrated conceptual framework should guide marketing leadership direction of key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity.

Evaluated against the criteria set by Ulaga, Keinaltenkamp, Kashyap and Eggert (2021:2), the research propositions are simple and easy to understand and can move marketing leadership and their key internal stakeholders to change their behaviour. The research propositions are not truisms or internally contradictory and they are also technically sound and in alignment with the conceptual model presented in Chapter Six.

1.3.4 Research philosophy

In terms of ontology (nature of human existence), the researcher's lens is that of an employee of the selected retail bank who worked in a wide range of marketing positions as well as business roles in her banking career, which spans more than two decades. The broad network of colleagues and range of experience across all sub-segments, pillars, product houses, channels and enablers provided a strong foundation on which to base the research. The dynamic and innovative nature of the organisation presents a number of opportunities and challenges for an enquiring mind and the drive to understand the phenomena well beyond what can be seen on the surface were strong motivators to help drive this exploration. From this understanding flows sensemaking, which includes and implies bridging the different "thought worlds" of employees from varying functional backgrounds (Kalaighnam, Tuli, Kushwaha, Lee & Gal, 2021:40). An interpretivist ontological paradigm was followed which assumes the existence of multiple realities that are socially constructed (Harrison & Reilly, 2011:8).

In line with the role of the researcher in qualitative research, as described by Bloomberg and Volpe (2019:40), an insider point of view was adopted, seeking to explore and comprehend the meaning of experiences, while being flexible and open to change. The researcher was aware of the influence of her own voice and perspective, and was actively involved in the research having personally conducted all the in-depth interviews in both rounds of data collection. There is also an acknowledgement of the personal values and experiences that may influence the study.

Epistemologically (studies knowledge or knowing), the researcher wanted to test her belief that marketing leadership can modernise its role in a specific organisation to include directing key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity. Themes and concepts could be identified from interpretation and co-creation of meaning from the data, derived from dialogues, social interaction and observation.

In terms of the axiology (studies values), the researcher wanted to gain a deep understanding of the phenomena and their dynamic interaction and interdependence. The researcher then wanted to create a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge through the improved understanding based on the extensive literature review and the primary data collection. Coding and analysis resulted in the identification and discussion of emerging themes, on which findings, management implications, recommendations to leadership and recommendations for future research were based. The proposed conceptual framework, which provided an elegant depiction of a solution to the alignment problem described in the problem statement, also originated from the analysis. While the research process can be influenced by the values, ethics and unique appreciation of aesthetics exercised by the researcher, care was taken to not introduce researcher bias by ensuring full transparency during every step of the process. The research aesthetics (beauty, art, and harmony) are summarised in the proposed conceptual framework, which follows in Chapter Six and depicts the dynamic interaction and interdependence between the three main components or phenomena.

1.3.5 Mode of enquiry

The intended Mode 2 knowledge contribution of the research is to explore the role of marketing leadership in directing key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity in a selected South African retail bank. In this instance Mode 2 knowledge is understood as being a “system of knowledge that is socially distributed, organisationally diverse, application-oriented, and trans-disciplinary”, as described by Le Grange (2017:168). Practically, the social distribution in the knowledge system means knowledge-sharing and knowledge creation rely on the social networks within the bank, some formal and some informal. The so called “grapevine” is a powerful and effective knowledge distribution system, albeit not entirely fool proof. The bank runs a significant

number of committees, such as ExCos, ManCos, StratCos, regular status meetings and workshops, to ensure as many people as possible are kept “in the loop” regarding important developments and critical information dissemination. The system is organisationally diverse and in relation to the study, diverse aspects and representatives of the organisation were under study. The diverse aspects include attitudes, beliefs, opinions, mindsets, perceptions, behaviours and habits and the diverse representatives refer to participants from a wide range of influential disciplines, at different levels of the organisation, with very different backgrounds, academic achievements, experience, skills set, knowledge, talents, ambitions, motives, and values, which impacts the system of knowledge. Application orientation in terms of the system of knowledge means the study was conducted in the participants’ natural setting and based on their day-to-day observations and experiences, with the aim being to make a positive impact with the proposed broadening of the role of marketing leadership. The study was set in a trans-disciplinary knowledge system. The Marketing discipline was represented by marketing leadership, and key internal stakeholders included Finance as represented by select Chief Financial Officers, Product Management represented by Product Heads and the C-Suite represented by Chief Executive Officers, who were all involved in the study.

Building on research by Foucault (1972), Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott and Trow (1994), Spinoza (2001) and Santos (2014), Le Grange (2017) expands on some of the key characteristics of Mode 2 knowledge, including that problems are proposed and resolved in the context of applications; in addition, it is particular and situational, contextually embedded, trans-disciplinary, heterogeneous, transitory or temporary, quality control is performed by diverse actors and the actors are agents of change and more socially accountable and reflexive researchers. Gibbons (2000: 41) points out that in a socially distributed knowledge system, higher education institutions are no longer the only role players in knowledge production processes. The future survival of universities is therefore dependent on research done in partnership with government and industry (Le Grange, 2017:170).

In this section, the research problem was articulated. The elements making up the research problem were examined and supporting literature references were cited.

1.4 Primary research approach

In the next section, the purpose of exploratory research in helping to clarify the nature of the problem is discussed. Qualitative research is discussed, including the rationale for choosing a category to fit the purpose of the research and the design, key elements, limitations, and assumptions are reviewed prior to introducing the primary research strategy. The Research Onion™ (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009:108) was used to identify the layers of the choices available to the researcher and the suitability of each option within a layer. The following sub-sections will be addressed: clarifying the nature of the problem through exploratory research, the purpose of exploratory research, creation of social experience and assessing meaning, sampling methodology, research instrument, data collection and qualitative data analysis.

1.4.1 Clarifying the nature of the research problem through exploratory research

The research study is exploratory in nature in the form of a single research investigation. The literature review provided valuable information to help understand the research problem and its broad impact. The researcher was systematic in designing the exploratory research studies by focussing on the problem and purpose of the research rather than the perceived convenience, difficulty or workload associated with different techniques, understanding that most of the techniques have limitations. The researcher familiarised herself with the proper and improper uses of the various research techniques and methodologies, as cautioned by Zikmund (2003:111).

1.4.2 The purpose of exploratory research

The purpose of exploratory research is intertwined with the need for a clear and precise statement of the recognised problem. Through exploratory research, the researcher wanted to understand the problem, critically reflect on the research problem, and discover new ideas associated with the problem (Zikmund, 2003:111). “There are many techniques of investigating undefined research problems. However, the purpose, rather than the technique determines whether a study is exploratory, descriptive, or causal” explains Zikmund (2003:114).

In understanding the research problem, the researcher wanted to establish the uniqueness and nuances of the potential misalignment problem as it relates to the organisation, sector, country and continent in which it exists and how it compares with the global and economic context. The antecedents and consequences are related to the phenomena as well as the nature and dynamic interaction and interdependence between the main phenomena.

1.4.3 Creation of social experience and assigning meaning

The word “qualitative” implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers emphasise the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasise the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that clarify how social experience is created and given meaning. Qualitative research is inductive in nature, and the researcher generally explores meanings and insights in each situation. It refers to a range of data collection and analysis techniques that use purposive sampling and semi-structured open-ended interviews (Mohajan, 2018:23).

The data collection was conducted in the participants’ and researcher’s natural setting and enables the researcher to develop a level of detail from high involvement in the actual experiences. The research consisted of a set of “interpretive material practices that makes the world visible”. It investigates local knowledge and understanding of a given programme, people’s experiences, meanings and relationships, and social processes and contextual factors and focused on words rather than numbers. The research observed the world in its natural setting, interpreting situations for understanding the meanings that people make from day-to-day life, providing a detailed understanding into human behaviour, emotion, attitudes and experiences (Mohajan, 2018:24). Within the qualitative research, the interpretive paradigm was selected for the primary research.

1.4.4 Sampling methodology

Table 1.1 below provides a high-level indication of the population and sample sizes involved in the study.

Table 1.1 Sampling methodology

Population and Sampling	Round One (2018/2019)	Round Two (2022/2023)
Population framework (All divisions in bank)	Approximately 40 000 employees; 600 branches.	Of the nineteen participants in round one, several have left the organisation and in particular of the few remaining marketing leaders most have left marketing leadership roles. To compensate for the above, the researcher invited a participant who was not part of the original sample to participate, since the person’s current role is an amalgamation of two of the previous participants, who have left the organisation’s roles.
Population sub-framework (Bank divisions)	Several Thousand employees	
Sample population (Bank head-office , both retail and business/commercial bank)	Several hundred employees in Marketing role family. Several hundred employees in Finance and Product Management. Less than one hundred product house, segment, sub-segment, pillar, channel, or enablement CEOs.	
Sample frame (sub-samples within)	Less than one hundred employees in Marketing Leadership and Key Internal Stakeholders in senior roles, respectively.	
Sampling unit (participants)	Eighteen: Nine marketing leaders	

	Nine Key internal Stakeholders	Five Key internal Stakeholders
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Source: Researcher

Purposive sampling was used. Half of the participants are marketing executives and senior management and the other half are executives who are key internal stakeholders to the marketing fraternity including CEOs, CFOs, Product Heads, segment management or in senior customer analytics roles (enablement roles). Participants were only from the retail bank (Personal, Private and Commercial Bank), not the Merchant Bank, Corporate Bank or vehicle and asset finance division.

Only head office staff were included from both the Retail and Business/Commercial Bank, as the strategic direction is set at head-office level as the engine room of the bank. Interview participants lead and influence a wide variety of head-office and regional strategy and operations. Although input is received from the distribution network across the country on a regular basis, final direction is set at head-office level. Transactional, Investment and Lending pillars' staff were represented, which spans most of the bank's market activities. The Insurance and Connectivity pillars were not included as these businesses are in the early years of operation. There were nineteen participants in total.

1.4.5 Research instrument

Two semi-structured interview guides for both rounds (one per round) of data collection were designed based on the literature review of this study, with open-ended questions for the individual, face-to-face or virtual in-depth interviews that allowed the researcher to be flexible and navigate the conversation with participants. The interview guides for round one, as informed by the literature review and research question, aim and objectives, were developed in the last quarter of 2018 and 2022 respectively. The interview guide for the second phase of data collection included a few warm-up questions about the perceived general, organisational, and global impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, before focus shifted to the three main phenomena of the study: marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity, and lastly, the dynamic interaction and interdependence between these main phenomena.

1.4.6 Data collection

The researcher conducted each of the interviews in full, using a semi-structured interview guide. The data collection process was managed carefully and professionally by the researcher throughout the process. A pilot interview for the first phase of data collection was conducted in November 2018. The verbatim transcription process for the first phases of data collection was outsourced, and the second round was recorded on MS Teams which has a transcription function. Three coding techniques were used for analysing text data derived from verbatim transcriptions in the first phase of data collection of each participant's recorded interviews. Protocols set out by the DaVinci Institute Ethics Committee at the time of each of the rounds of data collection were followed and confirmed.

1.4.7 Qualitative data analysis

The qualitative data analysis included the verbatim transcription of round one's recorded interviews (the second round of interviews was conducted via Microsoft Teams which has a transcription function), coding, manual categorisation, tabulation, filtering, analysis in the context of the research problem, question, aim and objectives. Open, axial, and selective coding and analysis were conducted by the researcher. Coding is done followed by thematic analysis without a preconceived framework, but rather allowing the themes to emerge naturally. Manual coding and categorisation of questions were done by the researcher.

1.5 Theoretical framework underpinning the research problem

The approach to create the theoretical framework based on secondary data, followed by two rounds of collecting primary data, is depicted in Figure 1.4 below, which portrays the three phases of the study.

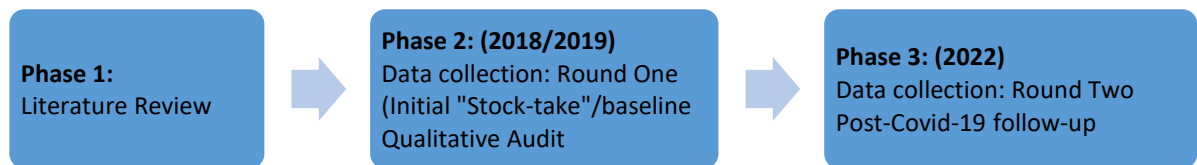


Fig 1.4 Phases of the study

The research process was initiated with an extensive review of literature to understand the scope of the problem, after which two rounds of primary data collection followed. The first round of data collection was conducted prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and serves as an audit at a point in time as a baseline, while the second round of data collection commenced after the height of the pandemic and serves as an update on the impact the unexpected global event had on the main phenomena and their interplay, in the context of the research problem and questions.

1.6 Research contribution

With regard to the research contribution, the research methodological, academic and practical research contributions will be discussed below.

1.6.1 Research methodological contribution

The research methodological contribution was guided by The Research Onion™ (Saunders' *et al.*, 2009:108). A longitudinal study was conducted with two phases of data collection, four years apart – prior and after a global pandemic. The first round of data collection was concluded months before the outbreak of the global Covid-19 pandemic (which makes for a unique contribution) and the second approximately four years later after most of the virus variant waves subsided. A qualitative method was used to gain deep understanding and insights into perceived customer centricity and the current and future role of marketing leadership in directing their key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity. Recommendations for future research, related to the methodological approach, is provided.

1.6.2 Academic contribution

The academic contribution includes a comprehensive and critical review of literature to provide a theoretical framework within which the main phenomena, marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity, can be understood. The exploration, interpretation, gaining of a deeper understanding and theory building aims to contribute to the body of knowledge, through advancing the discourse on major phenomena relative to the study title, aim and objectives, in the context of the Mode 2 mode of enquiry. Recommendations for future research, related to the opportunities identified throughout the research process, as well as to bridge the limitations as declared, are also supplied.

1.6.3 Practical contribution

The practical contribution includes a single embedded case study in a retail bank (with individual and small business owners as clients) in South Africa, a conceptual framework to demonstrate optimised intelligent interplay between the main phenomena, management implications and practical recommendations to leadership based on emerging themes identified through a rigorous coding and data analysis process. Specific transdisciplinary application in the context of the realities in the southern hemisphere, including the African continent and South Africa in particular, were also considered. Learnings could potentially be applicable in other geographies and sectors but should be explored with caution.

1.7 Delimitations of the study

The delimitations of the study are detailed below.

- 1) The study is limited to participants in a single organisation. Only one retail bank is included in the study, so the study excludes, for example, competitor banks, financial service providers, other service sectors and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sectors.

- 2) To enable sharp focus on the large retail bank and the three main phenomena, including customer centricity with a focus on individuals and small business owners being studied, participants from other Group franchises such as the Corporate Bank, Public Sector Banking, Private Bank or Vehicle and Asset Finance division were not included in the study.
- 3) The study focused on marketing leadership and their key internal stakeholders' perspectives, not the full set of stakeholders, since these key internal stakeholders, however, hold most of the influence and potential impact power within the organisation and the specific context.
- 4) Not all internal stakeholders participated in the study. The list of key internal stakeholders was based on literature, the researcher's experience and thereafter co-created with validation from participants. The samples included CEOs, CFOs, and Product Heads since these functions' attitudes and actions represent the biggest and most direct and significant positive or negative impact potential on alignment to evolving customer centricity. They are also the stakeholders with whom marketing leadership would have the most interaction within their day-to-day activities. Participants were asked who else could be seen as key internal stakeholders to marketing leadership. Additional suggestions were made, which were considered and included, for example, pillar heads and client data analytics custodians, given the nature of the study.

Recommendations for future research will be supplied in Chapter Six to help address the above limitations.

1.8 Structure of thesis

This section provides a high-level overview of the content covered in each of the chapters to follow.

1.8.1 Chapter Two: Overview of retail banking and the selected bank

Chapter Two will provide a high-level overview and context of retail banking to readers who are not familiar with the financial services and specifically the retail banking sector

in South Africa. A view of the global, continental, and local context, as well as trends and emerging realities prior to and spanning the two data collection phases, are shared in the chapter as a backdrop to the exploration and evaluation of the role of marketing leadership in directing key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity in a South African retail bank.

1.8.2 Chapter Three: Literature review: a theoretical framework

A selective literature review will be presented to provide a theoretical framework to this study which explores the role of marketing leadership in directing key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity in a South African retail bank. Considering the research aims and objective as detailed, Chapter Three contains the literature review, highlighting, and evaluating existing knowledge, thereby creating the context to the body of research this study intends to contribute towards.

The exploration, analysis and discussion of scholarly text and academic literature associated with this study were organised according to the main theoretical phenomena. The nature of a shared understanding of the three key phenomena, including customer centricity, marketing leadership and key internal stakeholder alignment, based on the review of seminal sources will be discussed, to deepen the discourse. The subsequent discussions will also include the phenomenon's evolution, importance, benefits and related challenges, a deconstruction of sub-components, its applications to current practice, as well as the gaps and emerging realities. The nature of conceptual frameworks and the opportunity to contribute to the relatively low number of conceptual frameworks related to marketing leadership will be discussed, together with the influences behind the proposed conceptual framework, which forms part of the contribution of the primary research study.

1.8.3 Chapter Four: Research design and methodology

The research methodology chapter will provide a motivation for the selection of qualitative research over a quantitative approach. The population framework, sampling

design, ethical considerations, data collection, transcription, quality controls and data analysis used during the primary research will also be addressed.

There were two data collection phases, four years apart, with the first concluded early in 2019, well prior to the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic and the second data collection phase concluded after the pandemic had subsided early in 2023.

1.8.4 Chapter Five: Emerging themes

The key themes, which emerged from the review of literature as well as coding and analysis phases following two rounds of data collection, will be introduced, and discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

1.8.5 Chapter Six: Findings, implications, recommendations, and conclusion

Following the identification of the emerging themes as discussed in Chapter Five, Chapter Six will expand on these themes by sharing the key findings, management implications, recommendations to leadership and recommendations for future research, related to each theme, as well as a conclusion.

2. CHAPTER TWO

OVERVIEW OF RETAIL BANKING FOR NON-BANKERS

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides readers who are not familiar with the financial services sector, and specifically the retail banking sector (servicing individuals and small business owners), a high-level overview of key themes and developments in retail banking in the global, African and South African contexts over the past decade in order to provide a sectoral context for the chapters that follow. High-level trends and emerging realities observed in practice by the researcher and found in literature prior to, during and after data collection, were included. The overview in this chapter serves as a backdrop to the proposed research survey introduced in Chapter One, involving marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity.

The marketing leadership function is often acknowledged as the custodian of an organisation's customers (Durmaz, Hawrami, & Hamasaeed, 2022:117). In retail banking, the Banking Group and the individuals who serve in the function are confronted with a range of customer-specific and organisational opportunities and challenges, including building consumer trust in banks (Rant & Cerne, 2017:92; Layton, 2011:271-4; Kotler *et al.*, 2010:31) and putting customers first, thereby evolving customer centricity (Goyette, 2018; Quinn & Thakor, 2018; Yohn, 2018; Cerne, 2017 & Alexander, Serafeim & Gartenburg, 2017). Optimising growth (Whitler, Krause & Lehmann, 2018:86; Bernhard *et al.*, 2014:2; Luo, Kauri & Rajendran, 2012:8), remaining world-class (BASA, 2019:7) and fierce competitiveness (PwC, 2020), industry transformation (BASA, 2019:4), leadership talent (Bawany, 2017), digital innovation (BASA, 2019:26), keeping up with who is benefitting from and participating in change and understanding the 4th and 5th industrial revolutions (BASA, 2019:26; WEF, 2018; Bawany, 2017:18) also need to be considered. The themes listed, together with mitigating risk (Agarwal, 2018:7; Palmatier *et al.*, 2019:10) and market conduct requirements (BASA, 2019) have a direct impact on the research study as organisations will need to better align their thinking and

actions and ensure a concerted effort is made to be successful in the markets they choose to serve. The above will be discussed in more detail in the sections to follow.

2.2 A matter of trust

The world financial crisis that began in 2008 and impacted on the financial sector in the most developed countries has undoubtedly affected consumer attitudes and behaviours. The most obvious consequence has been the loss of trust in financial institutions, as pointed out by the marketing science institution in 2011 (Tirado, Tena & Guillén *et al.*, 2019:227; EY, 2013:2-25; Luo, Kauri & Rajendran, 2012:8). In this context of far-reaching change in the conditions affecting the financial business environment and having come through the worst moments of the crisis, Tirado *et al.* (2019:227) state that it is surprising that most of the literature has focused on the negative effects of the crisis. They further observe that there is a clear lack of research that adopts a positive approach by proposing courses of action for banks. Such proposals will help banks to identify the necessary factors that will inform their efforts to turn an unfavourable situation around and focus on recovering competitiveness and improving performance.

2.3 Putting customers first

Retail banking clients (individuals and small business owners) in general expect more service from their banks (Blakey, 2023). They demand a superior cross-channel experience and hands-on guidance during challenging times. “Heightened demands will require banks to go beyond a product lens and create customer experiences that are data-driven, consistent across channels, and complete with personalised advice” (Deloitte 2022). “The democratisation of advice and demographic shifts, including generational wealth transfer, are also upending established business models and existing ways of serving customers. Customers are increasingly expecting holistic advice, prompting a shift from a product focus to client-centricity” (Deloitte, 2022).

In South Africa, optimal responses to trends and emerging realities will benefit banking clients, according to the former chairperson of BASA, Mike Brown who observed that the only thing that can be predicted with any certainty is that the real winners will be

customers, who will obtain access to better, easier to use and cheaper banking products and services (BASA, 2019:27). According to PwC (2020), the next frontier will be capturing customer focus and maximising customer convenience by providing financial services where, when and how customers require them.

2.4 Growth prospects

Global, continental, and local growth prospects in retail banking are explored in the section below.

2.4.1 Global prospects

In 2018, while celebrating the prospect of global economic growth, at least in the short-term, CEOs in every region reported heightened levels of anxiety about their own organisations' long-term prospects for revenue growth as they confronted growing stakeholder expectations and unprecedented threats that are not of the market's making (PwC, 2018).

In 2020, amid weak profitability, some banks continued to report strong growth. This gave rise to a question about the secret of high performers and how other banks might emulate their success? Focusing on adopting three common traits can help banks boost revenues and enable investment in transformation. The highest performing global banks focus on resilience, committing to cost reduction and putting the customer at the heart of the operation (EY, 2020:12). Outperformers thus build resilience (EY, 2020:13), outperformers control costs (EY, 2020:14) and outperformers are customer-centric (EY, 2020:14).

According to Deloitte (2020), first and foremost, traditional revenue sources and business growth in established segments will likely be moderate at best, which would compel banks to find new pathways to profitable growth. Second, scale, more than ever, could become critical as profitability pressure will bring costs into greater focus. Third, advanced technology is expected to be at the heart of everything that banks do. In addition, CEOs cited over-regulation as the biggest threat to their growth prospects (PwC Global BCM, 2020).

2.4.2 Africa prospects

Africa's banking markets are said to be among the most exciting in the world. The continent's overall banking market is the second-fastest-growing and second-most profitable of any global region, and a source of innovation. The sections below will provide context to support the research study.

Cautious optimism was observed about the prospects of financial services organisations, including banks, to keep growing in emerging markets, given the market potential and their access to powerful data and technology capability (Coetzee, 2014:1001; Jones, 2014:27; Ernst & Young Report, 2013:8; Baird & Gonzalez-Wertz, 2011:17). Customers were taking more control over their financial relationship with banks and required greater customisation to better serve their unique needs. External interference, such as, for example from government, and lack of internal alignment posed risks that needed to be managed proactively.

During the time the primary research was conducted, the global banking industry was facing disappointing returns and slow growth. However, Africa's banking sector provided a refreshing contrast. Some banks were already tapping the opportunities inherent in these challenges, for example harnessing Africa's widespread mobile phone coverage to provide low-price offerings and innovative distribution models, which could significantly accelerate revenue growth in the next five years. The reality was that the continent was in the middle of unprecedented growth that was lifting millions out of poverty, creating an emerging consumer class, and propelling rapid economic growth in many economies (McKinsey & Company, 2018:6).

2.4.3 South African prospects

The South African financial sector ecosystem is complex, with a high level of interconnectedness between different subsectors. The sector accounts for 20% of the country's GDP and the five largest banks account for almost 90% of banking sector assets (BASA, 2023:18). The relative strength in terms of development and growth potential of the South African financial market, due to redistribution of wealth and population, is noted in the World Economic Forum's *Global Competitiveness Report (2016 – 2017)*, as well as earlier sources, such as Baird and Gonzalez-Wertz (2011:17).

A total of 39.7 million South African citizens had a bank account in 2018 according to FinScope (2018). These citizens are looking to business to fill the void on critical issues such as income inequality, health care, diversity, and cybersecurity to help make the world fairer and more equal (Deloitte, 2018:4). Leading companies are developing strategies that address societal concerns such as longevity and well-being and they are doing so in ways that help improve productivity and performance. Those in this vanguard are finding rich opportunities to build social capital and become a leading voice on important societal issues (Deloitte, 2018:8).

2.5 A world-class global competitiveness ranking and local competitive posture

This section discusses the world-class ranking of the South African financial system, regulators, and banking operations over the period covering the two rounds of data collection.

1) Acknowledged as world-class, to the benefit of banking customers

South Africa was the first emerging market country to hold the position of Chair of the International Banking Federation (IBFED). The South African financial system, its regulators and its banking operations are often acknowledged as world-class by other national bank associations. The South African financial system consistently ranks high in global competitiveness reports, and this should be safeguarded as a national advantage (BASA, 2019:7).

2) South Africa's overall global competitiveness ranking could impede customer centricity

The World Economic Forum's *Global Competitiveness Report* (2016–2017) states that South Africa slightly improved both its score and ranking (47th, an improvement of two positions compared to 2015/16). However, several shortcomings may limit South Africa's competitiveness in the future. Infrastructure development has stalled, both in transport and electricity, with widespread power shortages being experienced. Institutional quality has diminished, with increased political uncertainty, less

transparency, growing security concerns, and business leaders having less trust in politicians (down 11 places since 2015/16). The slowdown of the Chinese economy and exchange rate volatility may dampen growth, now forecast at 0.1% for 2016. This makes it unlikely that the high unemployment rate will diminish soon, undermining the ability to leverage Africa's demographic dividend (Schwab, 2016/2017:324).

Half a decade later, South Africa ranks 60th out of 63 countries, in the WEF *Global Competitiveness Report (2022)* ranking. Challenges in 2022 included high headline and youth unemployment, high public debt levels and a shrinking fiscal space, ongoing electricity supply problems and rolling blackouts, the lack of decisive plans to address socio-economic structural problems and sluggish processes to address State Capture Commission recommendations.

3) Local competitive posture

a. Fierce local competition expectantly improves customer centricity

Within a challenging and varied landscape, competition in the African retail banking landscape (individuals and small business owners) is increasingly fierce. Some banks are taking the lead well above the rest in terms of profitability, revenue growth, efficiency and credit control, while others are struggling.

Given that revenue pools are concentrated in the middle-income and higher income segments, African customers have a strong need for affordable financial solutions, which points directly to a winning practice – targeting the right segments with compelling offers (McKinsey & Company, 2018:8-11). Transaction fees have declined over this period while deposit rates are on the increase. Competition in the domestic banking market intensified with an unprecedented number of new license applications and the launch of three digital banks (PwC, 2020).

b. New entrants and increased competition ensure more choice for consumers

The 2018 EY Banking Results Analysis states: "One of the biggest things the local banks will need to look out for in 2018 is the introduction of five new banking options entering into the South African market – three entirely new, while two established brands are

relaunching. The new entrants include two digital-only banks – TYME Digital and ex-FNB CEO Michael Jordaan’s Bank Zero – as well as a full-service bank in the form of Discovery Bank. Postbank and African Bank, meanwhile, will relaunch with retail banking services” (EY, 2018). *MyBroadband* in an online article headlined: “Bank Zero starts trial run in South Africa” on 30 October 2018 states that Bank Zero announced that it has been integrated with the national payments system of the South African Reserve Bank (SARB) and is set to begin trial runs in preparation for the launch of its banking platform.

c. Competition in South African retail banking and the impact on customer centricity

It is said that the winners and losers within markets will be determined in large part by how they answer the following questions: *Are we competing in the most attractive segments, and do we have compelling propositions for customers in that segment?* (McKinsey & Company, 2018:20). The rise of ‘return on customer experience’ as changing customer needs and evolving expectations influence product innovation and strategic decisions resulting in the major banks broadening their offerings across the breadth of financial services to core customers (PwC, 2020). “Overall, the major banks continue to work on combining technological change and adapting their workforces to be future-ready. These efforts are premised on the core of their strategies to create distinctive customer experiences. In an environment of constant change and ‘always-on’ expectations, they recognise that stability of their operations is key, and that customer perception is only as good as their last experience” (PwC, 2020).

2.6 Transformation, leadership talent, and digital technology

Drivers of change such as globalisation or more recently, the questioning of the premise (WEF, 2016/17:3) and technology advances and reforms (EY Global, 2020:24) have fuelled a virtuous cycle that has lifted a significant percentage of the world population out of poverty, increased life expectancy globally and facilitated a rich exchange of knowledge and talent that has spurred unprecedented productivity and innovation. The distribution of the benefits has, however, not been equitably distributed, contributing to an increased wealth gap (EY, 2020:33), as these same market forces increase transparency and enhance instantaneous global communication (PwC, 2018:2).

Business leaders therefore need to consider what they can do to contribute to a more equitable distribution of benefits. Four possible approaches are suggested: adopt new measures of prosperity that look beyond economic growth to social progress; foster a beneficial place for technology in the society; educate for the future; and finally, commit to a purpose (PwC, 2018:2). Andy Gillard, EY Asia-Pacific Financial Services Operational Transformation Leader observes that: “Operational transformation is not about single point solutions. It requires a focus on business outcomes first and foremost, a broad approach and a strong understanding of what levers to pull in what order and why” (EY Global, 2020).

According to Bawany (2017:19), since digital impacts the entire organisation it requires effective leadership at all levels to drive the digital strategy. As digital transformation expands across the organisation and the ‘war for talent’ continues, organisations need to consider a more structured approach to building a healthy leadership pipeline with the necessary capabilities to lead in the digital era. They can do this by placing potential leaders in positions that stretch them beyond their current competencies and skills, by coaching them and supporting them on building new digital capabilities as rapidly as possible. Though some traditional leadership capabilities remain critical to successfully lead in the digital era (such as creating and communicating a clear vision, motivating, and empowering others), there are also new requirements for leaders at all levels. These demand a dynamic combination of a new mindset and behaviours, digital knowledge and skills that are critical to lead teams in the digital era, concludes Bawany (2017:19).

In 2018, the World Economic Forum (WEF) stated that: “The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) represents a fundamental change in the way we live, work and relate to one another. It is a new chapter in human development, enabled by extraordinary technology advances commensurate with those of the first, second and third industrial revolutions. These advances are merging the physical, digital, and biological worlds in ways that create both huge promise and potential peril. The speed, breadth and depth of this revolution is forcing us to rethink how countries develop, how organisations create value and even what it means to be human. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is about more than just technology-driven change; it is an opportunity to help everyone, including leaders, policymakers and people from all income groups and nations, to

harness converging technologies to create an inclusive, human-centred future. The real opportunity is to look beyond technology and find ways to give the greatest number of people the ability to positively impact their families, organisations, and communities” (WEF, 2018).

In the preface to the WEF’s 2018 *Global Competitiveness Report*, Klaus Schwab, WEF Founder and Executive Chairman observes: “With the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), humanity has entered a new phase. The 4IR has become the lived reality for millions of people around the world, and is creating new opportunities for business, government, and individuals. Yet it also threatens a new divergence and polarisation within and between economies and societies (WEF, 2018).

The opportunities and challenges for South Africa are perhaps best set out in the report by the Centre of Excellence in Financial Services: “The impact of the 4th industrial revolution on the South African financial services market”. The Report further notes: “Technological innovation is taking place at unprecedented speed. Applying this technology in financial services has the potential to reduce costs and improve efficiency, allow customers to transact seamlessly and in real time, and improve providers’ understanding of customer behaviour and needs, allowing for the personalisation of financial services” (BASA, 2019:26).

Digital innovation is changing the way customers use financial services. In part because of these changes, many in the South African banking industry are in the throes of a deep, complicated and sometimes painful restructuring to ensure they continue to meet the evolving needs of consumers (BASA, 2019:5), which should improve customer centricity. Dedicated focus is placed on refreshing their IT stacks, triggering large-scale changes in response to security risks, unlocking efficiencies and digitising customer experiences (PWC, 2020). Changes in technology and regulation have also made it easier for new banks, among others, to enter the financial services market, which will increase competition to the benefit of customers. This combination of changing customer behaviour and increased competition means many banking operations and businesses must be restructured (BASA, 2019:5) to keep up with customer needs and transform their organisations to align with evolving customer centricity.

2.7 Market conduct and risk mitigation

Market conduct considerations and risk mitigation practices are discussed below.

2.7.1 Market conduct

According to Brown (BASA, 2019:5), “Now, more than ever, we need to respond effectively to evolving regulatory and economic challenges that affect the interests of banks and their customers, while maintaining productive and mutually respectful relations with our stakeholders”. The annual report goes on to say that banks are committed to a just transition to environmentally and socially sustainable businesses that balance the interests of their customers, shareholders and workers. This will require meaningful partnerships that acknowledge and address the material concerns of all stakeholders in a reasonable and practical manner (BASA, 2019:14), including marketing leaders, key internal stakeholders and customers, as main parties in the primary research proposed.

Conduct of Financial Institutions (CoFI) extends the treating customers fairly (TCF) outcomes to nine core principles. These include licensing, culture and governance, product suitability and design, detailed expectations for financial services, marketing and disclosure, post-sale barriers and reporting. Crucially, CoFI also includes provisions in respect of distribution – including by agents not directly employed by a financial services provider – and remediation. There is a senior manager’s regime which will apportion accountability to ‘key persons’, including where errant behaviour is committed by someone under their authority. Oversight will have a more intrusive approach – one that will investigate a bank’s business operations and business model. There is much from which South African banks can derive comfort. They are, generally, well-aligned – with the right values and motivations of TCF. They have a high degree of familiarity with TCF principles already which will – by and large – serve them well under CoFI (BASA, 2019:13).

Under the CoFI regime, banks should be vigilant with regard to the danger of a product-flogging culture, even where those practices are masked behind seemingly well-aligned processes, or high customer satisfaction scores. Customer satisfaction is a poor and

deceptive proxy for achieving good outcomes. Overall, however, South African bank standards of conduct are a significant asset for the industry. Good conduct not only guarantees more loyal customers, thereby generating greater long-term sustainability, it also assures South African banks of a more secure place in society. However, none of this should be an inducement for complacency (BASA, 2019:13).

2.7.2 Risk mitigation in favour of customer centricity and society at large

The World Economic Forum (WEF) *Global Risk Report 2016* identified mega trends including climate change, environmental degradation, and rising income disparity, together with long-term risks such as social instability, interstate conflict and water crises. These risks have tangible impacts on business and society at large. To mitigate these risks, Veldsman and Johnson (2016:315-318) state that sustainable development plans are required. The term sustainable development can be defined as the improvement in the quality of life for all humans equitably, both inter- and intra-generational, within the context of minimum societal foundations and the earth's limited carrying capacity. Business sustainability is understood to be closely linked to societal sustainability, given the direct dependence of business on the existence of society and the supportive natural environment. According to Deloitte (2020), banks have made good progress on sustainable finance, but much more can be done. It is important to note that new ways of assessing financial risk have created more opportunities to extend loans for education and personal development, and to support entrepreneurs and small businesses (BASA, 2019:26).

2.8 Impact of a virus and a war

The late Brazilian car-racing champion Ayrton Senna once said, *you cannot overtake 15 cars in sunny weather, but you can when it's raining*. Within that context, according to Birshan, Seth and Sternfels (2022:1), there have been a number of downpours in recent years, as seen in situations where new shocks, such as the war in Ukraine and the return of inflation have been layered over earlier shocks, including a deadly global pandemic and supply chain disruptions on top of dramatically accelerated, long-standing trends such as digitisation and sustainability. The high-level impact of the global pandemic and

geopolitical tension on retail banking (individuals and small business owners) will be discussed in the following section.

2.8.1 Global pandemic: Covid-19

The global Covid-19 pandemic was first reported on 31 December 2019 by the World Health Organisation country office following a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan City in the Hubei Province of China.

Unlike many past shocks, the Covid-19 crisis was not merely a banking crisis but a crisis of the real economy. Banks were affected, as credit losses cascaded through the economy and as demand for banking services reduced. However, the problems are not self-inflicted. Global banking entered the crisis well capitalised, according to McKinsey (2020), and is far more resilient than it was 12 years ago (EY, 2013:19).

2.8.1.1 Covid-19 in South Africa

The virus reached South Africa in March 2020 and government responded with a five-week lockdown of the country, which, while necessary, had devastating economic consequences (BASA, 2019:8). At the time the national lockdown was imposed on 27 March, the unemployment rate was 30.1%, a 17-year high, which has deteriorated further over the period that followed (PwC, 2020:2). Government introduced an economic relief and stimulus package worth as much as R500 billion by some estimates. Banks played an important role in the measures introduced to keep the economy moving and save jobs (BASA, 2019:8).

During the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa, “the financial services sector was declared an essential service during the first hard lockdown of March 2020, resulting in the sector experiencing a relatively lower operating impact than other sectors in the economy” (BASA, 2023:15). Many of the objectives, opportunities and challenges listed in sections 2.2 to 2.8 and several unique challenges and opportunities were nevertheless impacted during the onset, height, and slow phasing out of the global Covid-19 pandemic. As explained by BASA (2023:8), “Covid-19 presented as a test of each country’s ability to respond to this crisis, and the South African financial sector demonstrated its resilience and agility in this case. People do not reach for a guiding

document or manual during a crisis. However, if organisations have had the opportunity to practice collaboration during a crisis, this not only reconnects transient workforces, but also provides opportunities to groupthink and build relationships between key personnel, both within organisations and more broadly across industries and regulators”.

An emerging reality is the ongoing impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Deloitte (2020) notes that the banking industry was confronted with a range of challenges in 2021, many ongoing, but also some new obstacles. While uncertainty about the effects of the pandemic will likely remain for the foreseeable future, this should not prevent bank leaders from reimagining the future and making bold bets. They should institutionalise the lessons from the pandemic and build a new playbook by strengthening resilience and accelerating the transformation in the post-pandemic world.

Banks also made the industry’s infrastructure available to assist in the distribution of social grants and provided funding amounting to just over R176 million to social support initiatives, including the provision of food and hygiene products for vulnerable communities and the purchase of personal protective equipment, medical equipment, and beds for isolation wards. This was in addition to the normal corporate social investment that banks make on an ongoing basis (BASA, 2019:8).

Many organisations have already acted in the last two years to transform their supply chains, with a majority increasing their footprint as a reaction to non-geopolitical incidents (such as the global Covid-19 pandemic) yet remain disadvantaged as a result of not considering geopolitical risks that lead to disruptions. (Gartner, 2022:1). Looking forward, as a strategic planning assumption, it is predicted that by 2030 humans will live in a multipolar world driven by increased geopolitical tensions. This is in contrast to today’s globalised world in which organisations need to find ways to develop self-sufficiency as a mark of strength and navigate with more agility and resiliency in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world (Gartner, 2022:2).

2.8.1.2 Drawing on existing, and building new, resilience in the face of a crisis

Banks need to reset their agenda in ways that few expected immediately prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Three imperatives will position banks well against the trends now taking shape. They must embed newfound speed and agility (FRG, 2020:74), identifying the best parts of their response to the crisis and finding ways to preserve them; they must fundamentally reinvent their business models to sustain a long winter of economic challenges, while also adopting the best new ideas from digital challengers; and they must bring purpose to the fore according to Quinn and Thakor (2018:80&81), Serafeim and Gertenberg (2016) and Craig and Snook (2014:105), especially with regard to environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues, and also collaborate with the communities they serve to recast their contract with society in a more sustainable manner (EY, 2020:115; McKinsey, 2020).

2.8.1.3 How Covid-19 has affected megatrends globally

Some global trends were accelerated during the global pandemic, while others were decelerated, as discussed below (Deloitte, 2020).

ACCELERATED TRENDS:

- 1) Digitisation: Social distancing has driven further adoption of contactless technologies and digital experiences
- 2) Virtualisation of the workforce: Many organisations have adjusted to working remotely and Covid-19 has led to increased adoption of flexible workplace models
- 3) Focus on safety and surveillance: More consumers will likely expect safety and precautionary measures from both brands and governments
- 4) Corporate responsibility: Taking steps to do the right thing in the Covid-19 context is not negotiable for consumers. The larger purpose of banks is changing beyond financial services to also positively impact and influence society
- 5) Emergence of pop-up ecosystems: Value chain disruption will likely result in more creative partnerships, innovation, and agility
- 6) Focus on cost reduction: Structural cost reduction may become a critical priority to ensure business continuity based on cash, profits, and revenues.

DECELERATED TRENDS:

- 1) The sharing economy: Rising health and hygiene concerns and increased virtual work may reduce demand for shared services
- 2) Urbanisation: While urbanisation has been growing steadily, social distancing and rising fears of contagion may reduce the likelihood of people living and working in major cities
- 3) Global movement of people and goods: Based on likely government restrictions, the movement of people and goods across national borders could decrease.

2.8.1.4 Industrial revolution during a pandemic

As the world entered different phases of the coronavirus disease in late 2019 every business was disrupted as reflected by the dwindling global operations and dearth of Smart Manufacturing (SM) technologies, according to Sarfraz, Sarfraz, Iftikar and Akhund (2021:591).

- 1) Major industrial shifts throughout history were driven by natural disasters or outbreaks of infectious diseases threatening public health security
- 2) The evolution of humankind has been dominated by industrial revolutions, one after the other, which have changed the face of the modern world. The fifth industrial revolution is dawning upon the world in unforeseeable ways as humans increasingly rely on Industry 4.0 technologies including Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data (BD), the Internet of Things (IoT), digital platforms, augmented and virtual reality, and 3D printing
- 3) Society 5.0, known as the super-smart society, may be the final bridge between machine and man
- 4) Among the technologies of Society 5.0, the most important are AI, robotics, 3D printing and digital platforms. BD and AI have already changed the face of white and blue-collar jobs
- 5) The current generation is gearing itself towards a more personalised future due to the recent adoption of AI algorithms.

2.8.1.5 Immediate aftermath of the pandemic

In the years following the first round of primary data collection and with the reality of the global Covid-19 pandemic, non-performing loans (NPLs) were expected to potentially double from 2019 levels as payment holidays expired, while increased provisioning needs, reduced business generation, and margin pressure eroded the profitability of banks. South African and Nigerian banks experienced acute macro challenges (Deloitte, 2020), while loan quality and liquidity were the main issues for Angolan and Tunisian banks respectively. East African and Francophone West African banks were better placed than Central African banks to weather the pandemic, given their more resilient economies, with Egyptian banks experiencing the least impact (Moody's, 2020:1).

2.8.2 Escalating geopolitical tension

Over decades, businesses have become increasingly global. Recently, however, supply chains were disrupted for many unexpected reasons with geopolitics specifically causing uncertainty, and examples include the Russian invasion of Ukraine. A recent Gartner survey revealed that 79% of respondents who took part in a research survey at large organisations draw lessons from past disruptions and current concerns to change the way they have been conducting their business. They are leaning into resilience and agility to be more proactive and better prepared (Gartner, 2022:2).

2.9 Conclusion

For readers who do not operate in the financial services or banking sector, this chapter provides a high-level overview of retail banking and some of the main themes relevant to the research study. Global, continental and local perspectives were included to give context to the environments in which the financial services and banking industry exists. Chapter Three further examines and builds on some of the phenomena mentioned and their related opportunities and challenges, including marketing leadership, stakeholder alignment and customer centricity, by reviewing prevailing sources in literature to provide the theoretical framework for the proposed research survey.

3. CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the main phenomenon contained in the title of the study: the role of marketing leadership in directing internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity in a selected South African retail bank (servicing individuals and small business owners). Considering the research aims and objective as detailed in Chapter One, as well as the high-level sector context provided in Chapter Two, this chapter contains the literature review underpinning the conceptual theoretical framework created. The chapter explores and evaluates existing knowledge of marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and evolving customer centricity, as well as the interplay between the three main phenomena, thereby creating the context to the body of research this study intends to contribute towards.

The analysis and discussion of scholarly text and academic literature associated with this study were organised into theoretical phenomena, including marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and evolving customer centricity, as well as the interplay between these phenomena. Each phenomenon will be discussed in the context of exploring the role of marketing leadership in directing key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity. The review of literature also acknowledges and aims to understand some of the impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic on the main phenomena and their inter-relationships.

The literature review conducted, as a theoretical framework for the study, covers each main phenomenon's introduction, a section defining the phenomenon to create a shared understanding, a view of the evolution of each phenomenon, potential benefits and challenges associated with each phenomenon in the context of the study, measures of success, practical applications, limitations, and delineations, as well as a conclusion to each main section. The first main phenomenon, namely marketing leadership, is discussed in the section below.

3.2 Marketing leadership

3.2.1 Introduction

This section discusses marketing leadership as a part of the organisational ecosystem, which holds great potential in directing key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity. To ensure a shared understanding of terms across the organisation, the first sub-section describes marketing leadership based on a wide range of literature reviewed and deduces a summary of the term. Thereafter, marketing leadership is discussed in the context of its evolving nature, including broadening the role of marketing leadership, leading the transformation towards increased customer centricity in a responsible manner and the potential associated benefits, such as improved market sensing and having the voice of the customer represented in the boardroom. Thereafter, potential challenges facing marketing leadership, including a lack of board support, unrealistic expectations, and an underestimation of the power of data, are explored. A discussion on measuring marketing leadership's success, practical applications, limitations, and delineations, as well as a section conclusion are included.

3.2.2 Defining marketing leadership

To ensure a common understanding of a phenomenon such as marketing leadership, in a complex organisation with many internal stakeholders, defining the concept and distilling it to create a shared understanding, can prove valuable. A clear definition and actual recognition of marketing is necessary to further differentiate the practice, and only then would the company be able to integrate its departments into a 'complex' organisation that is intuitive, agile and customer centred, according to Ozeum, O'Keeffe and Lancaster (2015:17). Strategic marketing is dynamic as it continually adapts to the changing environmental and competitive landscape by developing new innovations and perspectives, while marketing, according to the average person, is about selling things, making products or advertising (Phillips, 2023:5&8). Leadership is about steering the ship in the right direction, as opposed to management, which is about keeping the ship afloat, according to Phillips (2023:121).

Marketing leadership is said to “emphasise the dynamism of marketing” (Felton, 1956:117-127), “take the *lead* in initiating and coordinating a market-driven perspective” (Bettencourt *et al.*, 2014:57), “positively influence organisational performance” (Feng *et al.*, 2015:12) and “should build learning organisations and encourage diversity” (Bassel & Lambert, 2018:34&36). Table 3.1 below details a range of bids to define marketing leadership as found in literature, presented in chronological order.

Table 3.1 Marketing leadership as a phenomenon

Author and year of publication	Marketing leadership
Felton (1956)	Marketing leadership emphasised the dynamism of marketing and revolves around a need to have a holistic view of the enterprise and to understand how the various functions of the organisation depend on each other.
Drucker (1998)	Marketing is the concept of <i>managing</i> an organisation in the centre of which is the buyer, the client with his needs and requests, and the entire company, its branches and sites are aimed at meeting these needs as much as possible.
Kotler and Keller (2012:3)	Marketing <i>management</i> is the art and science of choosing target markets and getting, keeping, and growing customers through creating, delivering, and communicating superior customer value.
Bettencourt <i>et al.</i> , (2014:57)	A service lens challenges marketing to take the <i>lead</i> in initiating and coordinating a market-driven perspective for all internal and external resources.
Feng <i>et al.</i> , (2015:1)	Powerful marketing <i>departments</i> positively influence an organisation’s performance and exert stronger influence over the organisation’s strategic decision-making.

Bassel and Lambert, (2018:34)	Marketing leaders must be agents of change, creative, ethical, and global thinkers and should build learning organisations, encourage diversity, and ensure employees are engaged in meaningful work.
Vargo, Koskela-Huotari and Vink (2020:28)	Traditionally, marketing has been understood as a small sub-domain of economics and business focused narrowly on the techniques of the marketing department of a firm.
The American Marketing Association - AMA, (2022)	Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.
Pimpan (2022:2)	Marketing leadership strategy is a main enabler of organisational success and achieving sustainability in competitive business environments. Marketing leadership <i>strategy</i> is defined as the ability of an organisation to evolve processes associated with marketing creativity by creating new products, as well as new technology and innovation to respond to customers' demands to bring about change in an organisation's success.

The selected definitions related to marketing leadership as presented in Table 3.1 above span references from 1956 to 2022, confirming the dynamic nature of the phenomenon of marketing leadership and the need for a holistic approach, given the interdependence between marketing leadership and the potential broadening of the role to include directing their key internal stakeholders' alignment to evolving customer centricity.

An updated definition of marketing leadership, distilled by the researcher from the above literature, reads as follows:

While marketing leadership is a dynamic, rapidly evolving phenomenon, it retains some core tenants, with artistic and scientific duality, requiring departmental interdependence without siloes, holistically minded yet focussed and selective when targeting customers. The ability to attract, grow and retain customer bases and

relationships by creating and articulating customer value through products and services value propositions, is necessary. Marketing leadership should lead the initiation and coordination of market-driven insights and perspectives for internal stakeholders and should contribute meaningfully and significantly towards the organisation's strategic decision-making and success, through being creative, ethical, engaged agents of change in the global context (beyond local branch and regional representative impact), adding sustainable value to its ecosystem, including customers, stakeholders and society at large, through the use of new technology, innovation and proactive market sensing.

Reviewing definitions of marketing leadership to help define the phenomenon also informed the discussions and inclusions in the sub-sections to follow, as well as the discussion guide for the primary data collection phase of the case study.

3.2.3 Marketing leadership as an evolving phenomenon

The section below examines marketing leadership as an evolving phenomenon, including the potential to broaden the role of marketing leadership in organisations and responsibly leading organisational transformation towards increased customer centricity, given the many potentially conflicting interests and trade-offs required.

3.2.3.1 Broadening the role of marketing leadership

With regard to the primary research case study, there is a strong argument made for broadening the role of marketing leadership to include the direction of key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity, as explained by Vargo, Koskela-Huotari and Vink (2020:28): "Traditionally, marketing has been understood as a small sub-domain of economics and business focused narrowly on the techniques of the marketing department of a firm. Service-dominant (S-D) logic suggests, instead, that marketing should be understood as the study of value co-creation through markets, broadly applicable to economics, business, and society at large".

Bartels (1974:73) posed the question: "... is marketing a specific function with general applicability or a general function that is specifically applied?" The researcher would

posit that the answer could be both, rather than either. Marketing leaders should be building stronger working relationships with their key internal stakeholders in the C-Suite and the executive leadership team, as suggested by Moorman *et al.* (2019:2), since, “given the interdisciplinary nature of most marketing problems, they will be stronger when united to solve the field’s most pressing questions and problems”.

Helping to direct and drive long-term sustainability of the organisation (Bawany, 2017:18; Pless & Maak, 2011:4) by, for example, becoming more customer centric, should be a realistic aim. Contributing to organisational success in a measurable manner, which will help build credibility with stakeholders, especially Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) (Katsikeas *et al.*, 2016), will also benefit marketing leaders. As different stakeholders view success using different lenses, a section addressing marketing leadership measures of success (such as significantly contributing towards organisational growth, building brand equity and brand love, and growing and defending the customer base) and other key performance indicators, ideally agreed upfront, will shed light on the discussion.

An opportunity to restore confidence in marketing (Bawany, 2017:18), respect with leadership and business, positioning themselves as thought-leaders (O’Keeffe *et al.*, 2016:430), as well as an opportunity to positively influence the organisation’s customer-centric culture, can also be added to the list of potential benefits of broadening the role of marketing leadership. Exploring the future role of marketing, adding *operating with a service lens* (Bettencourt *et al.*, 2014:57), it is suggested that the role of marketing is not only to create a value proposition based on the information gathered from others, but also to ensure that the entire network of resource-providing stakeholders understand it and what role they play in fulfilling it. Marketing must understand the unique job of each stakeholder to help them to be effective and efficient in value co-creation. A service lens also challenges marketing to take the lead in initiating and coordinating a market-driven perspective for all internal and external resources (Bettencourt *et al.*, 2014:57). The role of marketing is to present value propositions that serve as invitations to participate in value co-creation based on customer jobs and value criteria, to evaluate solicitations to participate in value co-creation with a customer, and

to create support systems that help customers to be more effective in their value co-creation role (Bettencourt *et al.*, 2014:54/5).

3.2.3.2 Leading transformation responsibly to increased customer centricity

Marketing leadership can employ transformational leadership principles to play a meaningful role in directing their key internal stakeholders to align with evolving customer centricity. Strategic, dynamic capabilities help the organisation to maintain, absorb and innovate, allowing it to create, extend and modify, transform, and reconfigure its substantive capabilities, thereby encouraging an attitude of sustainable competition, according to Tirado *et al.* (2019: 232). According to Quinn and Thakor (2018:80-81), authenticity is a prerequisite for transformation; they state that “when an authentic purpose permeates business strategy and decision making, the personal good and the collective good become one”.

Given several social and environmental crises, beyond governments’ responsibilities, business leaders can have a positive impact when they lead responsibly, and their decision-making is devoid of greed and self-interest. Responsible leadership needs to be approached on both individual and systemic levels. A society of markets, laws and elections is not enough if the rich and powerful fail to behave with respect, honesty, and compassion towards the rest of society and towards the world. The powerful statement is made that “relationships are the centre of leadership”; a level of regard and stakeholder inclusion are also cited by Pless and Maak (2011:3&4).

According to Pless and Maak (2011:4), responsible leadership is essential to enact a vision for a sustainable future through co-creating futures with key stakeholders. The type of leadership required to navigate such change is both rational and ethical, in that it occurs through social interactions that give purpose and direction to such leadership. The question is to what degree business leaders play a political role in ensuring a sustainable future in an increasingly connected world. Are they acting as good citizens and are external stakeholders convinced that business leaders take an active role in responsible behaviour inside and outside the organisation, growing the triple bottom line; socially, environmentally, and economically? Patzer *et al.* (2018:342) state that

responsible leaders can establish the conditions that will create appropriate arenas for successful discourse.

Table 3.2 below compares responsible leaders' contribution, responsibility, and role as mediators between the lifeworld and economic system, in the societal sphere.

Table 3.2 Responsible leaders as mediators between the lifeworld and economic system

Societal sphere	Lifeworld	Economic system
Contribution to society	Social integration by reproduction of a shared base of norms and values.	Efficient distribution of goods and services.
Leader's responsibility	Contribution to the process of (re)producing a shared foundation of norms and values.	Contribution to organisational efficiency.
Role of leadership as mediator between lifeworld and economic system	Leaders as citizens Initiating and moderating stakeholder discourses Facilitating discourses about values	Leader as strategists Motivating and committing employees to organisational goals

Source: Extract of table from Patzer *et al.*, 2018:339.

Table 3.2 above describes the balancing act required from responsible leaders, with complex trade-offs or mediation between aspects of the lifeworld, which is more externally focused, and the economic system which is more internally focused, such as social integration versus efficient distribution. To mediate between lifeworld and economic systems, responsible leaders should have an integrative style to showcase a broad and balanced approach towards value creation and lead the organisation responsibly with a focus on business and societal objectives. This balancing act requires marketing leadership to use their skills such as market-sensing and hearing the voice of the customer, to craft strategies based on customer insights and needs on the one hand,

and their ability to grow the customer base and contribute to organisational growth on the other, in an optimal manner.

In terms of responsible trade-offs, it is essential that the evaluation of new initiatives, processes, and structures be based on their impact not only on a certain group or product but also on the organisation as a whole and its collective purpose. This helps balance the trade-offs of complexity because the benefits of any single component may be concentrated in one small area, whereas the complexity costs may be distributed across the organisation. A holistic view of all potential costs and benefits is needed (Reeves, Levin, Fink & Levina 2020:13).

To conclude, in the context of the primary research where it is proposed that marketing leadership should direct alignment of their key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity responsibly, Maak, Pless and Voegtlin (2016:11) state that “responsible leaders with an integrative style showcase a broad and balanced approach towards value creation and lead the business with a focus on business and societal objectives”.

Leading transformation to increased customer centricity responsibly (Quinn & Thakor, 2018; Patzer & Maak, 2018; Voegtlin & Scherer, 2018; Bawany, 2017; Pless & Maak, 2011) could also include helping to future-proof through the 5th industrial revolution (BASA, 2019:26; WEF, 2018; Bawany, 2017:18), and grow the organisation (Whitler, Krause & Lehmann, 2018:86).

3.2.4 Potential benefits of marketing leadership

Marketing leaders make a significant contribution to organisations given their unique combination of skills employed in providing marketing leadership to an organisation. These skills include being agents of change, listening to the voice of customers, doing market sensing, being a force for good, wielding influence and persuading others, being drivers of organisational growth and forging powerful partnerships across thought worlds.

3.2.4.1 Marketing leaders must be agents of change

Marketing leaders must be agents of change, creative, ethical, and global thinkers and should build learning organisations, encourage diversity, and ensure employees are engaged in meaningful work (Bassel & Lambert, 2018:34). Marketing leaders need to reflect on the changes required to ensure optimal customer and organisational outcomes (Palmatier *et al.*, 2019; Tirado *et al.*, 2019; Prifti & Alimehmeti, 2017; Varadarajan, 2017; Narver & Slater, 1990). Efficient marketing leaders inspire and motivate people and the essential behavioural skills of leadership include how to react to people's emotions. Building the evidence in support of marketing leadership directing key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity continues in the section below with a focus on their unique skill set.

3.2.4.2 Marketing leaders listen to the voice of customers and share it in the organisation

Marketing leadership is acknowledged as the customer custodian (Durmaz, Hawrami & Hamasaeed, 2022:117; Al-Sumri and Cao & Duan, 2020:39) and the organisational function most closely associated with customers, meaning marketing leadership is well positioned to be the voice of the customer inside the organisation and the voice of the organisation to the market. Marketing leaders know better than anyone in the organisation what the expressed and unexpressed needs and wants of customers are (Pandya, Ismoyowati & Suharno, 2020:475).

A shift in power to the individual consumer is being propelled by today's hyper-connected world, which enables people to track information about companies and their products, express their opinions to a wide audience, and sign onto social movements, globally and in real time (Deloitte, 2018:4). The listening opportunity is greater than ever if organisations truly take advantage of the data they have available to them. The increasingly hyper-connected nature of the *workplace* means that interactions between and among workers and the outside world can be a valuable source for analysis if managed appropriately. Leaders need to take a proactive approach to managing this wealth of information and leveraging it in order to monitor the trends both inside and outside of the workplace (Deloitte, 2018:5/6).

The role of marketing leadership includes representing the voice of the marketplace in an organisation's discussions (Jaworski *et al.*, 2016), or demonstrating an understanding of the customer's point of view. Marketing leaders represent the voice of the customer in the organisation, agrees Eriksson *et al.* (2020:7), noting in addition that it is of strategic value as the voice of the customer represented in the organisation can improve customer centricity and contribute significantly to corporate strategy. The CMO Survey, conducted between October 2018 and February 2019 among 575 Fortune 500 executives across the C-Suite established that a central challenge for CMOs, when communicating with the C-Suite, is infusing the customer's point of view in business decisions (MarketingCharts.com, 2019).

3.2.4.3 Marketing leaders do market-sensing

Complementing the need to listen to the voice of the customer is another skill of marketing leaders called market sensing, which requires making sense of all the information available to them to the benefit of the organisation and brand they represent. Customers and employees are inextricably linked to their brands. Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) and the whole marketing leadership team should collaborate with other stakeholders to manage an organisation's total internal and external brand (Deloitte, 2018:20). Organisations on the cutting edge embody the concept of the social enterprise: an organisation that is alert enough to sense, and responsive enough to accommodate, the range of stakeholder expectations and demands (Deloitte, 2018:3). Listening-in actions are compatible with the outside-in market sensing process. This is consistent with the notion that market orientation emphasises the distinctive capability of market sensing. The organisation uses market sensing to learn about customers, competitors or channel members to continuously detect and act on events and trends in present and prospective markets as explained by Ananda *et al.* (2016:177). When it comes to market sensing, speed matters to ensure maximum benefit; marketing agility refers to the extent to which an entity rapidly iterates between making sense of the market and executing marketing decisions to adapt to the market (Kalaiganam *et al.*, 2021:36).

Marketing capabilities allow organisations such as banks to understand market needs, introduce new products, and organise marketing activities and strategies that provide

unique value to their customers; in addition, they help to create and maintain relationships with them, achieve greater efficiency and cost control and thereby help them to outperform their competitors (Tirado *et al.*, 2019:242). Increased and improved market sensing can serve the case study bank's marketing leadership and their key internal stakeholders well, as it aims to become more aligned to evolving customer centricity.

3.2.4.4 Marketing leaders are a force for good

People are increasingly realising that social stability can be undermined by unforeseen impacts created by rapid technological change, while holding out the promise of valuable opportunities, explains Agarwal (2018:4). Striking an optimal balance between the human touch and technology is vital. Furthermore, advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and new communications technologies are fundamentally changing how work gets done, who does it, and how it influences society (Deloitte, 2018:4). Many stakeholders are alarmed, and they expect businesses to channel this force for the broader good.

Another example is the launch of ChatGPT (generative pre-trained transformer) towards the end of 2022. Here marketing leadership can ensure they are a force for good by guarding the use of artificial intelligence to confirm it is used with the customers' best interests at heart and not to exploit them *en masse*. As the solution cannot yet *interpret* or *analyse* information or understand the context in which it is used (Schneider, 2023:1), human marketing leaders will need to keep a close watch on developments in order to protect customers from those who may want to use the solution to drive mass sales or other self-centred objectives, without putting customers first.

3.2.4.5 Marketing leaders wield influence and persuade others

Marketer leadership needs to influence the decisions and behaviours of others to affect strategy and outcomes. Therefore, understanding conditions that enable marketing leaders to wield influence is critical (Whitler *et al.*, 2018:101). Evidence already shows that powerful marketing departments positively influence an organisation's performance and execute stronger influence over the organisation's strategic decision-making (Feng *et al.*, 2015). As subject matter experts, marketers can fundamentally

change the governance, prioritisation, and counsel related to growth-enhancing strategies through their presence and influence on the board of directors.

All else being equal, then, boards should look to their experienced marketing colleagues to address and provide sound strategy regarding marketing issues (Whitler *et al.*, 2018:88). According to Katsikeas, Morgan, Leonidou and Hult (2016:16), “Marketing’s influence can grow only if its unique characteristics add to greater understanding of issues that matter to other disciplines”. Unfortunately, there is convincing evidence that the influence of marketing as a business function has been declining over time (Key, 2020:162).

3.2.4.6 Marketing leaders are drivers of organisational growth

The role of marketing varies from tactical, such as sales support, developing collateral materials, or developing retail advertising, to strategic, such as finding new *growth* opportunities and driving the development of these opportunities, as explained by Key (2020:161/2). Marketing leaders can acquire prospective customers (Sharma *et al.*, 2021:2302), help drive revenue growth, make growth a priority for the organisation, provide demand generation expertise on the board (Whitler *et al.*, 2018:86) and stimulate creativity and innovation for driving the business and fostering growth (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009).

In the context of banking, according to Symonds, Wright, and Ott (2007:5), most banks pay lip service to giving attention to the right customers, but true customer-led banks drive up their numbers by developing customer-led *growth* disciplines that permeate all levels of their organisations. They approach three customer elements simultaneously:

- 1) They *design* the right propositions for the right customers, which includes identifying target market segments and crafting value propositions and experiences to delight them.
- 2) They *deliver* these propositions by focusing the entire company on them, from boardroom to frontline, with an early and ongoing emphasis on cross-functional collaboration.

- 3) They continually *develop* their capabilities to delight customers again and again. That ability, the most difficult to realise, and the rarest, entails measures such as creating closed feedback loops that establish direct dialogue with the customer and accountability for the ongoing improvement of the customer experience based on that discipline.

Each of these “Three D’s” (design, deliver and develop) reinforces the others. When wielded together, they can effectively transform a bank (such as the case study bank) into an organisation that is continually and profitably led by its customers (Symonds *et al.*, 2007:6).

3.2.4.7 Marketing leaders’ skills forge powerful partnership across thought worlds

Marketing leaders bring a wealth of skills, capabilities and sensibilities to organisations and can take on responsibilities varying from motivating and inspiring stakeholders (Malik *et al.*, 2021:54) to making significant contributions by providing demand generation expertise, revenue growth and ultimately organisational growth (Whitler *et al.*, 2018:87). Their skills, capabilities and sensibilities include having high levels of business, spiritual, emotional and political intelligence, according to Malik *et al.* (2021:56); the ability to be change architects and change agents (Malik *et al.*, 2021:54); building sincere, authentic, collaborative and trusting relationships (Sayyadi *et al.*, 2020:29), and leading with wisdom, inner peace, self-awareness and purpose, as well as empathy, compassion, self-efficacy and self-regulation (Malik *et al.*, 2021:56/7). Empathic listening, and demonstrating cool, calm and compassionate behaviour in times of difficulty are also valuable characteristics generally associated with good leadership, including marketing leadership (Malik *et al.*, 2021:57).

With regard to marketing specific skills and capabilities, having competitive marketing experience, especially in organisations with extensive high-level technical requirements from other stakeholders or employees, such as an engineering firm from which the below example is drawn, will be most valuable in a market-driven milieu. An empirical study revealed that communication skills (87%), problem-solving (47%), interpersonal skills (48%), and being a team player (49%) were the four non-technical skills with the

highest demand in engineering (Zubaly, 2020:441), which are all skills generally associated with marketing leadership. Because of their background, good non-technical sales and marketing managers bring fresh ideas, according to Zubaly (2020:445). The benefit of a diverse team representing different thought worlds is extremely important for progress and that is what non-technical sales and marketing managers can bring. They can challenge the way things are done. Technical deficiencies can be counteracted by partnering, having a mentor, or learning from organisational resources over time. Success in sales and marketing is dependent on collaboration. This applies to a team that may not have the technical expertise or skills to complete a project. Partnering will be the best way to do this. The ability to acquire prospective customers (Sharma, Raney & Luhar, 2021:2302) and being customer custodians and advocates who know how to reach out to customers (Durmaz, Hawrami, & Hamasaeed, 2022:117), as well as the highly ranked ability to show the customers' points of view (MarketingCharts, 2019) are critical skills required of marketing leaders.

Developments in the market, swiftness of rivalry among companies, increased customer's demands and globalisation forced organisations to change because without change organisations may encounter difficulties in adapting to market shifts. In a rapidly changing environment leaders require dynamic capabilities to handle and manage change; they must have the ability to persuade others (Boris, 2020), an ability that many influential marketing leaders possess.

Success in sales and marketing is dependent on collaboration (Gartner, 2022; Moggi & Dameri, 2020:2831/2; MacGillavry & Sinyan, 2016). This applies to a team that may not have the technical expertise or skills to complete a project. Great managers are not afraid to ask for help, they understand that they do not know what they do not know. Partnering is the best way to do this, according to Zubaly (2020:445). When marketing leaders lack some of the necessary skills, partnering, mentoring, learning from stakeholders, collaboration and asking for help are suggested to bridge the gaps quickly, as suggested by Zubaly (2020:445), who states "technical deficiencies can be counteracted by partnering, having a mentor, or learning from organisational resources over time".

In summary, based on the evidence shared above, including listening to and sharing the voice of customers in the organisation, doing market sensing, being a force for good by balancing technology and the human touch, wielding influence and persuading others, driving customer-led organisational growth and forging powerful partnerships across thought worlds, marketing leaders have the skill set and are well positioned to broaden their role to include directing key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity. The section below explores the challenges faced by marketing leadership, also as it may pertain to a broader leadership role, as proposed.

3.2.5 Potential challenges faced by marketing leadership

Marketing leadership encounters a wide range of potential challenges, some more and some less directly within marketing leaders' (including the CMO, senior and mid-level marketing managers) control when addressing these challenges. For example, garnering board support may be less within their control than ensuring they give proper guidance and direction to their teams. In some cases, the marketing leaders may have created or perpetuated the challenges. According to Whitley, Lee and Young (2022), Key, Clark, Ferrel, Stewart and Pitt (2020), Self (2020) and Zubaly (2020), good marketing leadership should be able to avoid or timeously address challenges, such as struggling to secure board support and garner stakeholder agreement and alignment, setting of unrealistic expectations, inability to scale team efforts, underestimating the power of data, and losing prominence and self-centred leadership behaviour such as derailing people and plans, managing by fear and hampering team efforts, as described in more detail below.

3.2.5.1 Lack of board support

Being backed by the board is a critical success factor for CMOs, since a person with marketing experience on the board could be a valuable mentor and guide to the CMO. Whitley (2022:110) observes that if there is a marketer on the board, it can be valuable and helpful for the CMO to help advocate for and adopt their agenda. The challenge can be for the board member to not relive their own personal achievements and conflate the board role with that of the CMO. Their role should be to help educate the board and elevate the marketing sensibility of the board.

The support of the CEO is also invaluable, but it needs to be articulated openly and honestly to the entire C-Suite and leadership teams, to ensure that what is expected of CMOs and marketing leadership is supported by their stakeholders. According to Whitler (2022:110), if the expectation is that marketing should be the leader in transformation, everybody needs to be made aware of this and the board can keep the CEO honest by ensuring that whatever is in his/her mind is made explicit to the organisation. The expectations communicated to the CMO must be aligned with the board and shared with the broad organisation. Marketing leadership should prioritise securing board support. Not enjoying board support early on may result in serious challenges in the future. When boards ensure role clarity and align the upper echelon levels on the CMO role definition and measurement of performance, the relationship between board characteristics, marketing beliefs (such as belief in the value of marketing and utility of CMOs in strategy setting meetings), and behaviour should be strengthened (Whitler *et al.*, 2022:131).

3.2.5.2 Lack of alignment or agreeing to and setting unrealistic expectations

If marketing leaders are unable to garner agreement or align stakeholders to organisational purpose and ensure optimal levels of understanding they should not expect others to agree with their points of view or ideas first. They may also struggle to create a shared or common purpose and align outcomes between internal stakeholders (Self, 2020). The debate on the alignment of the interests of stakeholders relies on the notion that interests should be considered by leadership in its objectives and daily decisions (Rissy, 2021:222).

The first thing that poor sales and marketing managers do is set unrealistic expectations for their team. This could stem from misunderstanding the complexity of a project. Employees need to feel they are welcome and are being set up to succeed. The implications of not being realistic with business goals may have extremely detrimental consequences for individual careers. These impractical expectations lead to broad dissatisfaction that could result in inaccurate or unfair reviews (Zubaly, 2020:447).

3.2.5.3 Inability to scale team effort and underestimating the power of data

Seeing everyone in the team as an individual is important on many levels, but there is a difference between seeing someone for who they are, and not having a view of the team's bigger picture. According to Zubaly (2020:447), if a manager does one thing to help one person over and over, that is considered commendable. Good leaders do not only work by individual outputs, but also benefit from ratios that have more influence for the team so having a focus on doing one thing that helps everyone equally scales their efforts and leads to greater efficiency.

It is also important for leaders to use data properly and to not underestimate the power of the data at their disposal or fail to sufficiently interact with data in the most efficient or ethical ways (Self, 2020). Not only can it present serious challenges, but it will also result in missed opportunities. During the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic, according to Accenture (2020:26), retailers responded in record time with new products and services, new ways of working, and some impressive displays of innovation. Responsibility to employees and consumers assumed a new significance. To understand and build relationships with their new consumers, retailers need to leverage data-driven insights to inform future decision making.

3.2.5.4 Losing prominence and influence

A challenge facing marketing leadership, according to Key *et al.* (2020:155), is that marketing has been reduced to an influence and persuasion technology, mainly subservient to the needs of the entire marketing system that makes the function complete. Robust issues related to integrating strategic decisions associated with operations, procurement and logistics now fall outside of marketing.

Problems occur when managers do not view marketing as a separate role from other business sectors or when a technical manager (in an engineering firm, for example) does not see the value in non-technical knowledge (Zubaly, 2020:445). In addition, and for some time, scholars Key, Clark, Ferrel, Stewart, and Pitt (2020) have debated the strategic role of marketing leadership, with some, including Key *et al.* (2020), fearing that the influence and impact of marketers are dwindling among strategic decision

makers, despite noteworthy research on marketing representation in top management teams.

3.2.5.5 Poor marketing leadership

Poor marketing leadership in itself is a major challenge. Poor leaders can undermine people and plans whereas good leaders have the ability to restore direction and drive (Self, 2020). Some poor leaders may also manage by fear. This is often paired with unrealistic goals and unfair reviews. Leading by fear includes blackmailing and threatening consequences directed at employees. Poor managers fail to understand that people work better when they have freedom. In a toxic work environment people experience undue stress and may become less efficient and interactive. Managers cannot force their teams to respect them; respect needs to be earned (Zubaly, 2020:447).

When marketing leadership (including Marketing Managers, Marketing Heads and CMOs) cannot proactively prevent these challenges from occurring or rapidly react to their presence in their current role scope, they could also negatively impact performance in the proposed broader role which would include the directing of key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity in the case study bank.

In summary, the potential challenges faced by marketing leadership, including a lack of board support, insufficient alignment, unrealistic expectations, an inability to scale team efforts, underestimating the power of data, losing prominence and influence and poor marketing leadership were discussed and the awareness of these potential challenges and avoiding or addressing them proactively will serve marketing leadership well in future, since their skill sets and experience should equip them to address most of the obstacles these challenges present.

3.2.6 Measuring marketing leadership success

Managerial research has suggested that Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) are not living up to expectations. A high percentage of CEOs surveyed indicated dissatisfaction with their CMOs, believe they are disconnected from financial accountability, and in many

cases do not consider them highly effective (Whitler, 2022:105). The section on measuring marketing leadership success discusses the importance of board involvement in setting objectives and resource allocation as well as mentoring should there be marketing experience on the board. In addition, it is important to agree on measurement criteria early on to align stakeholder expectations of marketing leadership and direct focus, including responsibilities and deadlines (Katsikeas *et al.*, 2016:6). Potential inclusions on the marketing leadership balanced scorecard is discussed, after which the imperatives of leading a marketing team and being a good marketing leader will be examined, including the professional and personal characteristics of successful marketing leaders. Finally, the marketing leadership measures in the context of the case study will be discussed. Contributions from Phillips (2023), Whitler (2022), The CMO Survey (2021) and Katsikeas (2016) are reviewed below.

3.2.6.1 Backed by the board

Whitler *et al.* (2022:131) states that in terms of measures of success for CMOs prior to starting at the firm, the research interviews highlight the importance of board involvement in ensuring CMO role clarity, CMO role alignment, and CMO measurement alignment. When those above the CMO have clear role expectations, or the clarity, certainty and predictability required to guide CMO behaviour and communicate them clearly to the C-Suite, there should be a reduction in role ambiguity not just for the CMO but for the C-suite team as well.

All functions should share the growth responsibility and such a structure will drive alignment. On an ongoing basis, the structure, measures, and decision rights must be correctly articulated (Whitler, 2022:110). The board needs to play a role in ensuring expectations are realistic and appropriate resources are allocated to set the marketing leadership team up for success. “The board, through their governance role, can be the voice of reason and make sure expectations are appropriate”, explains Whitler (2022:111). Finally, the board can play an important role by asking the right questions of the CMO and maintaining the appropriate perspective on the business’s needs, and in doing so help to drive *alignment* between the management team’s focus and the CMO’s agenda (Whitler, 2022:110).

3.2.6.2 Agree criteria early on

Although linking organisations' marketing efforts with performance outcomes is a critical issue, scant attention has been paid to how performance is and should be conceptualised and measured (Katsikeas *et al.*, 2016:1). Agreement on how the team will define success should be achieved in the early stages of the marketing planning process. Team reminders of these key performance indicators (KPIs) throughout the process, as well as assignment of individual responsibilities, are beneficial (Phillips, 2023:51). Moreover, the definition of marketing performance measures (Katsikeas *et al.*, 2016:1) and the time horizon (Katsikeas *et al.*, 2016:6) of marketing related performance measurement are important.

In the context of the primary research case study, improvements in employee perceptions of the organisation's alignment to evolving customer centricity, with specific focus on the alignment of marketing leadership's key internal stakeholders, based on pre-agreed criteria for the CMO and marketing leadership, can serve as a future measure of marketing leadership success.

3.2.6.3 Marketing leadership's balanced scorecards

While several marketing performance metrics have proven to be important when evaluating the impact of marketing actions, according to the CMO Survey (2021:36), marketing leaders report that sales impact and customer engagement comprise almost 50% of the evaluation and consistent with this finding, sales revenue and digital performance are the marketing outcomes most consistently tracked. Growth is the most important key performance indicator (KPI) for evaluating marketing performance relative to return on investment (ROI) and companies use traditional accounting metrics (for example, sales, profits) to measure marketing performance, while forward-looking metrics (such as customer lifetime value) are not used often. Metrics such as brand equity value and customer lifetime value, on the other hand, are rarely tracked, according to the CMO Survey (2021:31).

Research by Whitley (2022:105) suggests that CEOs expect CMOs to be trustworthy, impressive in work output, connected from a financial accountability point of view, "highly effective", have the power to influence key C-Suite decisions and worthy of their

confidence in them. Katsikeas *et al.* (2016:18) notes the importance of performance measures such as customer mindset, customer behaviour, customer level performance, product-market performance, accounting performance and financial market performance. The whole marketing–performance outcome chain is dynamic in two main respects. *Firstly*, organisations reinvest the financial resources they generate to build and maintain their marketing-related and complementary resources and capabilities. *Secondly*, in terms of learning and adjusting, organisations also learn by going through the stages of the marketing–performance outcome chain, according to Katsikeas *et al.* (2016:4), in ways that lead to:

- 1) adjustments to the selection and management of future marketing resources and marketing programme actions
- 2) managers possibly changing their organisation’s resource deployments
- 3) marketing-related actions in response to observed outcomes at any level of the performance-outcome chain, such as:
 - a. operational performance (brand equity, perceived quality, unit sales, word-of-mouth, or share-of-wallet), as well as
 - b. accounting performance (sales revenue and revenue growth) and
 - c. financial market outcomes (investor returns and cost of capital).

For the application to the proposed approach of adding the responsibility of directing key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity to marketing leaders’ role, a notable increase in customer centricity as perceived by an organisation’s marketing leadership and their key internal stakeholders will need to be added to the performance measures, with key contributors to improved customer centricity as measurement units.

The full support of the rest of the C-Suite, as well as the board, will be required to ensure marketing leadership success in their future role, as observed by Whitley (2022:107), who states that if somebody claims that boards have nothing to do with the CMO, then it is evidence that they have misunderstand the role of boards. The job of boards is to provide direction, oversee management, set strategies, and most importantly to do this through the executive leadership team. Therefore, to deliver desired results, the board

should be aligned with the construct set for marketing, the role definition for the CMO, and the priorities and progress being made so that CMOs can perform and support these company-wide goals and objectives. CMO roles are unique, like snowflakes. The CMO role is more fragile with various sources of threat and so the board should exercise disproportionate care to avoid any forces at work that may undermine the success of the CMO, such as a lack of understanding, a bias against marketing, lack of trust, mismatched expectations, misjudging the required skill set and hiring inappropriately, or holding highly unrealistic expectations of what can be done and achieved by marketing alone. The board must play a role by agreeing to clear, sensible expectations grounded in some understanding of the function.

3.2.6.4 Marketing leadership's characteristics and skills help drive measures of success

Marketing leadership possesses a mix of personal characteristics and professional skills enabling them to achieve positive results. Some of these are discussed in the section below. With regard to personal characteristics, leadership effectiveness can be measured through the degree of emotional intelligence the leader possesses. Leaders must have intrapersonal, interpersonal skills and competencies as these are useful in times of change (Malik *et al.*, 2021:57). Professional skills required to measure up as a good marketing leader, according to Self (2020), Boris (2020), Habel *et al.* (2020), Malik (2021), Self (2020) and Zubaly (2020), include:

- 1) Listening to each other and being open to all conversation as this contributes to compatibility. The opposite of being able to listen is being able to communicate (Zubaly, 2020:446).
- 2) Good managers understanding everyone's career goals and wanting to help them succeed (Self, 2020).
- 3) The best managers being seen to "walk the talk" as leaders (Habel *et al.*, 2020:38; Zubaly, 2020:446).
- 4) Building up a team through an inherent sense of mission mixed with charisma (Boris, 2020).
- 5) Measuring the team's success by each individual achievement instead of a collective effort (Zubaly, 2020:447).

- 6) Measuring marketing leadership effectiveness by business expertise possessed by the leaders; being proactive in analysing market, customer, and competitor's trends, in taking opportunities to improve customer services.
- 7) Using Business Intelligence (BI) to support leaders during change process as with high BI level they can anticipate customer's needs, wants and demands in initiating and driving organisational change (Malik *et al.*, 2021:56).

3.2.6.5 New marketing leadership measures

The importance of updating success criteria as new constructs come into play is emphasised by Whitler, Lee, Krause and Morgan (2021) when they suggest: "ensure new constructs have new measures. When developing new constructs in this domain, ensure that measures are also new and different". This applies to measuring the degree of success that marketing leadership will achieve in directing key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity. Improvements in employee perceptions of the organisation's alignment to customer centricity, with specific focus on the alignment of marketing leadership's key internal stakeholders, based on pre-agreed criteria, can serve as a measure of success. In assessing marketing leadership performance in an organisation, a central question to be answered in the marketing discipline is the role that an organisation's marketing leadership plays in explaining performance outcomes, as observed by Katsikeas, Morgan, Leonidou and Hult (2016:1).

In summary, and in the context of the primary research, the measurement of marketing leadership effectiveness will need to capture marketing leadership's ability to align key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity, through garnering board support, agreeing measurement criteria early on, building a fair balanced scorecard, using marketing leadership's characteristics and skills to drive success, and updating measures to accommodate new constructs.

3.2.7 Practical applications

This section explores the potential applications and current practices associated with the marketing leadership literature reviewed in the context of the primary research problem.

3.2.7.1 Application of advantages of marketing leadership driving alignment

Figure 3.1 below presents a proposed application of advantages of marketing leadership directing alignment of key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity.

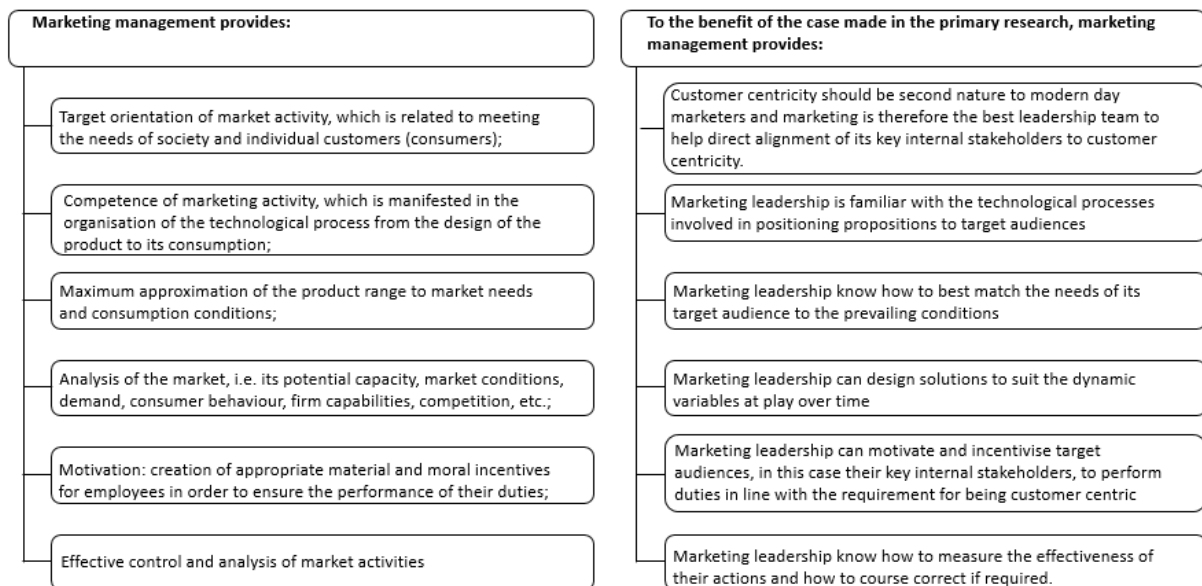


Fig 3.1 Proposed application of advantages of marketing leadership driving alignment

Source: Kateryna (2021:4) in the first column and the author's interpretation of the potential application related to the primary research in the second column.

Marketing management provides:

- 1) a target orientation of market activity, which is related to meeting the needs of society and individual customers (consumers):
 - a. to the benefit of the case proposed in the primary research, customer centricity should be second nature to modern-day marketers and marketing is therefore the best leadership team to help direct alignment of its key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity.
- 2) competence of marketing activity, which is manifested in the organisation of the technological process from the design of the product to its consumption:
 - a. marketing leadership is familiar with the technological processes involved in positioning propositions to target audiences.
- 3) maximum approximation of the product range to market needs and consumption conditions:
 - a. marketing leadership know how to best match the needs of its target audience to the prevailing conditions.

- 4) analysis of the market, i.e., its potential capacity, market conditions, demand, consumer behaviour, firm capabilities, competition, etc.:
 - a. marketing leadership can design solutions to suit the dynamic variables at play over time.
- 5) motivation: creation of appropriate material and moral incentives for employees to ensure the performance of their duties:
 - a. marketing leadership can motivate and incentivise target audiences, in this case their key internal stakeholders, to perform duties in line with the requirement for being customer centric.
- 6) Effective control and analysis of market activities:
 - a. marketing leadership know how to measure the effectiveness of their actions and how to course correct if required.

In Figure 3.1 above, the author/researcher utilised the content from Kateryna (2021) and added an interpretation of the potential application, which relates to the primary research conducted, aiming to contribute to the argument of the case to propose that marketing leadership should direct the alignment of their key internal stakeholders to customer centricity.

3.2.7.2 Marketing leadership during Covid-19 and beyond

The Spring 2020 issue of the American Marketing Association (AMA) Marketing News gives many examples of how leading marketers were working during the global Covid-19 pandemic. Many managers employed a short-term view and had difficulties ensuring that their new short-term actions still fell in line with their longer-term strategic plans. Companies were urged to calibrate and redefine their purposes, products, (omni)-channels, target customers, advertising and technology at the time (Hoekstra & Leeflang 2022:253). This is discussed in more detail below.

1) Purpose

In a meta-analysis, Fan *et al.* (2020) found that the effect of cause-related marketing is greater when it is done by a familiar brand of a utilitarian product, when a relatively large amount of money is donated (as was the case with many organisations during the pandemic) than when the cause is less familiar. It is also important that such activities

connect with the authenticity of the brands that initiate them (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2022:253). South African banks embarked on several cause-related marketing campaigns during the height of the global Covid-19 pandemic. These included sponsorship of personal protective equipment (PPE) to old age homes, for example, as senior citizens were particularly vulnerable during the pandemic, and they form an important part of a bank's client base.

2) Product tweaks

Many companies developed creative and innovative ideas that redefine their product portfolios (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2022:253). Consumers may respond to an economic crisis in different ways. They can reduce the total quantity of products and services purchased, they may shift budgets across product categories, switch to cheaper brand (or store) alternatives within the product category, and/or postpone purchases (Hunneman, 2020). From a customer point of view, getting more for less by extracting more value from offers was top of mind. In the banking sector, for example, more favourable rates, lower fees, more flexible credit repayment terms, greater and more relevant loyalty rewards are examples of product enhancements implemented to accommodate customer needs during the height of the pandemic.

3) Omni-channel strategies

Research shows that companies that apply a multichannel strategy in which they combine offline and online channels perform better in terms of share of wallet and in terms of revenues. Such companies reacted better during the pandemic because they were already prepared to offer their products and services online where others were not and were therefore more responsive to changes in the customer journey (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2022:254).

The *CMO Survey* has been collecting and disseminating the opinions of marketing leaders since 2008. The 29th edition examines how marketers are approaching strategies, spending, and organisation in a post-Covid-19 environment. Results show that some aspects of marketing have changed significantly over the last three years, while other aspects that changed dramatically during the Covid-19 period have returned

to pre-Covid-19 levels. These results are based on a recent survey of 273 marketing leaders at for-profit American companies, 95.6% of whom are VP-level or higher. According to the results, the pandemic has changed the use of channels—65% of marketers are now using a larger number of channels while 41% are using social channels to sell. Only 10.5% of marketers report their former face-to-face channels are now all digital, and half report their companies are returning to or opening face-to-face channels. This finding reflects the buyers' growing appetite to embrace traditional channels after two years of all-digital interactions, according to Moorman (2022).

Many South African retailers and banks responded relatively quickly and effectively to the challenges and opportunities presented by the pandemic. Grocery delivery services and digital banking, including virtual cards, were introduced and met the new needs of clients with agility.

4) Advertising

Advertising, especially in mass media, has declined dramatically. Communication is directed less at acquiring new customers; instead, most companies are directing greater attention to their existing customers (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2022:255). Advertising spending reacts strongly to changes in the business cycle. Several factors are responsible for this, notes Hunneman (2020). First, advertising is often seen as a cost rather than an investment. Second, if fewer competitors engage in advertising, firms believe that lower advertising budgets may suffice because one can obtain the same share of voice with less expenditure. Another reason may be the low commitment and flexibility in advertising contracts. Focus in the South African banking sector also shifted to defending and protecting existing customers and ensuring they were serviced as best as possible.

5) Influence and impact of technology

During the Covid-19 pandemic, technology played multiple parts in the way organisations served customers, how their employees interacted and how marketing designed and executed campaigns. Some of the measures were related to hard lockdown and physical distancing and others provided an evolutionary technological advancement, which will continue to serve those who adopt it.

With regard to banking in South Africa, the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the rate at which businesses and consumers adopted technology for transactions, particularly for payments, with many customers preferring to transact with card over cash while tap-and-go transactions increasing significantly (SARB, 2022:36). This also accelerated the trial and speedy acceptance of virtual cards which was useful since a physical card did not need to change hands and increase the risk of contracting the virus. Technology is driving significant change in the operational landscape of the financial services industry (SARB, 2022:45). The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the operating models of financial institutions, notably with an accelerated increase in the adoption of technology to provide products and services. A positive consequence has been the accelerated adoption of technology and digital financial services among consumers (SARB, 2022:46), something banks' marketing leadership has been driving for years. This was thus a welcome outcome, albeit under unfortunate circumstances. The system leveraged technology acquired prior to the pandemic to facilitate secure and reliable remote working models (SARB, 2022:46), resulting in very limited if any disruption in the work done by marketing leaders or their key internal stakeholders. If anything, it may have presented the opportunity to have quick discussions, without physically having to track someone down. On the other hand, it impeded the possibility of impromptu "water cooler" conversations.

In relation to marketing communications and promotions globally, this specific crisis period demanded the use of different advertising media: less outdoor advertising, more online, and possibly more television and radio advertising. American Marketing Association (AMA) chapter leaders believe that e-mails are more effective than messages on social media. Recent problems with Facebook, Twitter and YouTube support these sentiments. Personal approaches focused on 'how can we help you' give insight into the challenges faced by customers and offer opportunities to help them. However, 'we are here for you' messages are only effective if they are authentic and are followed up. This not only affects marketing communication. It requires businesses to be fully aligned with the customer-centric paradigm, which is not as yet the case for many businesses (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2020:258).

Furthermore, the digitalisation of processes has led companies to adapt to new market contexts, and on the other to integrate traditional communication and sales channels with new digital channels, according to Fortuna, Riso and Musso (2021:143). Digital and social media marketing strategies, including campaign development, implementation, measurement and results and an immersive in-store experience offered to customers were predicted to increase purchases within physical store locations once social distancing directives for Covid-19 were fully lifted and business returned to normal. Therefore, retailers should develop new strategies and plans to increase sales volume and create strong relationships with online customers by providing trustworthiness and security in buying practices (Fortuna *et al.*, 2021:145).

In summary, practical applications related to recent literature on marketing leadership included a proposed application of advantages of marketing management to the suggested broadening of the role of marketing leadership to include directing their key internal stakeholders' alignment to customer centricity. Marketing leadership in the time of Covid-19 were challenged to rise to the challenges and opportunities and needed to work closely with their stakeholders to ensure a swift and appropriate response to customers' needs. Organisations were advised to further calibrate their purpose, products, (omni)-channels, advertising to target customers and use of technology in the face of the pandemic. The section below explores the gaps and emerging realities related to recent literature on customer centricity.

3.2.8 Section conclusion

During the literature review phase, scholarly literature was reviewed to better understand the schools of thought on the role of marketing leadership, with specific focus on the potential broadening of the role of marketing leadership to include directing alignment of key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity. The section includes a summary defining the marketing leadership phenomenon, based on a range of sources, the evolution of the phenomenon, potential benefits and challenges, measures of success, practical applications, as well as limitations and delineations. For some time, scholars including Moorman, van Heerde, Moreau and Palmatier (2019); Rant (2017); Varadarajan (2017); Kumar (2015); Brunswick (2014); Kumar (2011); Kotler

(2010) and Varadarajan (2010) debated the strategic role of marketing leadership, with some (Moorman, 2019; Varadarajan, 2010) fearing that marketers' influence and impact are dwindling among strategic decision makers, despite noteworthy research on marketing representation in top management teams (Whitler, Krause & Lehmann, 2018:86). The need to expand the role of marketing leadership is expressed by Moorman (2019); Rant and Cerne (2017); Brunswick (2014); and Ismail (2014).

In seeking to succeed at the challenge of steering an organisation to become more customer centric, members of the marketing leadership community in an organisation need to rally their key internal stakeholders on their journey to improved alignment. The next section addresses the alignment of key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity.

3.3 Key internal stakeholder alignment

3.3.1 Introduction

This section builds on the discussions in the previous section related to the potential future role of marketing leaders in directing key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity. The discussion includes a review aimed at defining the phenomenon and the evolution thereof. The importance of stakeholder alignment as stated by Burger and Pelsler (2018:145); O'Keeffe *et al.* (2016:422); Coetzee (2014) and Van Riel (2011), as well as the potential benefits and challenges associated with concepts such as collaboration (Zhelyazkov, 2018), the different thought worlds in different disciplines and the challenge of finding shared vocabulary between different stakeholders (Whitler, 2014) is discussed. The quest for a "Symphonic C-Suite" where all stakeholders perform in harmony and unity (Saha & Katha, 2018), "silo-busting" (Gulati & Ranjay, 2007), coordination (Brønn & Brønn, 2017; Halevy, Halali & Zlatev, 2019), cooperation (Stereov, 2017; Layton, 2011), employee engagement (MacGillavry & Sinyan, 2016), agility (Caballero, Moreno & Seffah, 2014) will be reviewed, followed by measures, applications and current practices, as well as limitations and delineations. An updated summary to define the *stakeholder* phenomenon is discussed in the section below.

3.3.2 Key stakeholders

Discussions of key internal stakeholders found in literature can vary and like earlier sections, the phenomenon will be discussed to build an understanding of the term for the purpose of taking the discussion forward based on a shared understanding in the organisation of key internal stakeholders to marketing leadership. Table 3.3 below provides a list to aid understanding of stakeholders as a phenomenon in chronological date order.

Table 3.3 Stakeholders as a phenomenon

Author and year	Stakeholders
Freeman (1984:277)	Any group or individual that can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives.
Phillips (1999:33)	Having something at <i>risk</i> on the organisation, as derived from Clarkson's risk-based stakeholder model (Phillips 1999:33) is organisation-centred and based on an implicit normative consequentialist structure of avoiding risk and maximising profit.
Burger and Pelsler (2018: 145); Mitchell <i>et al.</i> (2016); Carroll & Buchholtz (2012)	Possession or attributed possession of one or more of the following attributes: the stakeholder's <i>power</i> to influence the organisation; the <i>legitimacy</i> of the stakeholder's relationship with the organisation; and the <i>urgency</i> of the stakeholder's claim on the organisation.
Lyngso (2017:38)	A key stakeholder is someone with <i>power, knowledge, experience</i> and <i>competence</i> within the context of the strategic initiative that should be involved in the initiative to make the initiative successful.
Schwermer, Barz and	Stakeholders are members of a particular group that hold a personal stake. The increase of the <i>personal stake</i> of these

Zablotski (2020:24/25).	members will lead to an increase of their participation in regulatory processes. A group of people having a stake and <i>contributing</i> towards a knowledge base. Any group or individual who can affect, or is <i>affected</i> by, the <i>achievement</i> of the organisation's objectives.
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Descriptions of stakeholders includes references from 1984 to 2020, from Freeman, Phillips, Burger and Pelsler and more. Some descriptions are criticised as being too broad; it allows the inclusion of nearly everyone as a stakeholder (Schwermer, Barz & Zablotski, 2020:24/25). An attempt to provide an updated summary to help define stakeholders will include a reference to an individual or group who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's goals. They can carry some risk as they hold a personal stake, but also have power, knowledge, experience, and a competence in the context of a strategic initiative, as well as a legitimate relationship with the organisation and urgency in reaching goals. A proposed definition for *stakeholders* based on the above could be: "An individual or group who have the power, responsibility, knowledge, experience, legitimacy, and competence to act in the best interest of the organisation, whether by managing risk or optimising profit, for example, while carrying a personal stake in the outcomes influenced". With this defining summary in mind, the section below explains the evolution of stakeholder alignment.

3.3.3 Evolution of internal stakeholder alignment

A report by Deloitte (2018:2) stated that organisations are no longer measured based only on traditional metrics such as financial performance, or the quality of their products or services. Organisations today are increasingly judged based on their relationships with their stakeholders, including their employees, their customers and their communities, as well as their impact on society, transforming them from *business* enterprises into more *socially* oriented enterprises. On alignment, Islam, Furuoka, and Idris (2020) identify *strategic* alignment as one of the main characteristics of competitive advantage. Figure 3.2 below shows the dynamic evolution from a more siloed to a more symphonic operating model.

Level of external focus	Ecosystem External Focus	Increased engagement with external actors	Social enterprise
	Enterprise Internal Focus	Traditional organisation	Increased collaboration and internal integration
		Functional: Siloed operating model	Symphonic: "Network of Teams" operating model
		Level of collaboration and internal agility	

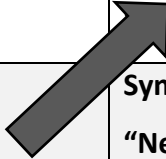


Figure 3.2 Evolution from traditional organisation to modern social enterprise

Source: Deloitte (2018:3).

Figure 3.2 above depicts the evolution from traditional organisations, where the enterprise or organisation is more internally focussed and operating models are more siloed, to more modern social enterprises, where the organisation is more focussed on the external ecosystem and teams operate in networks in a more symphonic, collaborative, agile and aligned manner. Techniques to ensure continued alignment (to customer centricity, as a practical application to the primary research case study), according to Canhoto and Wei (2021), Malik *et al.* (2021), Moggi and Dameri (2020), Velter *et al.* (2020:4) and Lyngso (2017) include the following:

- 1) Careful selection of people to become key stakeholders in the strategic initiative (Lyngso, 2017:37). Moggi and Dameri (2020:2831/2) state that collaboration between several actors is pivotal in increasing the chances of success. Some consider competing forces and value frames as vital ingredients for successful multi-stakeholder collaboration and innovation (Velter *et al.*, 2020:4).
- 2) Establishment of the teams of people and the roles and responsibilities of the people in the teams (Lyngso, 2017:37). Change processes (in the instance of the primary research, becoming more customer centric) should not be imposed on the employees, but should rather be done with mutual collaboration of all organisational stakeholders (Malik *et al.*, 2021:54).

- 3) Definition of the roles and responsibilities of the teams to perform the tasks required during the lifecycle of the strategic initiative (Lyngso, 2017:37).
- 4) Establishment of the physical and technological environment within which the chosen people can act and communicate in an optimal way (Lyngso, 2017:37).
- 5) Establishment of standards to be used for processes, documentation and deliverables to manage the quality of work, deliverables and final solution delivered by the teams (Lyngso, 2017:37).
- 6) Stakeholder collaboration facilitated by the nature of necessity in turbulent times (such as a global pandemic) and those shared goals contributing to the success of collaboration (Canhoto & Wei, 2021:3).

Lyngso, (2017:38) suggests that some impetus will be provided by getting the key-stakeholders together and giving them no excuse for failure to define the scope of the strategic initiative. Team building is a way to generate synergy; that is, the teams are organised in such a way that the performance of any team is higher than the performance measured as the sum of the team members' individual performances (Lyngso, 2017:37).

In its evolution, according to Langrafe, Barakat, Stocker and Boaventura (2020:299), stakeholder theory has pointed out different questions for the strategic management of organisations such as how to identify and prioritise stakeholders, how to understand their interests and demands, how to balance the relationships among various stakeholders and how to engage stakeholders in organisational activities. Stakeholders can be classified into the following two categories: internal and external. The internal stakeholders are those who act within the organisation such as owners and employees. The external stakeholders are those who interact directly with the organisation such as customers and suppliers.

The 2020 CMO Survey (which aims to collect and disseminate the opinions of top marketers to help predict the future of markets, track marketing excellence, and improve the value of marketing in organisations and society surveying over 2600 respondents at Marketing Vice-President (VP) level or above in United States (US)-based for-profit companies), states that having stakeholders aligned has significantly grown in

importance, as depicted in Figure 3.3 below. The importance of having all stakeholders aligned increased by 10% from 20.8% to 30.8% between February 2018 and February 2020.

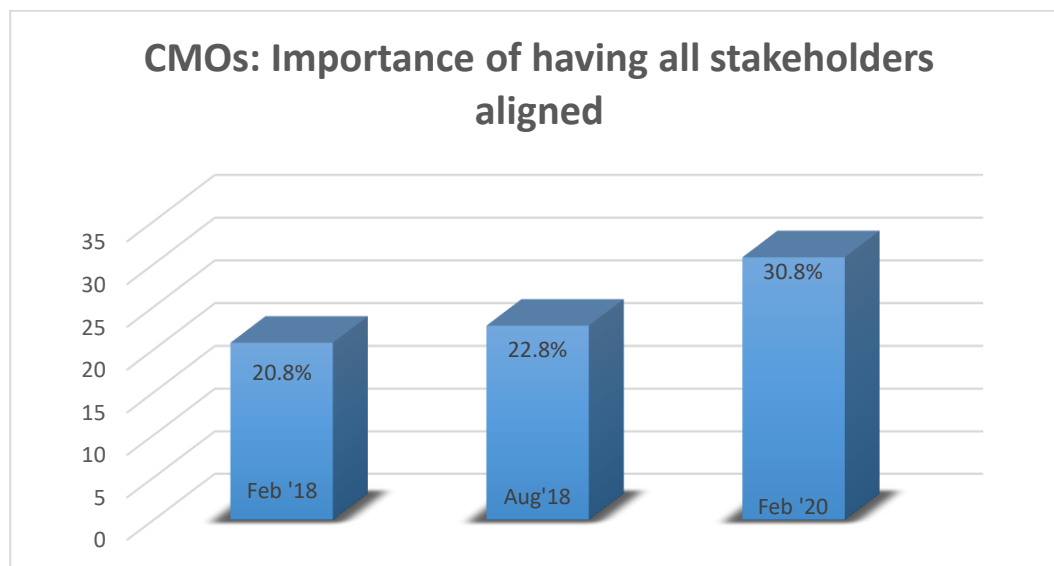


Fig 3.3 CMOs indicating importance of having all stakeholders aligned

Source: CMO Survey 2020:19

The importance of stakeholder alignment has grown by a third (22.8% to 30.8%) in 18 months (August 2018 to February 2020), as depicted in Figure 3.3 above.

In terms of alignment, while van Riel (2011) mainly applies to public relations and reputation management, the principles and processes to create alignment could potentially be applied to other related disciplines, including marketing leadership, where it can have a significant and positive impact, especially in creating organisational alignment among key internal stakeholders, with the result of aligning key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity. Coetzee (2014:999) states that: "Aligning the organisation, be that through product- and service-related processes or empowering contact-personnel, to identify and address the needs of clients is therefore crucially important when striving to be client-centric".

Organisational structure can influence marketing capability and influence the agility of the organisation, as the strategies are formulated closer to the market (Eriksson *et al.*, 2020:13). The challenges faced by marketing leadership were highlighted by the global

Covid-19 pandemic, with some analysts calling for a fundamental rethinking of marketing models. In response, scholarly research has advanced the need for new and flexible organisational models and recognised that marketing needs to be “*agile*”. Marketing agility (MA) is, in fact, viewed as a key priority for achieving marketing excellence, according to Kalaiganam *et al.* (2021:36). The potential benefits of stakeholder alignment are discussed in the section below.

3.3.4 Potential benefits of stakeholder alignment

The potential benefits of stakeholder alignment include improved collaboration, cooperation and coordination despite rapid change and increasing complexity, the opportunity to conduct a symphonic C-Suite and the advantage of shared values and resources.

3.3.4.1 Collaborating, cooperating, and coordinating despite change and complexity

According to a Global Human Capital Trends report published by Deloitte (2018:18), the world has changed significantly. While this report was published before the outbreak of the global Covid-19 pandemic, it cited frequent marketplace disruptions, a global economy, and the accelerating rate of technological change, meaning that the problems companies face is more difficult, more complex, and more multidimensional than before. More and more problems are of the ‘wicked’ variety - problems with multiple root causes and drivers that cannot be effectively solved by one party working alone. Conducting a *symphonic C-Suite* and executive leadership team is discussed in more detail in section 3.3.4.2 below.

3.3.4.2 Conducting a symphonic C-Suite (and executive leadership team)

A new leadership model is required, called a symphonic C-Suite. It is the next stage in the evolution of what customer centricity. It helps leaders understand, manage and respond to the complex issues that organisations face, enabling them to tap opportunities, manage risks, and build relationships with internal and external stakeholders. It requires CEOs to break down functional hierarchies and build a more networked team-based organisation as a key trend. The report by Deloitte (2018) suggests that behaving as a social enterprise and managing the external environment’s

macro trends effectively demands an unprecedented level of cross-functional vision, connectivity, and collaboration from C-Suite leaders. Therefore, the top executives of organisations work together as a team, while simultaneously leading their own functional teams, all in harmony.

In a symphonic model, C-Suite members not only lead their own area of responsibility, but also collaborate with other functional leaders, work in teams that affect the enterprise's strategic direction, and influence and inspire networks of teams throughout the organisation (Deloitte, 2018). The tension between competition and cooperation is among the most intriguing challenges confronting strategic management. Ambitious managers want the entire organisation to succeed but also want to see themselves promoted ahead of others (Freeman *et al.*, 2021:1760). In the organisation within which the primary research was conducted, the term "co-opetition" is sometimes used to describe this dichotomy.

Globally, a striking 73 percent of respondents said that their C-Suite leaders rarely, if ever, work together on projects and strategic initiatives. Senior leaders need to move from their silos and work with each other more. To navigate today's constantly changing business environment and address cross-disciplinary challenges, a company's top leaders must act as one (Deloitte, 2018). Work is becoming increasingly complex, specialised and interdependent, requiring coordination across roles, disciplines, organisations and sectors to achieve desired performance outcomes. Developed in the early 1990s from an in-depth field study of flight departures in the airline industry, relational coordination theory proposes that relationships characterised by shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect tend to support frequent, timely, accurate, problem-solving communication and vice versa, enabling stakeholders to effectively coordinate their work (Bolton, Logan & Gittell, 2021:2).

The need for increasingly cross-functional collaboration will drive continued evolution in the C-Suite, as well as in the leadership development pipelines that feed it, and therefore the symphonic C-Suite is proving to be one of the most powerful and urgent trends for organisations worldwide with the likelihood of becoming the most effective way to tackle the complex issues that businesses encounter (Deloitte, 2018).

3.3.4.3 Shared values and resources

Proponents of stakeholder theory appealed to normative claims and the role of cooperation and shared values in improving performance (Freeman, Dmytiryev & Phillips, 2021:1759). Challenging the dogma of fiduciary duty to shareholders and emphasising cooperation and moral norms rather than competition were, for the most part, too radical for mainstream strategic management two decades ago. Stakeholder theory, did, however, find traction with scholars in the field of business, ethics, and society. Considerations related to co-operation include:

- 1) That results were made possible using tools that facilitated *cooperation* among stakeholders who shared their resources and were united by sharing the same values (Moggi & Dameri, 2020:2839). This contrasts with the views of Velter *et al.* (2020:4), mentioned in Section 3.3.3 above.
- 2) Using the resources which fall under the area's control to reward *cooperative* behaviour and punish competitive behaviour can transform interactions and facilitate win-win-win outcomes for all parties involved.
- 3) Shared resources and shared values can contribute to successful co-operation, with rewards for all involved. This is also in contrast to the views of Velter *et al.* (2020:4) mentioned earlier in Section 3.3.3.

In conclusion to this sub-section, the potential benefits associated with alignment of stakeholders include interdepartmental co-ordination (Wong, Boh, Wu 2021; Halevy, Halali & Zlatev, 2019), harmonising the different thought worlds in different disciplines and finding shared vocabulary between different stakeholders (Kalaiganam, Tuli, Kushwaha, Lee & Gal, 2021). Collaboration (Malik *et al.*, 2021; Moggi & Dameri, 2020; Velter *et al.* 2020), cooperation (Moggi & Dameri, 2020; Sterev, 2017; Layton, 2011), employee engagement (Colleoni *et al.*, 2021); (MacGillavry & Sinyan, 2016) and agility (Kalaiganam *et al.*, 2021; Caballero, Moreno & Seffah, 2014) are potential benefits that can be expected. The key potential benefits of stakeholder alignment therefore include improved interdepartmental co-ordination, finding a shared vocabulary between different disciplines and thought worlds, as well as better collaboration, cooperation, employee engagement, and agility. The next section examines the potential challenges that may be encountered in a drive to increased stakeholder alignment.

3.3.5 Potential challenges of stakeholder alignment

In this section, potential challenges to expect on the journey towards increased stakeholder alignment are discussed. Ongoing alignment of purpose in practice, navigating different thought worlds, breaking down silo structures, addressing the collaboration challenge, trading off conflicting objectives, curbing the expense of alignment, and creating a shared understanding of value creation beyond self-interest are some of the challenges that may present themselves. These challenges are discussed in more detail in the section below.

3.3.5.1 Ongoing alignment of purpose in practice

Although organisations are cognitively open, interacting with their environment often, they need to be operationally closed to allow constant alignment of purpose (Gunaratne, 2008). Alignment is required as a counter to randomness. Organisations are complex social systems that require ongoing adaptation (alignment and re-alignment) to an ever-changing environment. Adaptation will only take place if interdependence is perceived, according to Burger and Pelser (2018:143). According to Avison *et al.* (2004) there is an ongoing debate regarding the nature of organisational alignment. The debate explores why it is required, how organisations can improve alignment, and how it should be researched. Additionally, they found that although alignment is a top-management concern, no comprehensive model of the construct is used commonly. While agreement on conceptualising alignment and its research foundation is limited, literature on the subject is critical to how organisations carry out alignment in practice (Avison *et al.*, 2004). Corsaro and Snehota (2011) commented that the concepts of alignment and misalignment remain vague as numerous gaps exist in the literature and scholars hold different opinions about the meaning and consequences of alignment.

Various authors have argued the importance of the intuitive relationship between organisational alignment and organisational performance (Baker *et al.*, 2011; Roca-Puig & Bou-Llusar, 2006; Tarigan, 2005; Priem, 1994; Powell, 1992). Discussing organisational strategy, Peters (2014) referred to alignment as fit and posited that organisations perform better when they harmonise the three “hard S’s” of strategy, structure, and

systems, and four “soft S’s” of skills, staff, style, and shared values. Burger and Pelzer (2018:143-155) elaborate somewhat on the hard S’s of strategy, structure, and systems by adding the following:

- 1) *Strategy*: Organisational alignment takes place through ongoing formal and informal agreement on organisational objectives and goals, stakeholder priorities, and strategy execution among internal roleplayers.
- 2) *Structure*: As organisations increase their focus on a broader scope of stakeholders, thereby adding more interconnected roleplayers, organisational structure complexity may increase to create more order. The authors warn against structures become too complex which may affect flexibility, openness, and inclusivity towards stakeholders.
- 3) *Systems*: Organisations are complex social systems that require ongoing adaptation (alignment and re-alignment) to an ever-changing environment. Adaptation will only take place if interdependence is perceived.

Strategic management literature often endorses the notion that an organisation’s strategy needs to address both external and internal environmental realities, according to Meier *et al.* (2010). Regarding the alignment of internal organisational roleplayers, Joshi *et al.* (2003) theorised the requirement for “strategic consensus” or “alignment” of priorities throughout an organisation, for success (Burger & Pelser, 2018:145-146).

3.3.5.2 Navigating different thought worlds and breaking down silo structures

In the case study on marketing leadership in a high-tech corporation by Zubaly (2020:442), reference is made to dis-synergies between the two schools of thought emphasising how technology is the foundation for the company, but marketing is the untapped potential. In the case of the primary research, the key internal stakeholders can be equated to the technical specialists in the case study by Zubaly (2020) mentioned earlier. Most of the stakeholders, with professional training in the fields of accounting, actuarial sciences, or engineering, operate in thought worlds that are different to those of professionals trained in marketing (Whitler, 2014:90).

Building relationships challenges business leaders to listen closely to stakeholders, act transparently with information, break down silos to enhance collaboration, and build trust, credibility, and consistency through their actions. This is not a matter of altruism: doing so is critical to maintaining an organisation's reputation; to attracting, retaining, and engaging critical workers; and to cultivating loyalty among customers (Deloitte, 2018:2).

Expanding on Follett's (1924; 1949) seminal work on coordination, the theory contends that cross-cutting structures can strengthen relational coordination by reducing siloed thinking and increasing stakeholder attention to the whole. The theory further contends that strong networks of relational coordination facilitate the achievement of desired outcomes, especially when work is highly interdependent, uncertain, or time sensitive (Bolton *et al.*, 2021:2). The bank in which the case study is set makes use of a multi-dimensional matrix structure to attempt to prevent silo operations. Customer segments, product manufacturers, channels, and other enablers such as Finance or Legal, Risk and Compliance departments, work across structures daily.

3.3.5.3 Addressing the collaboration challenge

According to Marketing Charts.com (2019), top-performing CMOs understand that they must work closely with others in the C-Suite to impact business priorities and strategic issues. However, a study by Deloitte which focused on how C-Suite executives view the contributions of CMOs revealed that only 17% of others in the C-Suite say they have collaborated with CMOs in the previous year. Deloitte's survey of 575 Fortune 500 executives across the C-Suite indicated that only CEOs collaborated less (12%) with other members within the C-Suite than CMOs. While CMOs do not rate themselves particularly highly in initiating collaborative efforts, others within the C-Suite, CEOs, and COOs, in particular hold alternative views. CFOs have a poor view of CMOs' collaboration efforts, with these executives having the lowest opinion of all the C-Suite members. The discord between CMOs and CFOs is not new and continues into the present, with a recent study from Gartner (2022) identifying Finance as marketing's top detractor.

Few decision-makers in marketing and finance roles say that these two departments plan and work collaboratively towards shared goals, according to a Neustar-

commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting. The report indicates that process (chain of command, rules, and regulations), people and technology are all hindering Marketing and Finance from making more collaborative decisions (MarketingCharts.com, 2019).

Among the 190 decision-makers surveyed (104 in Finance roles and 86 in Marketing roles), a majority noted that activities such as making more joint decisions on marketing spend and budgets (55%) and gaining a better understanding of one another's organisations, goals and objectives (53%) would be effective in getting the departments to work together. Around half also said that viewing marketing as a growth centre rather than a cost centre would be effective. This has been one of the biggest shifts in perception being driven by CMOs as reflected in recent research. A more in-depth understanding of the other department's role (breaking down siloes) seems to be critical to better relationships. Some 54% of respondents consider it a challenge to these departments' ability to collaborate that marketing lacks a fundamental understanding of finance's processes, tasks and objectives. Likewise, 61% consider it a challenge that finance lacks a fundamental understanding of marketing's processes, tasks and objectives (Marketing Charts.com, 2019).

Despite well-documented evidence of a history of collaboration on trust and commitment between collaboration parties, actors participating in collaborations aim to achieve a business objective rather than just feel comfortable with one another. As such, competence-based trust, believing that the collaborator has the capability to deliver what is expected, is extremely important in such settings and is constantly assessed during the interaction (Zhelyazkov, 2018:214).

3.3.5.4 Trading off against conflicting objectives and curbing the expense of alignment

The primary research explored the importance of trade-offs given the potential for conflicting key stakeholder objectives derailing the quest for customer centricity. This challenge calls for responsible and mature leadership and is not only observed in financial services organisations. Although not unique in this regard, mining organisations have the difficult task of balancing the needs of multiple stakeholders.

Each stakeholder group has its own unique objectives, often *conflicting* with that of others (Burger & Pelsler, 2018; Deloitte, 2013).

Kesler and Kates (2017:9) suggest that while alignment is a worthy goal, trying to align all parts of a complex organisation around a given strategy in a fast-moving world may be almost impossible. The collaboration and internal focus needed to gain that alignment across the enterprise is too expensive and time consuming. It is not a goal worth pursuing; rather focus on alignment efforts on the high-risk and high-value nodes and connection points where the various dimensions of the organisation come together. According to Lee, Sridhar and Palmatier (2015:1-2) customer alignment does not work for everyone and even when it does work, a company can go through years of poor performance before the benefits materialise.

3.3.5.5 Creating a shared understanding of value co-creation, beyond self-interest

Burnes (2009) viewed an organisation as a system of cooperating human activities with the objective of creating and exchanging utilities, while Freeman *et al.* (2007) described organisations as complex open systems that exist to create and trade value to the benefit of a variety of constituencies or stakeholders whereas Grant (2011) argued that an organisation could be a coalition of interest groups operating for the benefit of multiple constituencies. Value, however, has different and often conflicting meaning not only in between all the organisation's external constituencies, but also internally between roleplayers (Grant, 2011). At the heart of a discussion on value creation is self-interest. Hughes (2010) reasoned that creating and trading value in an efficient and effective manner must be the goal of organisations to be successful within a complex economy (Burger & Pelsler, 2018:144).

Stakeholders may have different and conflicting objectives and material interests and they may be characterised by fundamental power imbalances (Velter *et al.*, 2020:2). "The equilibrium between the stakeholders' diverse interests was precarious. This was because stakeholders first support their own interests, which are not always aligned with those of the ecosystem; however, even if they are not, they can still strive to create common values", according to a study by Moggi and Dameri (2020:2838). Interactions must suit the needs and interests of interdependent parties through multiple value

creation, delivery, and capture. This makes it pertinent to explore partners' divergent interests, resources, motives, and missions (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a) and to fuse value frames to co-create value (Velter *et al.*, 2020:4&10).

In summary, challenges including ongoing alignment, conflicting objectives, lack of shared understanding of value creation beyond self-interest, different thought worlds and silo structures. Addressing the above challenges may increase the chances of successful key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity. The next section explores the measurement or assessment criteria associated with stakeholder alignment.

3.3.6 Measuring key internal stakeholder alignment

Kesler and Kates (2017:10) state the importance of organisational alignment to core principles, rather than broad generalities. Strongly aligned companies *track* the degrees of employee alignment at overall levels systematically, increasing understanding about the drivers that work well and the drivers that need further improvement, according to Van Riel (2008:359). Alignment is essential and must be managed properly. This implies the necessity of having the ability to systematically track which actions work, along with what activities have not yet resulted in behavioural shifts among key internal audiences. A measurement tool should provide managers with an early warning system regarding the degree of supportive behaviour for a new strategy, argues Van Riel (2008:355).

It is important to obtain alignment on the core principles that will guide many initiatives. Clearly defined operating or design principles will set up parameters for empowered teams to drive change quickly, while staying aligned with the growth strategies and the core operating model of the company, as explained by Howell (2017:10). The involvement of stakeholders in decision-making processes can be used to *assess* the level of alignment between their interests and the objectives of the organisation (Langrafe *et al.* 2020:309). Stakeholder demands and changes over time make it important for organisations to *assess* the ideas and concerns of stakeholders through interaction and dialogue. A greater exchange of information with stakeholders enables a better understanding of interests and preferences (Langrafe *et al.*, 2020:301).

3.3.6.1 Stakeholder alignment in the time of Covid-19 and beyond

Stakeholder alignment in the time of Covid-19 will be discussed in more detail in the section below. Figure 3.4 below depicts a network analysis showing a dynamically changing communication pattern among agencies and stakeholders, during the early weeks of the Covid-19 pandemic.

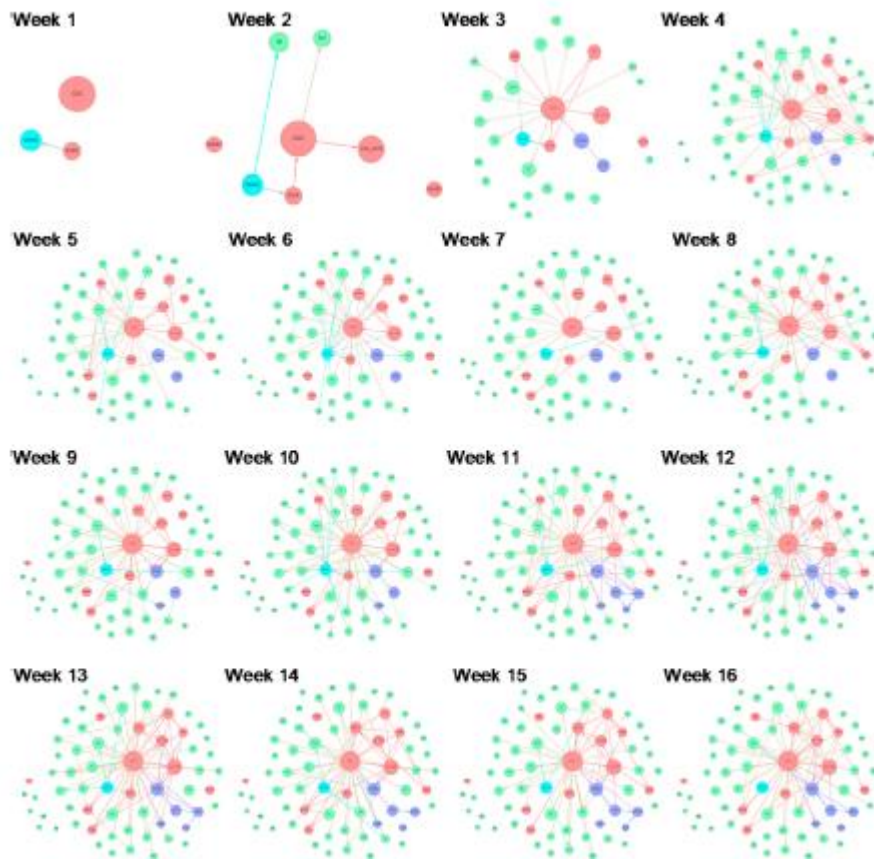


Figure 3.4 Network dynamic change over the weeks from January 6 to April 26, 2020.

Source: Wang, Hao & Platt 2021:11

Figure 3.4 shows the network analysis depicting a dynamically changing communication pattern among agencies and stakeholders with an increased level of connectivity and coordination during the study period (early-stage response). Disentangling the interactive influences of risk communication actors is instrumental in furthering information and education about the communication science of virus transmission and prevention on social media (Wang *et al.*, 2021:11). The speed at which stakeholder networks can form, strengthen and grow is evident, with the understanding that it

relates to the severe circumstances of a global pandemic. Figure 3.5 below presents a conceptual model for collaborative strategy development.

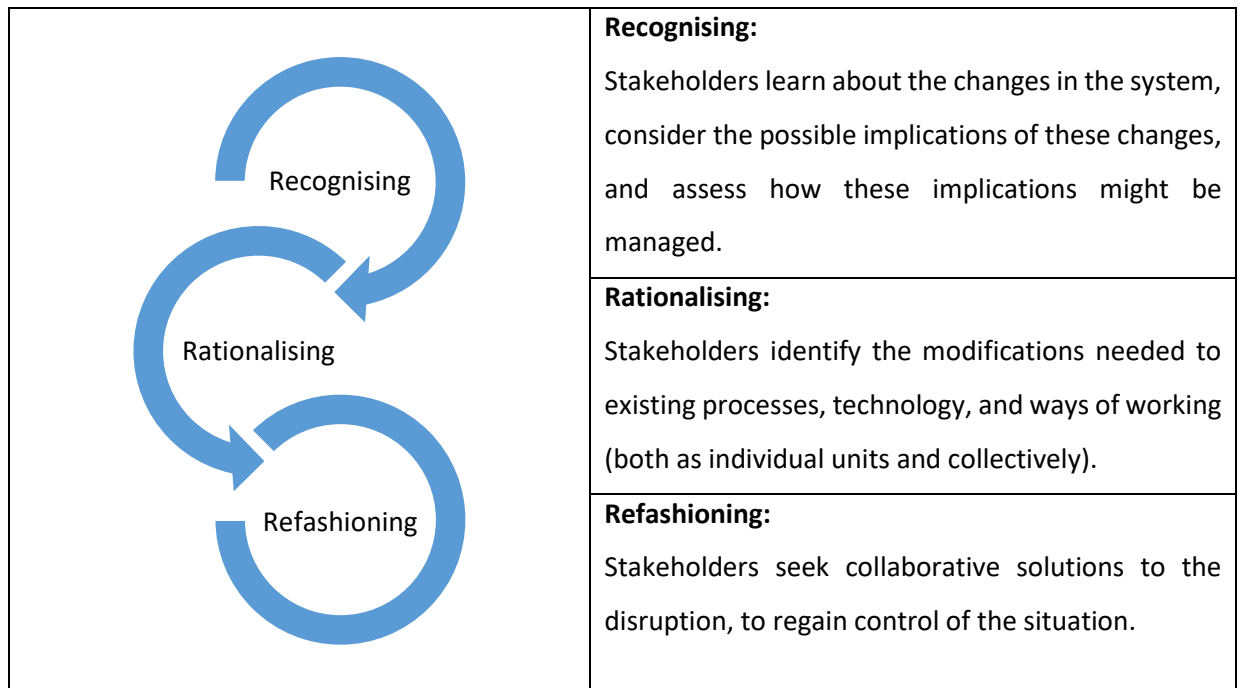


Figure 3.5 Conceptual model: collaborative strategy development

Source: Canhoto and Wei (2021:3).

Figure 3.5 outlines a process of recognising challenges, rationalising the changes needed and refashioning ways of working together in the context of the highly impacted hospitality industry, in the early days of facing the global Covid-19 pandemic (Canhoto & Wei, 2021:3). The highly relatable model can be applied to a range of industries and organisations, given its relative simplicity and resonance, and can serve as a simple guide to give individuals and teams dealing with strategic evolution a form of anchor to understand in which phase (recognising, rationalising, or refashioning) of collaborative strategy development they are and how to navigate it and regain control.

3.3.7 Section conclusion

Given the importance of internal stakeholder alignment in the face of fast-paced change and the importance of customer centricity, the sub-sections above covered topics on key internal stakeholder alignment. These include defining the phenomena under discussion, the evolution or growing importance and potential benefits and challenges

of stakeholder alignment, measures of success, the impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic on stakeholders, practical applications, declaration of limitations and delineations.

3.4 Customer centricity

3.4.1 Introduction

This section on customer centricity presents a summary on defining the phenomenon based on literature reviewed, explore the evolution of customer centricity over several decades, consider the potential benefits and challenges associated with the phenomenon, practical applications, limitations, and delineations related to customer centricity, as well as the impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic on the evolution of the phenomenon.

3.4.2 Understanding and conceptualising customer centricity: review and discussion

The sub-section below provides background on customer centricity is, although no single description captures the full essence, reviewing definitions and providing an updated attempt at defining the phenomenon in order to contribute to the discourse. Table 3.4 below presents a list of descriptions of customer centricity by Habel *et al.*, (2020:27/8), Vojvodic and Hitz (2019:401) and other authors, spanning references from 1997 to 2020.

Table 3.4 Customer centricity as a phenomenon

Reference and year	Customer centricity
Treacy & Wiersema (1997)	Extreme personalisation: a solution designed specifically for the individual customer where this requires deep customer knowledge as well as insights into customers' business processes.

Day (2000) Vojvodic & Hitz (2019:7&401)	Integration of the diverse customer centric units (marketing, sales, service, product) or organisational matrix with roles and authority giving focus back-end units to a particular customer.
Sheth, Sisodia, & Sharma (2000:5).	Customer-centric marketing: Understanding and satisfying the needs, wants, and resources of individual consumers and customers rather than those of mass markets or market segments.
Bolton (2004:44)	Customer centric business processing: All business processes and all individuals are focused on identifying and meeting the needs of customers.
Jayachandran <i>et al.</i> (2005:13)	Customer centric management system: Consists of structural aspects that ensure that organisational actions are driven by customer needs and not by the internal concerns of functional areas.
Gupta & Zeithaml (2006); Venkatesan & Kumar (2004)	Measure the evolving nature of the customer-firm relationship over time. The basis of this recognition is an understanding of metrics, such as, inter alia, customer lifetime duration, customer lifetime value, customer lifetime profit and understanding of the drivers behind them.
Ramani & Kumar (2008); Shah <i>et al</i> (2006)	In the setting up of commercial plans the focus is on the individual customer oversight and interaction with that individual customer, as opposed to focus on information from the market.
Shah <i>et al</i> (2006)	Organisational restructuring, removing organisational silos or a complex array of disparate product centric systems. All decisions start with the customer and opportunities for advantage.
Liang & Tanniru (2006)	Customer centric information systems: An information system that can configure four major components – customers, process, technology, and product/service – to satisfy a customer need.

Cheng & Dogan (2008).	Customer centric marketing: Refers to the practice in which “marketers assess each customer individually and make a determination of whether to serve that customer directly or via a third-party”, and one that “focuses on the needs, wants, and resources of customers as the starting point of the planning process”.
Kumar, Venkatesan, & Reinartz (2008)	Customer focused sales campaigns: Reflects sales campaigns where salespeople coordinate their contact strategy across product categories, salespeople, and time to address customers’ underlying dynamically changing needs.
Burmann, Meurer & Kanitz (2011)	Customer centricity: Focusing on marketing activities and processes of the corporation on the customer.
Marsh (2010)	The authority that oversees customer centric initiative and is high on hierarchical level or of support roles.
Fader & Toms, (2012)	Choosing a prime set of customers and maximising their long-term financial value to the firm, with accent on identifying those customers who matter most and dedicating a disproportionate quantum of resources to them.
Fader & Toms (2012)	Focus on a snapshot of a longer sequence of time that does not end with buying products, long-term profits are gained from the most valuable customers who buy more often and helps to build a passionate, loyal customer base.
Ambaram (2013:13).	Customer centricity is a strategy applied by an organisation using technology to collect information on customers throughout the organisation and using intelligence about the customers to be able to understand the current and future needs of customers. The effective utilisation of customer knowledge ultimately facilitates a central trust commitment relationship between the customer and the organisation, and this can be regarded as achieving customer intimacy.

Frankenberger, Weiblen, & Gassman (2013)	Solution customer centricity: Degree to which a company focuses on customers in the joint delivery of solutions.
Moorman & Palvolgyi (2013)	Profound understanding of customers' processes to guide them away from lower-level feature development or to take control and change interactions and processes of the customers, provisioning of complete solution.
Lamberti (2013:596).	Customer centric firms: Manifests a continuous interaction with customers aimed at generating intelligence and at understanding customers' explicit and hidden needs; a systematic involvement of customers in marketing and new product development decision making; strongly co-ordinating organisational structures, gathering and sharing information about them responsively and managing the interface all along the touch-points; and the presence of a supply chain co-ordination within the organisation, as well as an ability to face the customisation required by customers.
Coetzee (2014:999 & 1012)	To be customer centric, the organisation needs a customer centric vision, articulating a singular focus on the customer provides a <i>South African</i> perspective.
Bliss (2015)	Customer centricity that is proactive as opposed to 'customer focus' as efforts are often highly reactive.
Lee <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Customer centric structure: An organisational design that <i>aligns</i> each business unit with a distinct customer group.
Van den Hemel & Rademakers (2016:214)	Customer centricity is a business approach that places the value perception of the customer at the centre of attention and takes it as the starting point of all organisational activities.
Lee, Sridhar & Palmatier (2017)	Customer-aligned structural designs: Structures that seamlessly <i>align</i> their internal units with their external customers.

Womack & Jones (2017); Moorman & Palvolgyi (2013)	Firms should attempt to address the customers' demands methodically, instead of fulfilling just isolated aspects.
Fader & Toms, (2018:12).	Customer centricity: A strategy that aligns the development and delivery of a company's products and services with the current and future needs of its highest valued customers to maximise these customers' long-term financial value to the firm.
Crecelius <i>et al.</i> 2019	Firm's customer centric structure: Degree to which the firm's business units are <i>aligned</i> to distinct customer groups.
Latinovic & Sharmila (2019),	Customer centricity is putting your customer at the centre of a strategy. Customer centricity has long been considered the holy grail of retail marketing.
Habel (2020:27/8)	Perceived customer centricity: The degree to which a customer perceives a firm to put customers' interests at the centre of all its actions.
Osakwe (2020:1)	In theory, customer centricity is about understanding and satisfying the needs, wants, and resources of individuals rather than those of mass markets or segments. Practically, this means that because not all customers are created equal, they do not all deserve an equal share of the organisation's valuable time and resources.

Source: Adapted from Habel *et al.* (2020:27/8), Osakwe (2020:1), Vojvodic and Hitz (2019:401), with additional definitions added from other sources as indicated in the table.

When analysing the descriptions in Table 3.4 above, it is evident that, in essence, many definitions at least have the idea in common of customers being at the centre of organisations' thinking and actions, or expressed differently, customers' best interests must be placed first or ahead of organisational self-interest. A holistic view of the customer, a proactive approach, organisational and cross-functional alignment, and integration, as well as having clients' best interests at heart over their lifetime, rather than just over the immediate or short-term, are also observed.

Strategy development starts consistently at the customer and flows back to the organisation (as opposed to inside-out thinking that is, from the organisation to the customer). The aim is to create an optimal and distinctive fit between the value perception of the customer and products and the services offered. In this way, superior value is created for the customer and superior value is captured by the organisation. Interestingly and more nuanced than other definitions, Fader and Toms (2018:12) defined customer centricity as “a strategy that aligns the development and delivery of a company’s products and services with the current and future needs of its highest valued customers to maximise these customers’ long-term financial value to the firm”. Extracted from the definitions of customer centricity presented in Table 3.5, Habel *et al.* (2020:28) proposes a definition of perceived customer centricity as reflected in Table 3.5 below.

Table 3.5 Definition of *perceived* customer centricity

The degree to which a <u>customer perceives</u> a <u>firm</u> to put <u>customers’ interest</u> at the <u>centre of all its actions</u> .				
	Customer perception	Firm unit of analysis	Focus on customers’ interest	Active prioritisation of customers

Source: Habel *et al.* (2020:28); Osakwe (2020:1).

The analysis of discussions of customer centricity stretches more than two decades, which analysed entire organisations, marketing, sales, as well as information systems as units of analysis. The inclusion of a measure of customer centricity as *perceived* by customers provides a unique contribution to existing definitions, while a focus on customers’ interest seems to be covered in most definitions and the active prioritisation of the customer is a popular phrase in definitions. Although many definitions of customer centricity exist in literature (Fader & Toms, 2018; Lee, Sridhar & Palmatier, 2017; Coetzee, 2014; Lamberti, 2013), there is an expressed lack of a commonly agreed definition of customer centricity, as observed by Hodgson (2018) and Alter (2007:130).

The prominence of focussing on a set of prime customers and understanding their current and future, hidden and explicit needs is noted. Establishing a long-term mutually beneficial relationship between the organisation and these select customers is highlighted in the section reflecting on definitions from seminal sources, together with the notion of a disproportionate allocation of resources to these high-value customers. Internal to the organisation, the importance of gathering and sharing information and intelligence about their customers and how best to serve them, responsiveness to their needs, strong co-ordination and systemic customisation of value propositions and management of continuous interactions via interface along all touchpoints, are emphasised in the section reflecting on definitions from seminal sources above.

Without a common or shared understanding, it will continue to be difficult to evaluate whether an organisation may be perceived to be customer centric. The importance of commonly agreed definitions is highlighted by Hodgson (2018:207) who notes: “The social sciences are plagued with severe and unresolved problems of definition. Although there will always be some ambiguity and fuzziness, without workable definitions, science can make little progress”.

In conclusion, understanding customer centricity should include references to extreme personalisation to satisfy individual customer’s explicit and hidden needs and wants, based on deep customer insights and knowledge, driven by an authorised, strongly coordinated, integrated, silo-free, aligned, and responsive customer centric organisational matrix that places customers’ value perception at the centre of the organisation’s attention and activities. All business processes, management and information systems should be driven by customer need rather than internal functional concerns and should be measured in terms of customer lifetime duration, value, and profit as well as the evolving customer-organisation trust relationship, over time. A well-coordinated contact strategy addressing customers underlying dynamic needs, targeting a prime set of customers using a dedicated disproportionate number of resources to maximise long-term financial value to the firm, is required to create customer intimacy. Methodically and systematically approaching the opportunity over a longer sequence of time, looking at long-term profit gained from the most valuable customers who make up a passionate, loyal customer base, through joint deliver of

complete solutions, based on profound customer understanding, continuous interaction, and intelligence generation.

3.4.3 Evolution of customer centricity

The evolution of customer centricity includes the shift from product centricity to customer centricity, the increased interest in customer centricity over time and the broader geographical spread of recent interest, the importance of customer centric organisational culture, the role of customer value propositions in improving customer centricity and the role of marketing leadership in a modern customer centric organisation. Firstly, the shift from product centricity to customer centricity is discussed.

3.4.3.1 The shift from product centricity to customer centricity and rooting out product culture

Authors Colleoni *et al.* (2021) and Kotler *et al.* (2021) highlight the shift from a product centric to a customer centric orientation. During the last twenty years, the idea that developing strong relationships with customers remain a strategic source for corporate value creation has become widely accepted, suggesting a paradigm shift in marketing from a product orientation to a customer orientation (Colleoni *et al.*, 2021:3). Looking inward into the organisation, Lamberti (2013:594) states that the conceptualisation of customer centricity generally endorses the idea of customer centricity as the opposite of product centricity. Kotler *et al.* (2010) and Venkatesh (2008) also highlight the shift from a product to a customer centric orientation.

This shift is well documented in research related to service dominant (S-D logic) literature (Vargo, Koskela-Huotari & Vink, 2020; Vargo, 2018; Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Conceptual turns have elevated S-D logic from what might initially have been seen as a theoretical framework specifically applicable to marketing and marketing managers to a more general framework, applicable to a wider range of phenomena (Vargo, 2018:722). S-D logic is the identification, synthesis, and extension of an apparent coalescence in the ongoing development of marketing thought, as reflected in the title 'Evolving Toward a New Dominant Logic for Marketing' by Vargo and Lusch (2004), rather than a radically new idea. It is grounded on a foundation built

by many others, as has been its progress. This is due to the contributions of a growing community of scholars, both within and beyond marketing and other business disciplines (Vargo, 2018:721).

In S-D logic, the company co-creates the service logic with the client, so clients co-create value for themselves with the support of the company. The company hires marketing managers that know how to develop a consumer behaviour market analysis that aims at gauging sensory, emotional, communication behaviour of the customer, rather than only cognitive behaviours. Simply, the variable to analyse is no longer solely the customer (his/her purchase behaviour, needs or cognitive perceptions), but the interactions of the customer (his/her communication ecosystem, the quality of his/her relationships-communications, for example). This implies shifting the focus from how customers think to how customers get in contact with others with a human touch, as explained by Colleoni *et al.* (2021:8).

The path to customer centricity often involves substantial investment by the organisation to facilitate the transformation from product centric to customer centric business paradigms, explains Shah *et al.* (2006:118). There is also a shift from traditionally selling new product features to solving customer problems, notes Veldsman and Johnson (2016:387/9). The increased interest in customer centricity is discussed in the section below.

Despite companies trying to adopt customer centricity for more than 20 years, few have succeeded, based on the observation of Yohn (2018:1). For example, Fader and Toms (2018:97) highlighted five companies (Nordstrom, Apple, Starbucks, Costco and Walmart) that were often regarded as customer centric, but in their first book he pointed out why they failed (at the time) to meet the specific definition that he proposed. Barriers that add to the struggle include a lack of both systems and technology that segment and profile customers, as well as processes and operational capabilities to target them with personalised experiences and communications. Most common and concerning is the reported lack of customer-centric organisational culture, as product-focused or sales-driven culture remains. Challenges facing organisations

when implementing customer centricity are discussed in more detail in section 3.4.5, many of which also affect the organisation under investigation.

3.4.3.2 Increased interest in customer centricity over time and a wider geographical spread

Search platform Scopus (Elsevier, 2020), as well as authors, including Damázio (2020); Habel *et al.* (2020); Coetzee (2014) and Lamberti (2013) point out gaps in literature, as well as an increased demand for customer centricity related content. There is a lack of studies on customer centricity and new research is necessary to explore marketing strategies that allow organisations to enhance their capabilities in this area, according to Damázio (2020:1512). Yet, Habel *et al.* (2020:25) state the number of Google searches for the term “customer centricity” more than doubled from 2008 to 2018 (Google Trends, 2019) and several prestigious business schools included courses on customer centricity in their executive education programmes (Kellogg, 2019; Stanford, 2019). Despite the expressed limitations in shared definitions of customer centricity, from a recent surge in managers’ interest in customer centricity (Google Trends, 2019; Kellogg, 2019; Stanford, 2019), it is possible that the demand for more information is not being met in full. Based on the above, the southern hemisphere and specifically the African continent will now also benefit specifically from additional research that can contribute to the building of the body of knowledge based on scarce African perspectives, as evident in Figure 3.6 below, which shows that most publications on customer centricity originate from the northern hemisphere.

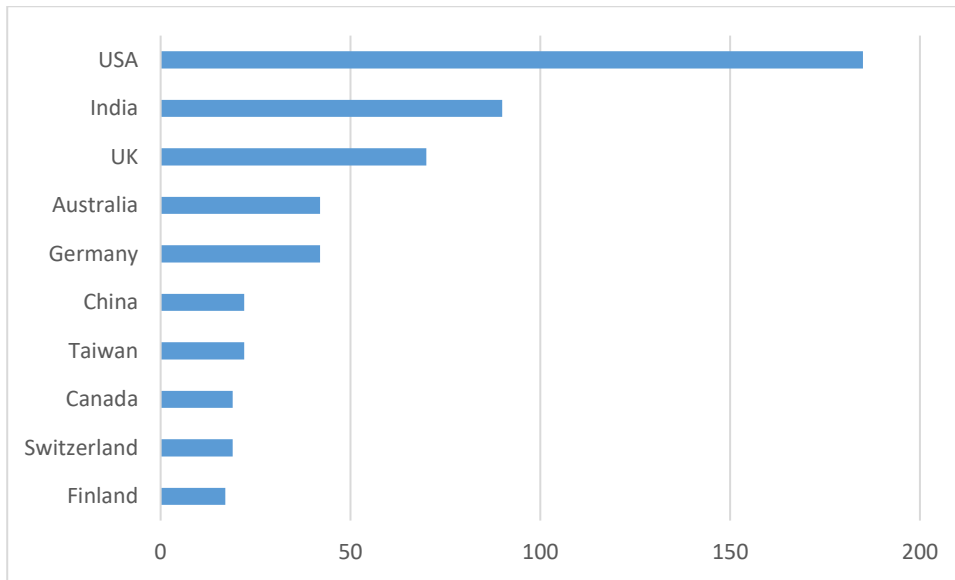


Figure 3.6 Volume of published articles on customer centrality by country

Source: Scopus (Elsevier). Analyse search results. Research conducted in May 2020.

Figure 3.7 below depicts the interest of South Africans doing google searches on the topic of customer centrality in the period mid-2021 to mid-2022, with some months reaching up to 100 searches, via the Google search engine. More regionally relevant content on customer centrality will make a significant difference in deepening the discourse in the country and the regions that look to South Africa as a role model on the continent.

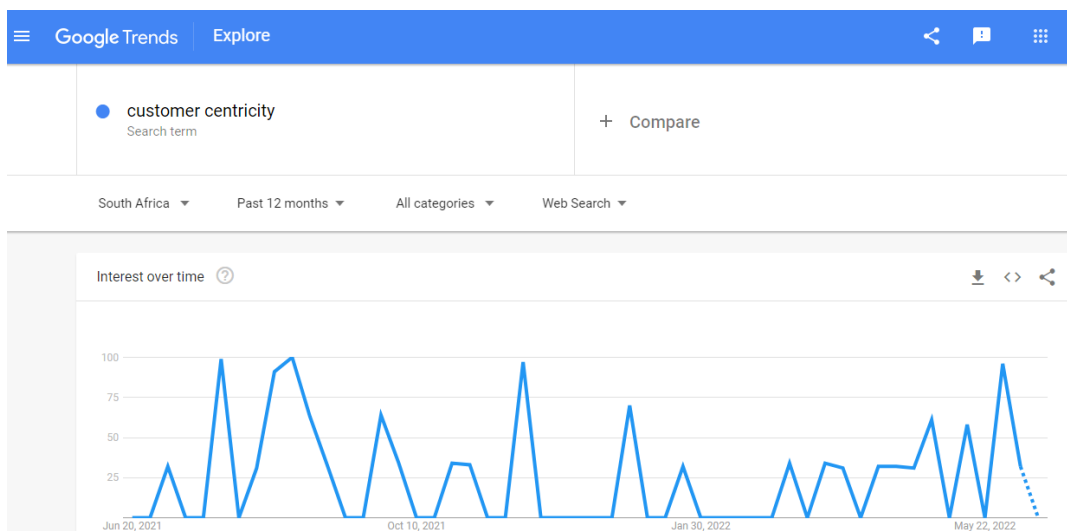


Figure 3.7 Google Trends – Customer centrality search interest – South Africa – May 2022

Source: Google Trends – search interest over period out of 100

Figure 3.8 below represents world-wide customer centricity specific google searches over a 5-year period.

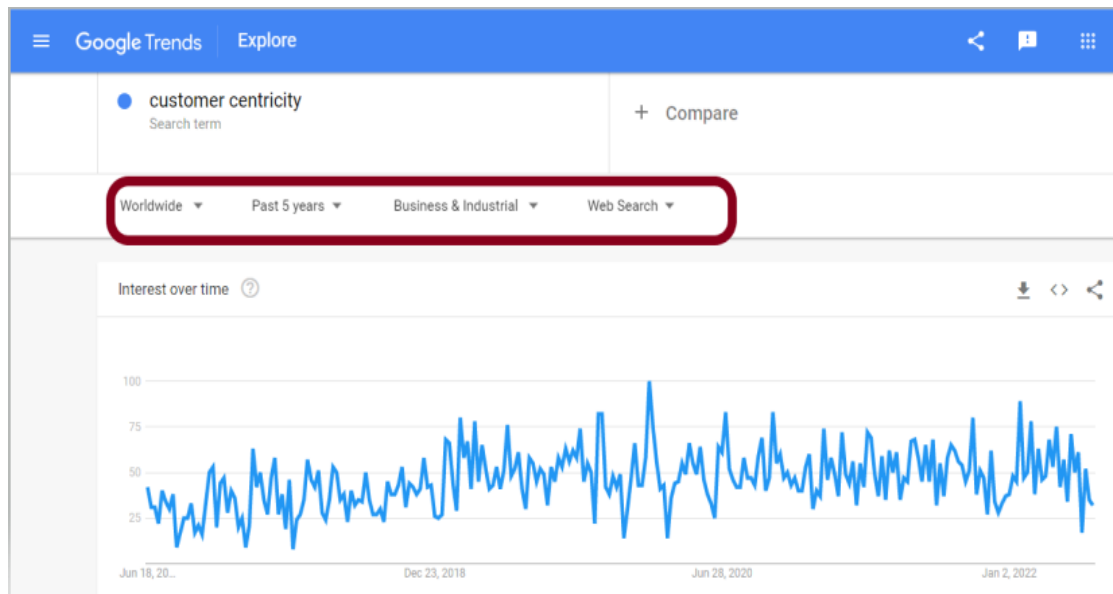


Figure 3.8 Google Trends – Customer centricity – Worldwide – Five years to May 2022

Source: Google Trends – search interest over period out of 100.

Figure 3.9 below reflects the search interest in the term customer centricity, by region. South Africa seems to lead, followed by Singapore, Switzerland, The Philippines, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

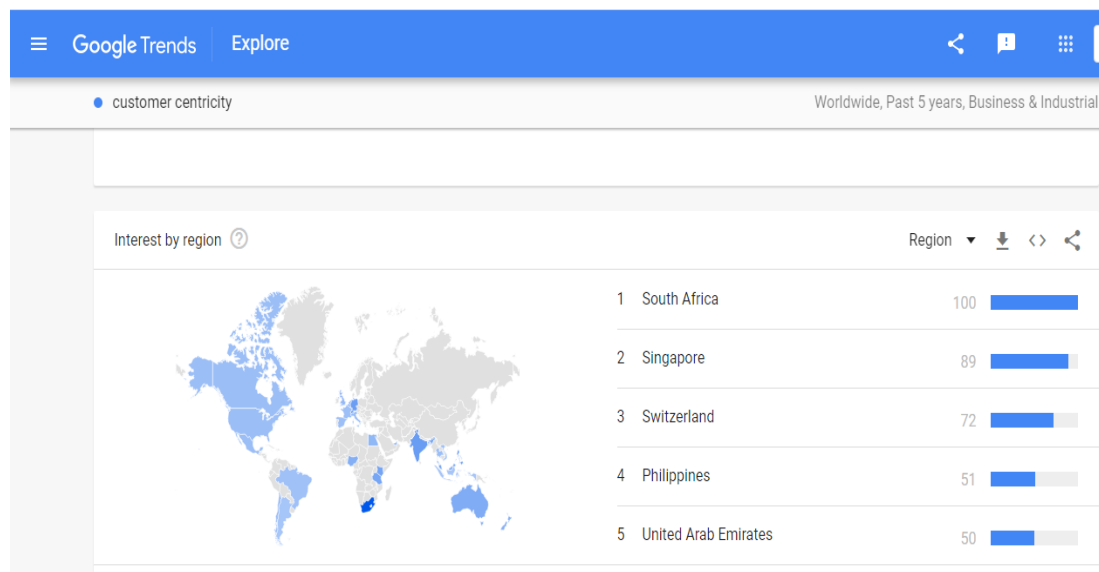


Figure 3.9 Google Trends – Customer centrality – Worldwide – order of interest by region – Five years to May 2022

Source: Google Trends – search interest over period out of 100 <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?cat=12&date=today%205-y&q=customer%20centricity> – accessed 17 June 2022.

While references to customer centrality date back as far as the 1950s, the frequency of references has increased significantly over the past decade and a half. Having a customer centric vision, as suggested earlier by Coetzee (2014), is not enough, since it is about listening to customer voices and engaging them, so the strategy can be adapted, argues Bernhard (2014:9). Lamberti (2013) focuses on the implementation of customer centrality. Although several studies have highlighted the relational aspects of bank-client relationships in South Africa, the notion of client centrality as such has not been explored in full, states Coetzee (2014:998) regarding literature on customer centrality in retail banking in South Africa. Lamberti (2013:589), in turn, points out gaps in understanding the conditions for successful implementation of customer centrality, as well as calls for a more balanced approach in choosing strategic orientations to the market.

3.4.3.3 Customer centric culture, value co-creation, and creating value for society

The importance of creating a customer centric culture is underpinned by value co-creation, value creation for society, innovation, a holistic approach, rooting out product

culture, cultivating customer centric values, mindsets, assumptions, and artefacts, as well as increasing collaboration, alignment, employee engagement and authenticity. Colleoni *et al.* (2021:7) states that the company must change the organisational culture toward marketing, from a system that enables companies to identify customer needs to serve them, to a system that enables customers to identify their needs to serve themselves. Accordingly, establishing an organisational culture toward consumer centricity implies hiring marketing managers who know how to design customer services that empower the client to communicate with the company in any possible way. While there may be differences in the way they approach the issue of how to establish a culture of customer centricity within organisations, co-creation of value in the context of empowered customers seems to be part of the shift marketing leaders need to adapt to into the future.

Studies that drive the debate on social aspects of customer centricity are those that focus on the application of customer centric culture to improve the lives of customers or citizens. They therefore address the importance of having a strong leadership and organisational culture in the context of customer centricity for forging a socially responsible culture within the company to create value for society (Colleoni *et al.* 2021:8).

3.4.3.4 Innovation and the need for a holistic approach

In a customer centric culture of innovation, all sectors of the organisation are committed to obtaining and collecting innovative insights, focusing on users and customers (Duarte & Picchi, 2021). A popular misconception of customer centricity is that the focus on the customer is only the job of sales and marketing (Goyette, 2018:13). It is important to observe customer centric culture in the whole organisation with a new brand of leadership (Shaikh, 2021:12). Fukumaya, Goyette, Markelz and Yohn (2018) and O’Keeffe *et al.* (2016) weigh in on shifting organisational culture to become more customer centric. Goyette, Markelz and Yohn (2018) point out the need for a customer centric organisational culture and the mindset shift required whereby leaders cultivate an understanding throughout the company that customer centricity is the job of everyone, not only that of marketing and sales.

3.4.3.5 Authenticity, attitude consistency across channels, values, mindset, assumptions, and artefacts

Although modern tools and processes are important enablers of a great customer experience, they often fall short of having the desired effect. This is usually because of a lack of customer centric attitudes and behaviour on the part of employees. In many cases, however, the helpful and friendly image presented in the digital interactions is not mirrored during in-person encounters, especially when a problem arises (MacGillavry & Sinyan, 2016:7). To enable a customer-centric culture, leaders need to align and deliberately cultivate the required values and mindset in employees (Yohn, 2018:1). All employee actions need to be examined through the filter of impacting the customer experience. The reality is that most customer journey improvements come from non-customer facing roles. A customer centric culture expects every employee to intentionally seek ways to make a difference in the lives of their customers. Organisational culture consists of collective assumptions, values and artefacts that are shared by members of the organisation (O’Keeffe *et al.*, 2016:423).

3.4.3.6 Collaboration and communication to enable culture, alignment, and engagement

MacGillavry and Sinyan (2016) state that adopting a customer centric culture is unlikely to happen without *collaboration*. Listening to customers and sharing customer feedback with others in the organisation are important in fostering a customer centric culture, but a cultural transformation is unlikely to happen without the *collaboration* among colleagues needed to effectively address customer issues (MacGillavry & Sinyan, 2016:10). Changing an organisation’s culture to become more customer centric will require mutual *collaboration* (Malik *et al.*, 2021).

O’Keeffe *et al.* (2016:422) points out the significance of internal communication in employee *alignment* to an organisation’s culture, as an important component of brand identity that shapes corporate brand values and plays a unifying role to maintain the consistency of the message. Internal marketing has been suggested as a key instrument to implement successful internal brand building, whereby employees better accept the brand values and align their attitudes accordingly. Internal marketing literature emphasises the crucial element of ‘communicating by deeds’ organisational values and offering employees a clear vision that is worth pursuing.

The work of Calleoni *et al.* (2021) and MacGillavry and Sinyan (2016) highlight the importance of employee *engagement* in organisations' successful and ongoing drive to become more customer centric. According to their research (Calleoni *et al.*, 2021:1) state that the term "customer centricity" is often used together with the terms "organisational identity", "organisational leadership", "organisational culture", and "employee *engagement*".

Employee *engagement* will be explored in more detail, based on research conducted by MacGillavry & Sinyan (2016:6), who explain that a shift in strategy that focused on cultural change from the top down can bolster the link between employee engagement and customer centricity. Their findings show that the results of this effort not only accelerated implementation of the company's customer experience management programme, but also identified practical measures for fostering a customer centric outlook and complementary behaviour throughout the organisation.

There are specific drivers of employee *engagement* that lead to a more customer centric mindset and behaviour. Cohesiveness and alignment among employees contribute strongly to employee *engagement*, as well as to customer centricity (MacGillavry & Sinyan, 2016:8). When employees feel that their jobs are important and their opinions count, they are far more likely to be satisfied at work. Therefore, both these factors are focal points for leadership teams to focus on when seeking to create a more satisfied and customer centric workforce. Employees that can do what they do best every day and are encouraged to develop and progress are mostly likely to be engaged and, therefore, contribute to creating a customer centric culture (MacGillavry & Sinyan, 2016:11).

In conclusion, the section on customer centric culture explored aspects such as value co-creation, value creation for society, innovation, the need for a holistic approach, rooting out product culture, values, mindsets, assumptions, artefacts, authenticity, and consistency across channels.

3.4.3.7 Customer value proposition (CVP) creation to improve customer centricity

A practical way in which organisations can evolve to a more customer centric orientation is by introducing customer value propositions rather than single products. Where a product may address a client need at a moment in time, a customer value proposition takes a more holistic and longer-term approach to addressing clients' needs and wants over their lifetime (Sales, Guarinoy, Guizzardiz & Mylopoulos, 2017; Anderson *et al.* 2006). The section below conceptualises and defines customer value propositions (CVPs) and notes the pre-requirement and resulting benefit of deeper customer insights, the more sustainable competitive advantage of deepened differentiation, as well as exploring the brand positioning benefits of CVPs. Firstly, the conceptualisation and definition of customer value propositions is discussed.

3.4.3.8 Conceptualising and defining CVPs

More than two decades ago a research survey published by Kaplan and Norton (2001) suggested as many as 75% of executive teams do not have a clear consensus around the customer value proposition. More recently, literature on customer value propositions published by Rintamäki and Saarijärvi (2021), Payne (2017) and Sales, Guarinoy, Guizzardiz and Mylopoulos (2017) provides an updated view of customer value propositions, as listed in Table 3.6 below.

Table 3.6 Recent discussions of customer value propositions

Author	Customer value propositions
Payne <i>et al.</i> (2017:472)	A customer value proposition (CVP) is a strategic tool facilitating communication of an organisation's ability to share resources and offer a superior value package to targeted customers.
Sales <i>et al.</i> (2017:3).	A value proposition is "an overall view of an organisation's bundle of products and services that together represent a value for a specific customer segment.
Sales <i>et al.</i> (2017:6).	A value proposition is a value assertion a company makes (as the value beholder) that a given market segment (the beneficiaries) will ascribe a particular value to the experiences enabled by an offering (the value object).

Rintamäki & Saarijärvi (2021:756)	A CVP is a strategic tool facilitating communication of an organisation's ability to share resources and offer a superior value package to targeted customers.
Rintamäki & Saarijärvi (2021:760)	A CVP is a concept used in management to increase or create competitive advantage based on customer value creation.

According to Payne *et al.* (2017:471), "There is no common agreement as to what constitutes a customer value proposition, so it is important to clarify different perspectives". The idea that a value proposition helps the providing company to align its resources and competencies around customer needs and create a shared understanding of the goals of both parties, remains valid. Payne *et al.* (2017:472) propose a working definition of the CVP: "A customer value proposition (CVP) is a strategic tool facilitating communication of an organisation's ability to share resources and offer a superior value package to targeted customers". Sales *et al.* (2017) offer a definition for CVPs in two parts:

- 1) A value proposition is "an overall view of an organisation's bundle of products and services that together represent a value for a specific customer segment".
- 2) Furthermore, "a value proposition is a value assertion a company makes (as the value beholder) that a given market segment (the beneficiaries) will ascribe a particular value to the experiences enabled by an offering (the value object)", explains Sales *et al.* (2017:3&5).

More recent literature on customer value propositions by Rintamäki and Saarijärvi (2021:756) present the following definition of the CVP: "A CVP is a strategic tool facilitating communication of an organisation's ability to share resources and offer a superior value package to targeted customers", but also propose the following definition for managing CVPs in their article (Rintamäki & Saarijärvi, 2021:760), based on their integrative four "C"s framework: "A CVP is a concept used in management to increase or create competitive advantage based on customer value creation" and further argue that managing CVPs addresses four perspectives – customer, company, co-creation, and context that integrate strategic and operational dimensions for understanding how customer value is perceived and proposed. The customer

perspective to managing CVPs puts the focus on customers' perceptions of value as a strategic lens to legitimating the relevance of a CVP.

3.4.3.9 Deeper customer insights, deepened differentiation, and positioning prowess

Value proposition creation requires deeper customer insights into customer needs, wants, desires, attitudes and behaviour, improved customer segmentation based on more than basic demographics, solution design from a wider range of angles so it is more contextual, and provides more flexibility to the client and the organisation, than a single once-size-fits-all product. On the other hand, a CVP can also be an important vehicle for creating customer *insight* that transforms the company, leading toward customer-orientation and coalescing around the creation of customer value instead of internal processes only. Customer orientation is then brought to bear for strategic goals and measures that are carried into the management systems (Kaplan & Norton, 2004).

According to Payne, Frow, and Eggert (2017:479), early propositions tend to recommend a focus on a unique product benefit that competitors cannot offer, with the assumption that a single, functional point of difference can be communicated to targeted customer segments most effectively. However, Anderson *et al.* (2006) take a different stance. They argue for a resonating focus and recommend a customer value proposition (CVP) that emphasises the (few) points of difference that make the biggest difference in customers' usage situation, with the assertion that customers want to do business with suppliers that fully grasp critical issues in their business and deliver a CVP that is simple yet powerfully captivating (Anderson *et al.*, 2006:94).

In the wine marketing sector, a gap was identified between predominantly fact-based supplier communication (e.g., "viticulture", "grape", "quality", and "vineyards") and emotionally driven brand image from the consumer side (for example, "pretty", "friendly", "kind", "tasty"), indicating that the transition from producer focus to customer centricity is an ongoing issue. This is consistent with the previous findings on customer centric offer design in the wine business, where wine offers are created based on a multitude of possible options. Practically, brand managers need to address the customer perspective by creating powerful emotional value together with matching

brand image qualities (Dressler & Paunovic, 2021). Brand image and emotional value arguably forms part of the customer value proposition.

In summary, this section covered customer value proposition (CVP) creation as a strategic tool to improve customer centricity, which addresses the customer, company, co-creation, and context of how value is perceived and proposed. The conceptualisation or definition of CVPs, deepened customer insights and differentiation gained, as well as an applicable observation from the wine marketing sector, where a transition is taking place from fact-based supplier communication to more emotionally driven brand images that are customer centric, were shared.

3.4.3.10 Marketing leadership in a modern customer-oriented organisation

The section below discusses marketing leadership in a modern customer-oriented organisation, including the shift from the traditional to the modern approach, marketing leadership skills, intellects and senses and taking on greater responsibility, including digital marketing.

The evolution from a traditional to a modern customer-oriented organisation, whereby the order of importance and focus is swapped, with customers enjoying a more prominent position in the modern organisation and shaping the orientation of top management, middle management, as well as frontline or customer-facing employees, as suggested by Sterev (2017:101), is depicted in Figure 3.10 below.

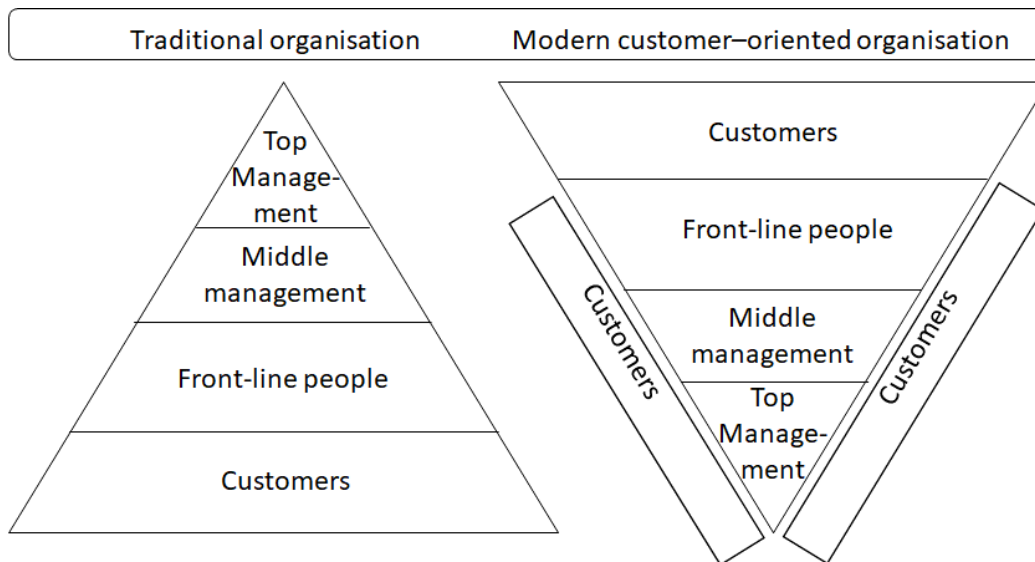


Figure 3.10 A traditional organisation vs. a modern customer-oriented organisation

Source: Sterev (2017:101)

For marketing leaders to direct their key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity, their approach needs to evolve to ensure it is based on a modern customer-oriented organisation as depicted, whereby customers come first, the *frontline* staff are enabled and empowered to address customer issues quickly and appropriately (MacGillavry & Sinyan, 2016:7) and middle management and top management craft an organisational structure (Crecelius *et al.*, 2019), culture (Malik *et al.*, 2021), and incentives (Moggi & Dameri, 2020), to support the drive towards customer centricity. Marketers are agents of change (Bassel & Lambert, 2018:34), so they are well versed in leading stakeholders from one reality to creating a next. Marketing leadership directing the alignment of stakeholders to the organisation’s evolving customer centricity should be possible, since leading the organisation from a traditional organisation versus modern customer-oriented organisation can be achieved (Stere, 2017:101).

3.4.3.11 Marketing leadership’s skills, intellects and senses and taking on greater responsibility, including digital marketing

Organisations could potentially benefit from marketing leaders’ inherent skill set by broadening their role. The most significant characteristic of an effective leader is not only the set of personality characteristics or leadership styles, but this also relates to four intellects. Marketing leaders possess high levels of business, spiritual, emotional,

and political intelligence, according to Malik *et al.* (2021:56). Marketing leaders' relationship management abilities, although mostly applied in the context of building customer relationships, but transferrable to key internal stakeholders, will be valuable (Inversini *et al.*, 2020:3). Marketers know how to listen, communicate, and sense group or target audience dynamics, trends, wants, and needs (generally applied to customers) (Kalaigianam *et al.*, 2021:36) and this skill will serve the organisation well in a transformation or stakeholder alignment drive. Furthermore, marketers can bring a fresh perspective and new ideas (Zubaly, 2020:445), they know how to collaborate (Zubaly, 2020:445) and marketing leaders can be influential and persuasive, which benefits an organisation wishing to implement a specific strategic intent, such as being more customer centric.

The CMO Survey found that marketing leaders are taking on more responsibilities as their companies rise to meet the ongoing challenge of Covid-19 and associated digital and go-to-market opportunities (CMO Survey, 2021:2). Marketing leaders are asked by their CEOs and/or CFOs to participate in board meetings and in the preparation for earnings calls. These are encouraging results that indicate marketing leaders are getting a seat at the table (Moorman 2021:64). When the Covid-19 pandemic forced people indoors and increased consumers' reliance on the Internet, Digital Marketing was identified as a primary responsibility for marketers. This increase pushed Digital Marketing above brand marketing or brand positioning as the top responsibility for marketers in 2021. Across the board, marketers appear to be taking on more responsibilities than before, with significant increases in responsibility in diverse areas such as marketing analytics, lead generation, market selection, and competitive intelligence (Moorman, 2021:64). Digital marketing spending reached 58% of marketing budgets, reflecting a 15.8% increase over the last year. With this growth in direct marketing budgets, marketing leaders have been asked to lead their companies' digital marketing transformations in 73% of companies, and take on a larger share of responsibility in strategic marketing activities across the organisation (CMO Survey, 2021:2).

Given the above, a discussion of the potential future role of marketing leadership in directing alignment of key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity is well

timed. Marketing leadership's responsibility to drive organisational growth (Pimpan 2022) and setting strategic marketing direction (CMO Survey, 2021:2) could be realised from marketing leadership's inherent competencies, capabilities, and skills (Malik *et al.*, 2021), which would serve the organisation well when marketing leadership's role is extended to include the driving of key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity.

3.4.4 Potential benefits of becoming more customer centric

Some of the potential benefits of becoming more customer centric include a singular focus on customers to cut through clutter, a strong market-centred focus to direct strategic planning, customers being placed at the centre of strategy, ensuring the loyalty of the best customers, prioritising high lifetime value customers, increased ROI and stakeholder satisfaction, lower prices, higher responsiveness and dependability, shorter delivery time, supply chain efficiency leading to competitive advantage, and increased marketing innovativeness.

3.4.4.1 Customer centricity enables a singular and strong market-centred focus

According to Von der Heydt (2017); Bernhard and Olderog (2014:9); Coetzee (2014:1000); Baird and Gonzalez-Wertz (2011:16) and Gonzalez-Wertz (2011:17), a singular focus on the customer will help cut through the distracting clutter presented by powerful internal and external forces. Although customer centric principles and practices originated in the 1950s and were broadly discussed for many years, dominance of marketing strategies centred in the products were the main strategy until recently. In the early 1980s Cravens (1983:24) observed: "the requirements of this new role are much greater than they were in the past. The Chief Marketing Executive will be a major participant in strategic planning for the enterprise". In an increasing number of organisations, the executive is directing the strategic planning of the organisation because of the strong market-centred focus of strategic planning.

Market sensing can lead to superior market and customer insights, which in turn can provide a significant competitive advantage. Birshan, Seth, and Sternfels (2022) note, as financial traders know well, when volatility is high, an insights edge generates great

value. It may not be possible to be right every time but seeing accurately through the distractions 10 percent more often than one's rivals is a substantial competitive advantage. That requires investing the resources, time, and effort to go beyond conventional analysis of conventional data that generate conventional wisdom.

3.4.4.2 Customers are placed at the centre of strategy

Customer centricity can provide organisations that wish to put the needs of their customers at the centre of their strategy and actions (Fader & Toms, 2018; Coetzee, 2014) with a reliable, principle-based guideline to help navigate the uncertainty presented by short-term trends and medium- and longer-term paradigm shifts. As indicated in Table 3.7 customer centricity evolved over time yet remains the true north or navigation system which keeps the organisation on course as a guiding force which can help an organisation to course-correct where required, before the organisation goes too far off track.

3.4.4.3 Ensuring loyalty of best customers and prioritising high lifetime value customers

A principle of customer centricity shared by Fader and Toms (2018:42) states “ensuring that your best customers remain loyal” is a critical guiding principle in a customer centric strategy. This realisation can prove to be very valuable during difficult times.

Another valuable principle is that: “even if customers look the same on the surface, not all customers are the same”, which is a prioritisation principle that is fundamental to customer centricity (Fader & Toms, 2018:6) and can serve as a guiding light throughout an organisation's journey to becoming more customer centric.

3.4.4.4 Increased ROI and stakeholder satisfaction

Vlašić and Tutek (2017) and O’Keeffe (2016) note the benefits of choosing customer centricity including positive returns, a significant increase in return on investment (ROI), satisfied shareholders and stakeholders and positive behavioural change. According to O’Keeffe (2016:421), “By operating customer-centrally, marketing brings positive return on investment, satisfied shareholders and stakeholders from business and the community, and contributes to positive behavioural change and a sustainable business future”. Customer centricity is regaining its importance, since it is expected that this

approach brings 30% more Return on Investment when compared to marketing strategies that are not centred on the customer (Vlašić & Tutek, 2017:1).

3.4.4.5 Lower prices, higher responsiveness and dependability, and shorter delivery time

Madhani (2019:7) observes that having a competitive advantage generally suggests that they can have one or more of the following capabilities when compared to its competitors: “lower prices, higher responsiveness and dependability, and shorter delivery time”.

3.4.4.6 Supply chain efficiency leading to competitive advantage

The customer-centric supply chain strategy must be designed according to the specific characteristics of the supply chain considered and the context in which this operates. Firms should select the right supply chain strategy based on product characteristics and market environment. In customer-centric supply chain strategy (CCSCS), supply chains are much more customer centric and deliver “great service at lower cost”. Value-creation aspects of the customer centric supply chain have become a *new competitive ground* to which most firms can aspire, concludes Madhani (2019:7). The section below explores the potential challenges associated with becoming more customer centric.

3.4.4.7 Increased marketing innovativeness and cross-functional knowledge sharing

Osakwe (2020:455) notes that another benefit of an organisational drive towards being more customer centric also directly leads to increased marketing innovativeness. At this stage of dynamic change and unprecedented opportunity, the marketing discipline is poised to offer new knowledge that contributes to the full range of marketing stakeholders (Moorman *et al.*, 2019:1). Furthermore, “Given the interdisciplinary nature of most marketing problems, they will be stronger when united to solve the field’s most pressing questions and problems”, explains Moorman *et al.* (2019:2). Over time there has been increased interest in the cross-functional relationship of marketing across an organisation, as well as how to structurally organise to achieve marketing excellence (Eriksson *et al.*, 2020:6).

3.4.5 Potential challenges to becoming more customer centric

Colleoni *et al.* (2021), Osakwe (2020), Van den Berg (2017); MacGillavry and Sinyan (2016); O’Keeffe (2016) and Lamberti (2013) point out that while customer centricity is an extremely attractive concept, it is sometimes difficult to build and sustain. Additional potential challenges hampering implementation of customer centricity include the fact that the conditions for implementation are not always clear.

Potential challenges associated with, or impeding the drive to becoming more customer centric, can include the following according to literature: lack of customer focus, collaboration, and management buy-in, misaligned staff incentives, lack of agility, purpose, processes and structure to enable customer centricity, structure-related challenges, increased complexity, difficulty navigating the cross-functional nature of customer centricity, fear, judgement, short-term profit pressure, low employee engagement and weak organisational identity, and the absence of a system to enable sharing of customer knowledge and resource constraints. These are discussed in more detail, following Fig 3.11 below.

Potential challenges to becoming more customer centric		
Lack of customer focus, collaboration, and management buy-in	Staff incentives misaligned to customer centricity	Lack of agility, purpose, processes and structure to enable customer centricity
Structure needs to support culture	Increased complexity and navigating the cross-functional nature of customer centricity	Fear, judgement, and short-term profit pressure
Low employee engagement and weak organisational identity	Absence of a system to enable sharing of customer knowledge and resource constraints	Navigating the impact of Covid-19 on customer facing or frontline employees

Figure 3.11 Potential challenges to becoming more customer centric

1) Lack of customer focus, collaboration, and management buy-in

The biggest challenges as cited by respondents in a research survey related to customer centricity implementation included a lack of customer focus across the organisation, insufficient collaboration between departments, and inadequate management buy-in, as explained by MacGillavry and Sinyan (2016:7).

2) Staff incentives misaligned to customer centricity

A culture of customer obsession is implemented starting from the top. Leaders can set the tone, embed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and base incentives on the customer-related KPIs to bring customer centricity to life, explains van den Berg (2017).

3) Lack of agility, purpose, processes and structure to enable customer centricity

According to van den Berg (2017), one must be agile to be ready for the constantly shifting business world, and the best way to prepare is to develop a strong purpose to guide the company, build the processes and structure to ensure customers are at the heart of all actions and decisions.

4) Structure needs to support culture

Lee, Sridhar and Palmatier (2015:1-2) argues that a customer centric structure can help a company understand its customers better, develop deeper relationships with them, and improve customer satisfaction. However, customer alignment does not work for everyone and even when it does work, a company can go through years of poor performance before the benefits begin to take effect.

The view that companies should adopt customer centric structures has been in both academia and practice for some time but was re-ignited in 1999 by George S. Day of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania who reignited interest in the concept, noting that “the wrong structure can doom all other market-driven initiatives in the organisation to failure.” (Lee *et al.*, 2015:2). In cases where customer centricity is an appropriate structure, it was found that it takes more than two years after a restructuring, on average, for a company’s performance to exceed prior levels. During

that period, performance typically deteriorates significantly as the organisation incurs coordinating costs due to internal conflicts and confusions (Lee *et al.*, 2015:5). Before initiating the adoption of a customer centric structure, companies should look carefully at the extent to which this approach has permeated the competition. Organisations should also gauge the industry's competitive intensity and carefully examine their industries' profitability (Lee *et al.*, 2015:6).

5) Increased complexity and navigating the cross-functional nature of customer centricity

Customer centricity allows for divisions to focus on specific customer segments, and this narrower focus increases their knowledge of those groups. However, it also introduces greater complexity into communication and decision making and leads to duplication of certain functions across divisions. Details of the competition and of customer segments determine whether the positive factors outweigh the negative factors, and years can pass before customer centricity delivers results (Zubaly, 2020; Burger & Pelzer, 2018).

To address customers' challenges, there is a requirement to make listening to customers possible across organisational boundaries, observes Veldsman and Johnson (2016:387/9). By increasing cross-functionality, organisations will see the bigger picture, enhance collaboration, mutual sharing of accountabilities, transparency, and teamwork, explains O'Keeffe (2016:439).

6) Fear, judgement, and short-term profit pressure

Van den Hemel and Rademakers (2016:228) state that organisations should benefit from recognising and avoiding barriers to customer centricity. This can be done by avoiding a culture of fear and judgment; taking care when offering increasing choices to customers and ensuring that senior management avoids any undue preoccupation with short-term profit by demonstrating a clear link between achieving customer centricity and long-term financial performance.

7) Low employee engagement and weak organisational identity

Some scholars argue that companies must focus on employee engagement while other researchers argue that the focus should be on establishing a strong organisational identity. Colleoni *et al.* (2021:4) state that despite extant research, which suggests that identity, culture, leadership and employee engagement are central to aligning the organisation towards customer centricity, there is still little agreement on how customer centricity can be achieved through combining these focal points, and, therefore, this issue remains “a chronic headache”.

8) Absence of a system to enable sharing of customer knowledge and resource constraints

Putting a system of sharing information and knowledge in the company in place, which allows employees to access data in relation to customer satisfaction surveys, empowers them to propose solutions. The basic assumption made here is to allow front-line employees (rather than only managers and back-office managers) to know what customers think, explains Colleoni *et al.* (2021:7).

Organisations in resource-constrained environments may find it difficult to make significant investments in customer centricity programmes, observes Osakwe (2020:455).

9) Navigating the impact of Covid-19 on customer facing or frontline employees

Customer care leaders are faced with a perfect storm of challenges: call volumes were up, employees were leaving and harder to replace, and digital solutions are not yet delivering on their full promise. In addition, increased customer expectations and decades-high inflation contribute to the pressure that customer care leaders are experiencing. These employees are harder to retain and this situation is exacerbated by the fact that talent attrition affects customer care capacity. Employees are leaving more rapidly than prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, a result of the “Great Attrition”, and they are more difficult to replace. The most cited reason for employees leaving is poaching by competitors (58) alongside employee burnout, employee dissatisfaction, lack of advancement opportunities, and poor work–life balance. To address these issues, leadership will need to take a serious look at ways to build a better organisational

culture. Two of the most effective ways to do this, according to customer care leaders, are to find ways to motivate and build trust with employees and to encourage leaders to listen and act on employee feedback (Berg, Buesing, Hurst, Lai, & Mukhopadhyay, 2022:4).

In summary, the potential challenges to becoming more customer centric could include obstacles such as a lack of customer focus, collaboration and management buy-in, misalignment of staff incentives, a lack of agility in purpose, processes and structure to enable the drive; a structure that does not support a customer centric culture; increased complexity and difficulty navigating the cross functional nature required; fear, judgment and short-term profit pressure; low employee engagement and weak organisational identity; the absence of a system enabling knowledge sharing; resource constraints; and navigating the impact of a crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic. These obstacles, while hopefully not occurring simultaneously in the same organisation, can be addressed and overcome with a methodical and systematic approach and an organisational commitment to becoming more customer centric.

3.4.6 Implementation, measurement, reward and recognition of perceived customer centricity

The implementation, measurement and reward associated with increased customer centricity will be discussed in greater detail below.

3.4.6.1 Implementation of customer centricity

This section addresses customer centricity implementation (Tirado *et al.*, 2019: 231; Lamberti, 2013:589) measurement (di Laurea, 2021; Umemoto, Kizu, Nakazaki, Hirayama, 2019; Shah *et al.*, 2006:118), as perceived by customers and employees (marketingcharts.com, 2014) respectively. Osakwe (2020); Palmatier *et al.* (2019:8); Tirado *et al.* (2019:231) and Lamberti (2013:589) expand on the implementation, institutionalisation and transformation towards a more customer centric organisation. From an emerging market perspective (BRICS - Brazil, India, China, Russia and South Africa; and MINT - Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey) and based on empirical

analysis, Osakwe (2020:456) suggests that local market conditions, such as competitive intensity among them, can affect corporate behaviour's attitude towards the development and/or implementation of strategic activities and in this case customer centricity.

3.4.6.2 Measuring customer centricity

Quantitative measures connected to customer centricity, according to di Laurea (2021), include customer lifetime value (CLV), customer equity and the net promoter score (NPS). CLV and brand equity (said to be closely associated with product centricity) were also mentioned in discussions related to customer centricity measurement by Shah *et al.* (2006:118), in addition to the challenge in quantifying the financial impact of customer centricity by determining the optimal levels of investment in such measures as customer satisfaction and loyalty. Customer centricity measures discussed by Habel *et al.* (2020) include customer perception measurements using a quantitative method. A qualitative measure of employees' perceptions regarding an organisation's customer centricity was included in the single embedded case study which formed part of the primary research survey conducted.

A quantitative study published in August 2014 presented statistics of global marketers' rating of their organisations' customer centricity, which was defined using five statements related to customer profiles and permission capturing; message personalisation; omni-channel device usage, orchestration of customer interactions based on their lifecycle; and use of marketing automation to enhance client engagement and profitability. In most cases global marketers did not present an exceptional summation of their organisations' customer centricity, leaving much room for improvement (marketingcharts.com).

Figure 3.12 below depicts the degree to which global marketers agreed with statements pertaining to their own organisations' customer centricity, including: "we build customer profiles and capture permissions, we personalise messaging based on an understanding of individuals, we orchestrate interactions on customer lifecycle understanding", and more.

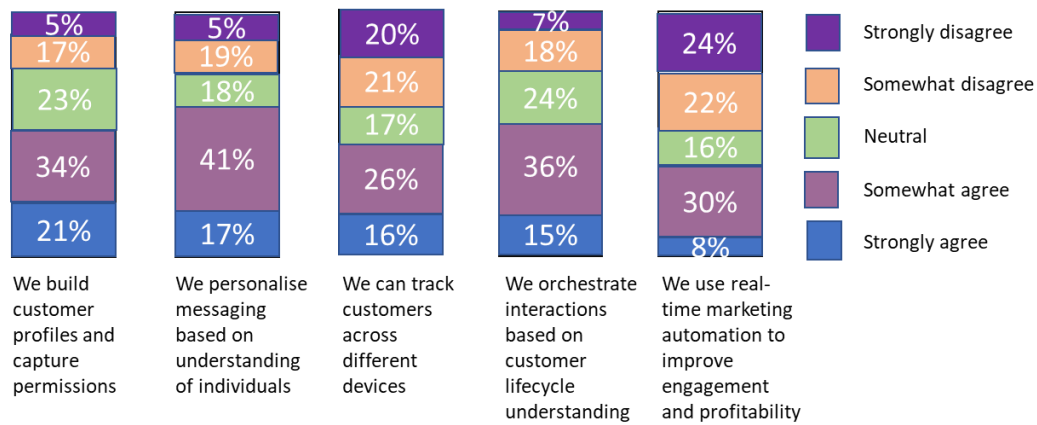


Figure 3.12 Global marketers rate their organisations’ customer centricity

Source: Econsultance, marketingcharts.com.

Based on the above figure, an opportunity exists to contribute to the body of knowledge in the form of a case study that explains qualitative measurement of employee (marketing leadership and their key internal stakeholders) perceptions of their organisation’s customer centricity in the head office context. The primary research includes a section which qualitatively measured key internal stakeholder (employee) perceptions of their organisation’s customer centricity that is presented in Chapter Four (Research Methodology) and Chapter Five (Research Findings).

The measurement of improvements in perceived customer centricity during and after implementation, institutionalisation and transformation efforts is a central aspect of the process. Many variables including market conditions can impact the implementation of strategic initiatives, so regular assessment of progress should help keep deliverables on track and will highlight any obstacles that need to be addressed urgently. Transparency around measurements was acknowledged to be important. Quantitative measures are discussed, and the qualitative perception-based nature of the primary research was noted.

Jeff Bezos, the CEO of Amazon, in his 2016 letter to shareholders wrote that to maintain vitality, leaders must “resist proxies.” What he meant was that *measuring* proxies for success, such as unit sales or project milestones, inevitably focuses attention on a specific goal or group, potentially damaging the company’s larger interests. Results

should always be measured against the company's purpose and ultimate objectives as well (Reeves *et al.*, 2020:13). Measuring what really matters is the important point.

3.4.6.3 Rewarding customer centric behaviour

Resources can be used to reward *cooperative* behaviour and punish competitive behaviour and shared resources and shared values can help facilitate win-win-win outcomes, according to Moggi and Dameri (2020).

Following the section on the implementation, measurement and rewards associated with increased customer centricity above, the section below examines the practical applications associated with customer centricity.

3.4.7 Practical applications

Practical applications related to customer centricity are discussed in the section below. These include customer value proposition (CVP) creation to improve customer centricity, key dimensions overlaid with the 4C framework for managing CVP and applicable observations from the wine marketing sector.

3.4.7.1 Key dimensions overlaid with the 4C (customer, company, contextual, co-creation perspective) framework for managing CVPs

Rintamäki and Saarijärvi (2021:754) discuss how value is created through a shared value proposition and how a CVP, in today's business world, lies at the heart of strategy, while at the same time representing a powerful hands-on tool. A CVP captures the company's strategic *raison d'être*, but also implicitly and explicitly articulates operational objectives, according to Rintamäki and Saarijärvi (2021:755). A unique but often under-appreciated characteristic of CVPs is their ability to bridge strategic and operational realms of management. Furthermore, the notion of CVPs possesses another quality that makes it unique among business concepts. It inherently considers both the customer and company perspective: for companies to propose customer value, they need to know what customers perceive as valuable. The latter awareness highlights not only the role and relevance of understanding what value is for customers, defined by their contexts and in their terms, but also mechanisms for negotiating how resources are configured,

integrated and shared between providers and customers (Rintamäki & Saarijärvi, 2021:755).

To build a better understanding of current literature on customer value propositions, three conceptual models are presented below:

1. Key dimensions of CVPs with selective references plotted along an x-axis with operational versus strategic management poles and a y-axis with CVP perceptions and propositions as opposing poles.

Table 3.7 Key dimensions of managing customer value propositions

		Key dimensions (illustrated with selected references)	
Managing	Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer perceived value, expected and desired value • Structure and types of customer value 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market orientation and customer orientation • The CVP as a component of a business model • Customer value management
	Operational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value-in-use and value-in-context, especially about service dominant logic • Service logic • Service science • Points-of-parity vs points of difference in value propositions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value- co-creation • In the context of service dominant logic • Service logic • Service science • Along with reciprocal value propositions
		Perceiving	Proposing
		Customer value propositions	

Source: Rintamäki and Saarijärvi (2021:756)

Table 3.7 above demonstrates key dimensions of managing customer value propositions, including its strategic versus operational management of perceiving versus proposing customer value propositions. The key dimensions include strategic dimensions such as customer perceived value, expected and desired value, structure and types of customer value, market orientation and customer orientation; and the CVP

as a component of a business model. In addition, it considers customer value management and operational dimensions, including value-in-use and value-in-context, especially with regard to service dominant logic, service logic, service science, points-of-parity versus points of difference in value propositions, and value co-creation in the context of service dominant logic, service logic and service science, along with reciprocal value propositions.

Figure 3.13 provides additional overlays with four perspectives including a customer, company, contextual and co-creation perspective positioned on the figure together with four steps to be taken to facilitate implementation, including identifying competitive CVPs, developing competencies and resources, facilitating value creation, setting goals and measuring CVPs for competitive advantage.

The literature review and primary research focus as presented in this study fall mostly in the top right quadrant's content – a strategic company perspective with a co-creating perspective to proposing customer value propositions, which mainly focuses on market and customer orientation, CVPs as a component of a business model and customer value management.

Figure 3.13 below depicts the 4C framework for managing customer value propositions, including the identification of competitive CVPs, developing competencies and resources, facilitating value creation, and setting goals and measuring CVPs for competitive advantage.

Managing		Customer perspective	1. Identifying competitive CVPs	Company perspective
	Strategic	4. Setting goals and measuring CVPs for competitive advantage		2. Developing competencies and resources
	Operational	Contextual perspective	3. Facilitating value creation	Co-creation perspective
		Perceiving		Proposing
Customer value propositions				

Figure 3.13 The 4C framework for managing customer value propositions
Source: Rintamäki and Saarijärvi (2021:758)

Figure 3.14 below represents an overlay of elements in Table 3.7 and Figure 3.12.

		Customer Perspective	Identifying competitive CVPs	Company Perspective
Managing	Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer perceived value, expected and desired value • Structure and types of customer value 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market orientation and customer orientation. • The CVP as a component of a business model. • Customer value management
	Operational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value-in-use and value-in-context, especially about service dominant logic • Service logic • Service science • Points-of-parity vs. points of difference in value propositions 	Facilitating value creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value-co-creation • In the context of service dominant logic • Service logic • Service science • Along with reciprocal value propositions
		Contextual perspective		Co-creating perspective
		Perceiving		Proposing
		Customer value propositions		
		Key dimensions illustrated with selected references		

Figure 3.14 Representation of an overlay of elements in Figure 3.13 over Table 3.7

Source: Author/researcher – combined content from Table 3.7 and Figure 3.14

Based on the above discussion, the 4C framework is included in the set of recommended frameworks for future customer centricity implementation, since the CVP forms an integral part of a shift from a product to a customer centric market orientation.

3.4.8 Gaps and emerging realities

Gaps in literature and emerging realities related to customer centricity are discussed in the section below.

3.4.8.1 Gaps

Gaps in literature related to customer centricity include geographic gaps, notably limited literature from the southern hemisphere, especially the African continent at large, as related to the primary study. South Africa can benefit from increased research on customer centricity in its financial services sector and beyond. Another gap identified during the literature review process in relation to customer centricity includes the scarcity of research on organisational customer centricity as *perceived by employees*. A more universally accepted definition and conceptualisation of customer centricity will also serve its evolution. Emerging realities are shared in the section below, including the impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic and adjusting to the shifting world realities following the pandemic.

3.4.8.2 Emerging realities

According to Osakwe (2020:1), “the term customer centricity has emerged as an important priority for organisations”. The aim of Amazon, for example, is to be the world’s most customer centric organisation. The idea of putting customers first was highlighted by Colleoni *et al.* (2021:3), Habel *et al.* (2020) and many more, and emphasises the need for businesses to not only adopt a customer centric vision, but also to recognise that customers are different and strategically target those customers for whom the marketing effort will pay off.

The onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic impacted the evolution of customer centricity and the emerging realities that resulted from it, as discussed in the section below. The world experienced one of the greatest challenges since the Second World War. The Covid-19 crisis affected every aspect of people’s lives (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2020:249). Euromonitor (2020) has identified various emerging megatrends, including:

- 1) Connected Consumers: both consumers and businesses are showing stronger emotional connections with reliable suppliers in their search for stability and value. In this respect, digitalisation is more important than ever and shows how consumers, employers and employees may be able to keep operating in the future.
- 2) Ethical Living: Moral and ethical values are receiving greater attention. In relation to this, Euromonitor has mentioned the tendency of consumers to become more engaged with products and services, and to attach greater value to connections with reliable, often important, and well-known brands.
- 3) Healthy Living: a healthy lifestyle and healthy habits inside and outside the home are becoming more important, and a more holistic approach to wellness is being adopted.
- 4) Middle Class and Lower-Class Retreat: because of Covid-19 and its economic consequences, the middle and lower economic classes are struggling to maintain their economic position and lifestyles. Unemployment in the United States is increasing dramatically and is affecting about 25% of all American citizens. In Africa, the situation is worse and middle-class retreat can be observed in Europe in particular. This is leading to behaviours such as sharing products (Eckhardt *et al.*, 2019), renting and borrowing.
- 5) Shopping Reinvented: social distancing led to a shift to online shopping among many consumers for both groceries and durables. As a result, online stores are experiencing enormous increases in turnover. Consumers who were not previously familiar with online shopping are now becoming ambassadors for this way of shopping. The expectation is that at least a part of the shift to online shopping will be permanent. The Covid-19 crisis has also led to a move towards buying more locally produced food (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2020:249).

With the explosive growth of online shopping in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, digital *savvy* (knowledgeable and confident) customers can buy anything from anywhere, anytime without visiting brick-and-mortar stores. Customers constantly seek ways to compare different product offerings at different prices, check stockholding status, and then order products online for local in-store pickup using mobile devices and personal computers (PCs). To meet this fast-changing customer preference and then adapt to e-commerce driven shopping environments, a growing number of retailers

began to realise that the traditional sale and delivery of products via a single distribution channel no longer makes sense. A viable alternative to such a traditional business practice is the exploitation of an omni-distribution channel (Min, 2021:10).

Shifting Market Frontiers: large cities reach saturation when social distance must be maintained. The space offered by free zones (parks, avenues, shopping streets) and nature (such as woodlands and beaches) is insufficient. As a result, a shift to living in mid-size cities is expected. It is also believed that certain markets have reached their limits, both directly because of Covid-19-related measures (including the travel industry, particularly aviation and cruises, and the restaurant industry), and indirectly, because of the developments mentioned above such as farming (both intensive livestock breeding and intensive agriculture), mining and fast food.

To conclude, the gaps and emerging realities related to customer centricity were explored in this section, including the scarcity of literature and research from the southern hemisphere, particularly the African continent and including South Africa, as well as the lack of a universally accepted definition of customer centricity, despite the growing interest in the phenomenon. In terms of emerging realities, customer centricity is emerging as an important topic in organisations, given for example its potential positive impact on return on investment (ROI). Identifying customers for whom the marketing effort will provide significant returns is also top of mind.

The impact of Covid-19 on customer centricity was reviewed, with a discussion of megatrends identified in literature and how they impact customer connections, health, economic class, shopping habits and market geographics.

3.4.9 Limitations and delineations

The limitations and delineations of the section on customer centricity include the exclusion of human-spirit centricity (Bedenkoff, Moreno, Agustin, Jain, Newman, Feng & Kostello, 2021), the potential role and impact of Chief Digital Officers (CDOs), Human Resources Officers (CHROs) and Chief Risk Officers (CROs) on customer centricity evolution as internal stakeholders, as well as limited focus on customer perspectives

related to perceived customer centricity. Themes in the literature reviewed related to customer centricity that are acknowledged but not explored in further detail due to the delimitations given the scope of the case study and the research goal and questions. This may include financial performance (annual results), price perceptions, sales revenue, brand value/loyalty/trust, customer satisfaction measurement (for example, SA-csi in RSA), customer service, customer experience, customer journeys, customer lifecycle, customer value, customer privacy, customer loyalty or customer empathy, “value-in-exchange” and “value-in-use”.

3.4.10 Section conclusion

This section of the literature review focussed on customer centricity, defining and conceptualising the customer centricity phenomenon based on historic and current literature contributions, as well as a review of the evolution of customer centricity, including paradigm shifts, observed increased interest in the phenomenon, the importance of a customer centric culture, customer value proposition creation and the role of marketing leadership in a modern customer-oriented organisation.

There is a significant opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge in relation to literature and surveys based on studies in the southern hemisphere, in emerging markets or developing economies including South Africa, as well as in banking, specifically in head offices. Research has already been undertaken that included a customer centricity study conducted with client-facing service staff in a bank branch in South Africa with another study focussing on perceived customer centricity of bank employees, published as a doctoral thesis in 2017.

In conclusion, due to the limitation of research and literature, an opportunity exists to make contributions to the body of knowledge about customer centricity in the context of the southern hemisphere, particularly on the African continent, including South Africa, specifically also in the context of broadening the future role of marketing leadership to include directing of key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity. The next section discusses conceptual frameworks with the aim of

introducing the inter-relationships and interdependencies between the major phenomena.

3.5 Conceptual frameworks: contribution to creating connections in marketing leadership

Part of the research's secondary objectives is the proposed integration of the phenomena into a dynamic interdependent framework demonstrating how marketing leadership can direct key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity. To that end, this section of the chapter discusses conceptual frameworks and their role in advancing academic and practical knowledge, Systems Thinking, and aspects of the Da Vinci TIPS™ Management and Leadership Framework, including collaboration, coordination, and cooperation, as well as engagement.

3.5.1 Conceptual frameworks

Conceptual frameworks play a critical role in advancing both academic and practical knowledge. High-quality conceptualisations that *integrate* prior knowledge, link research across disciplines, and contribute by providing multi-level insights help develop the research field *with substantial leaps rather than incremental steps*, according to Rintamäki and Saarijärvi (2021:755).

This integration of prior knowledge draws connections between previously differentiated phenomena, finding a novel simplified and higher-order perspective on how these entities are related. Integration involves synthesis, that is, the creation of a whole from diverse parts. Rintamäki and Saarijärvi (2021:755) presents a process of conceptual development in Figure 3.15 below.

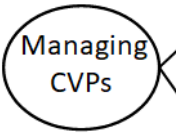
	Domain	Dimensions	Perspectives	Processes
Narrative-based style of conceptual development		Strategic & operational Perceiving & proposing	Customer Company Co-creation Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying competitive CVPs • Developing competencies and resources • Facilitating value creation • Setting goals and measuring CVPs for competitive advantage
Approach for conceptual development	<i>Differentiating</i> ← RELATING → <i>Integrating</i>			

Figure 3.15 The conceptual development process using CVP management as an example
Source: Rintamäki and Saarijärvi (2021:756)

Figure 3.15 above represents a process of conceptual development as detailed by Rintamäki and Saarijärvi (2021:756), which includes the *narrative-based style* of conceptual development covering domain, dimensions, perspectives and processes, as well as the *approach* for conceptual development, whether differentiating or integrating.

3.5.2 Systems Thinking

Systems Thinking, which also forms part of the Da Vinci Institute’s TIPS™ Managerial and Leadership Framework, supports improvements in the internal functioning of the organisation, adds to improved communication between functional groups, and contributes to overall better performance for the organisation, as well as a better learning culture. By adopting the systems thinking perspective, the individual actions of functional managers are coordinated and communicated so that the entire organisation performs better. It should be noted that this might involve some functional groups giving up local optimisation for the betterment of the whole, something not usually supported by most organisational cultures (Brønn & Brønn, 2017:303).

The basic principles of systems thinking are as follows:

- 1) Thinking of the “big picture”: Decision makers must develop the ability to see beyond just their own limited area of responsibility, which will be a benefit in the

context of the research study, where key internal stakeholders are also challenged to think about their impact on customers;

- 2) Balancing the short- and long-term perspectives: The pressure to meet short-term financial goals can make it difficult to reconcile these different timeframes. The drive to become more customer centric is a long-term, strategic goal with short term sacrifices necessary in order to enjoy longer term sustainable benefits;
- 3) Recognising the dynamic, complex and interdependent nature of systems: The tendency is to apply linear thinking to complex problems, which implies significant simplifications of the experienced situation. Overcoming this requires significant unlearning of established ways of interacting with problems. Habits, thought patterns, attitudes and mindsets will also need to change on the journey to becoming more customer centric;
- 4) Taking account of both measurable and non-measurable factors: For example, many factors that influence reputation fall outside of the traditional managerial accounting measures but are no less important. Customer centricity is largely a perceived phenomenon, but this study breaks it down into more tangible and measurable elements; and
- 5) A central tenet is that everyone is part of the system within which we function and that individuals exert influence on those systems even as they are influencing the individuals. The study will ensure renewed awareness of the interconnected and interdependent nature of the ecosystem context.

In summary, according to Brønn and Brønn (2017:303) and as detailed above, big picture thinking, balanced timeframes, unlearning linear thinking, valuing non-measurables and functioning in and influencing the system are some of the basic principles of Systems Thinking.

3.5.3 Cooperation

Organisations must perform marketing integration tasks: This principle allows the marketing activities to be undertaken not just in formal administrative units but to be spread out in different business units, such as the bank in which the primary research is

conducted. According to the principle, a marketing organisation must cooperate to integrate its tasks with other structural units to perform its main obligations (Stereov, 2017:100). Layton (2011:261) highlights a dependence on an implicit social contract among relative strangers or members from a different group to create kinship and reciprocity, which help foster *cooperation*. Customer centricity does allow divisions to focus on specific customer segments, but the *structure* may introduce greater complexity into communication and decision making and leads to duplication (Lee, Sridhar & Palmatier, 2015:1-2). Navigating such complexity, while creating a sense of ongoing cooperation, can be challenging if there is no clear alignment to the end goal. This is also true in a retail bank, where a wide variety of stakeholders are under pressure to perform at an accelerated pace.

Stereov (2017), Layton (2011) and others share the following aspects to be considered related to cooperation, including integration of tasks, understanding origins of trade, kinship and reciprocity, partnership formation, increasing access to essential resources, co-creation of value and rewarding co-operative behaviour. These aspects are explained in greater detail below:

- 1) The origins of trade can be found in the human talent for exchange based on cooperation
- 2) Initially grounded in kinship, then in reciprocity within small groups, cooperation in a wider context came to depend on the acceptance and shared understanding of an implicit social contract by individuals who were not kin, not group members, and most often strangers
- 3) Cooperation and competition may coexist in structured exchange as individuals and entities seek to build on existing links or to form new links with current or potential participants
- 4) There is a need to increase access to essential resources, a drive to widen offered assortments, to acquire new skills, or to reduce costs that may lead managers in a purposeful system to trade control for cooperation, to outsource non-core activities, to engage in cost-sharing collaborative research, all of which will move the system towards a more structured pattern

- 5) Using the resources which fall under the area's control to reward cooperative behaviour and punish competitive behaviour can transform interactions and facilitate win-win-win outcomes for all parties involved (Layton, 2011: 261-267).

3.5.4 Coordination

Complexity is one of the most frequently used terms in business but also one of the most ambiguous, and even in the sciences it has numerous definitions. A broad definition is that *it has many different elements that have many different connections to one another* (Reeves *et al.*, 2020:2). An advantage that complexity can confer on natural ecosystems is better *coordination*. That is because the elements are often highly interconnected. Flocks of birds or herds of animals, for instance, share behavioural protocols that connect the members to one another and enable them to move and act as a group rather than as an uncoordinated collection of individuals. The same is true of a company's strategy. If its complexity makes it hard to understand, rivals will struggle to imitate it, and the company will benefit (Reeves *et al.*, 2020:3). Complexity comes at a cost, however, including reducing an organisation's *efficiency*, a system's *understandability decreases*, and lack of understandability can lead to *unmanageability*; this, in turn, leads to *unpredictability*, whereby spontaneous and unexpected behaviours can emerge from the system and interventions can lead to unintended effects (Reeves *et al.*, 2020:4). In a large bank, such as the one in the primary research study, one is reminded that it takes time for a big ship to turn, compared to the time it may take a small speedboat.

In a business organisation, the equivalent is a set of simple underlying principles with which all elements and connections must comply. That increases the chances that new elements and connections will fit comfortably into the organisation and contains complexity (Reeves *et al.*, 2020:8). In a complex organisation, such as a retail bank, managing the cost and other undesirable effects of complexity is important, which elevates the need for systems thinking and articulating a complex system or concept in the simplest manner possible, to stakeholders to increase understanding and support, in principle. Maintaining complexity within productive bounds, however, is a difficult task involving challenging trade-offs. Fortunately, there are lessons that can be derived from

a few pioneering businesses—and from biological systems—on how to harness complexity on a sustainable basis (Reeves *et al.*, 2020:15).

Dependencies in the system must be harmonised, which requires *coordination*, including cognitive, epistemic, and semantic coordination (Brønn & Brønn, 2017). *Coordination* requires considerable effort, and selectively choosing which relationships can be fruitfully cultivated is important according to Halevy, Halali and Zlatev (2019).

For the system to function properly, the dependencies within the system must be harmonised (like the idea of a Symphonic C-Suite), which requires a great deal of coordination (Brønn & Brønn, 2017:300). An alternative view on coordination distinguishes between three dimensions, including cognitive, epistemic, and semantic coordination:

- 1) Cognitive coordination relates to the extent to which the employees share a common worldview (the thought world discussion in section 3.5.5 refers) of the business context.
- 2) Epistemic coordination refers to the questions of who knows what and of who *needs* to know what to function in the given business context.
- 3) Finally, semantic coordination refers to the extent that there is a common language among the stakeholders (for example, shared understanding of definitions or concepts, such as customer centricity).

The implications of these forms of coordination are important and the greatest challenge comes from working to achieve cognitive coordination (aligning thought worlds) (Brønn & Brønn, 2017:300). Epistemic and semantic coordination, while offering a unique set of challenges, do not engage other stakeholders to the same extent as cognitive coordination. Epistemic coordination can be achieved by providing information in new and/or different formats (which is also a function of cognitive coordination). Similarly, semantic coordination is enhanced by using clearer language. Coordination can be enhanced by fostering a culture of openness within the organisation. This can make it easier for cross-functional groups to exchange information and for alternative perspectives on issues to be surfaced. Opening up for interdisciplinary communications also emphasises the need for semantic coordination

as specialist groups frequently resort to shorthand jargon that may be indecipherable to outsiders. Epistemic coordination and semantic coordination can be seen as the basis for Mintzberg's standardisation coordination approaches (Brønn & Brønn, 2017:300).

Promoting coordination and cooperation sometimes require considerable effort and even ingenuity by third parties who need to identify opportunities for transferring information or resources from one context to another and selectively choose which ideas are worth pursuing and which relationships can potentially be fruitfully cultivated (Halevy, Halali and Zlatev, 2019:222).

3.5.5 Engagement

Stakeholder engagement requires extra efforts in sustainable business model innovation compared to conventional business model innovation (Velter *et al.*, 2020:3). Various stakeholders in the circularity often have different aims. Therefore, to reach a compromise, the ecosystem should incorporate multi-stakeholder *engagement* tools for sharing knowledge and best practice (Moggi & Dameri, 2020:2833). Continuous *engagement* also increases the members' sense of belonging to the ecosystem, strengthening the bonds between the participants, and reinforcing the boundaries of the ecosystem (Moggi & Dameri, 2020:2837).

Borrowing from Social Network Theory, which stipulates that the composition of social interactions that individuals *engage* with on a day-to-day basis impacts their exposure to and mutual influence on dissimilar ideas, opinions and perspectives and thus contributes to the individual's influence on organisational outcomes (Keller, Wong and Liou, 2020:3), aids an understanding of the impact of day-to-day engagements on ideas, opinions and perspectives. Trust seems to be an important ingredient in authentic engagements. A relationship of trust with stakeholders can lead to less conflicting situations and help to design strategies that engage stakeholders in organisational activities (Langrafe *et al.*, 2020:309).

3.5.6 A concept of intersecting and interacting components

The financial services industry in which the primary research single embedded case study is set remains a complex and dynamic network of socio-economic systems (Deloitte, 2020; EY Global, 2020; PwC, 2020; BASA, 2019; Burns *et al.*, 2019; Schwab, 2016/7; Coetzee, 2014; Jones, 2014; Baird & Gonzalez-Wertz, 2011). Ananda *et al.* (2016:177) argue that organisations adopting a transactional marketing approach will most likely focus on representation actions, while a customer-oriented organisation places more importance on engagement. According to Ananda *et al.* (2016:178): “The components of an organisation and its interdependent relations can be transformed; the components interact and intersect one another, leading to interconnected dimensions. Consequently, this transformation leads to not only less defined, but also more flexible and dynamic functional groups or elements of the marketing organisation”. This dynamic and complex context requires a continuous reflection on the role of participants and other stakeholders in the ecosystem. This also applies to the role of marketing leadership in directing key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity in the financial services industry context.

In conclusion, literature was reviewed related to conceptual frameworks, including an example of a conceptual development process, systems thinking, coordination and engagement and finally the concept of intersecting and interacting components was discussed.

3.6 Chapter conclusion

The literature review chapter endeavours to provide the existing foundational knowledge base to which the primary research study intends to contribute by achieving the following secondary research aims and objectives, including:

- 1) providing a deep understanding of customer centricity, marketing leadership and key internal stakeholder alignment
- 2) examining and describe the antecedents and potential consequences of improved customer centricity alignment

- 3) evaluating the potential role of marketing leadership in directing key internal stakeholder alignment to customer centricity, and
- 4) portraying the theoretical base for the proposed integration of the phenomena into a dynamic interdependent framework to ensure accelerated alignment to customer centricity.

The literature review provides the theoretical framework for the primary study and covers the review of literature on the three main phenomena of the study which are marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity, as well as their interrelationships and dynamic interaction. In terms of the theoretical framework, the three main components were discussed in more detail including defining the phenomena, the evolution of phenomena where relevant, potential benefits and challenges and measures of success, practical applications, gaps and emerging themes where relevant, limitations, and delineations of each phenomenon, as well as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the phenomena. Ultimately, the aim was to underpin the proposal to redefine and evolve the role of marketing leadership by harnessing its potential to successfully direct alignment of their key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity.

Chapter Four presents the research methodology employed during the primary research phase of the study.

4. CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and methodology and describes the rationale for using qualitative research, with a single embedded case study as the mode of enquiry. The chapter follows the researcher's review of academic, industry and organisational literature, which provides the foundation on which the study is built. The research questions informed the research design and methodology, including the data collection methods.

The selection of the primary research methodology was informed by "The Research Onion™" as described by Saunders *et al.* (2009:108), which include the research assumptions, the ontology, epistemology, and axiology. The "inside of The Research Onion™" clarifies the research philosophy, approach, strategy, mode of enquiry and methodology, as well as the time horizon, as depicted in Figure 4.1 below.

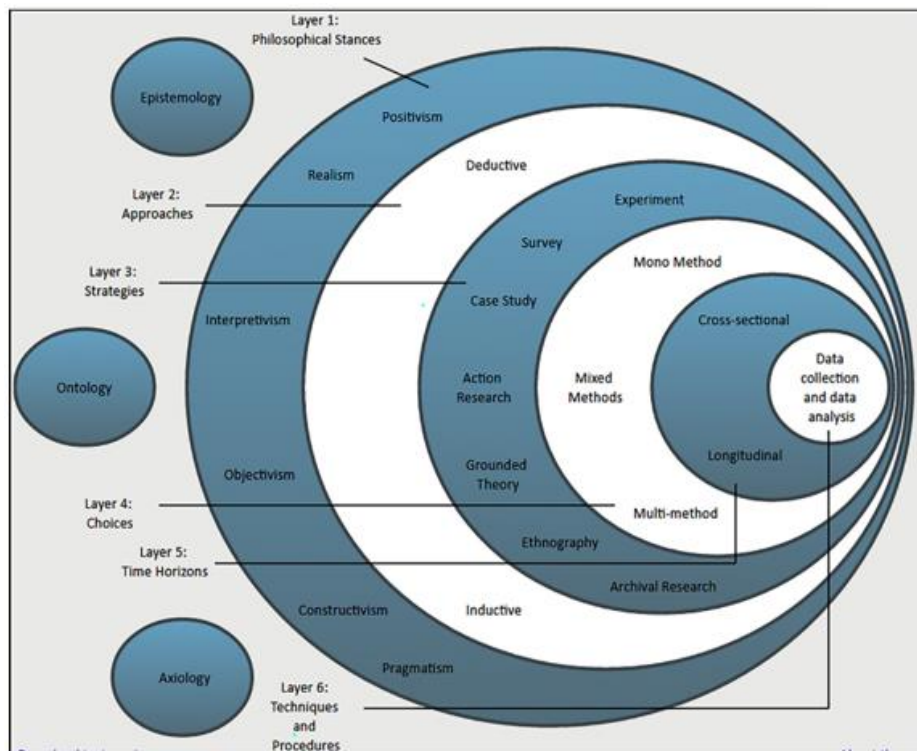


Figure 4.1 The Research Onion (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:108)

As qualitative research is widely used in social sciences such as management and leadership, this design was selected as it was deemed appropriate to the exploration of a current work-based phenomenon and would contribute towards the creation of a framework to guide marketing leadership in directing key internal stakeholders to align to evolving customer centricity in a South African retail bank (servicing individuals and small business owners). Ethical considerations, sampling design, the data collection method, data coding and analysis follow, prior to the conclusion of the chapter.

4.2 Contrasting quantitative and qualitative research in customer centricity perception studies

Habel *et al.* (2020) discusses customer centricity perception measurement and while the approach and context of the primary research conducted differed from that of Habel *et al.* (2020), the survey employed in this study nonetheless provided a basis for comparison, contrasting the use of quantitative versus qualitative customer centricity measurement approaches, as summarised in Table 4.1, column two, below.

Furthermore, a quantitative study published in August 2014 presented statistics of global marketers' rating of their organisations' customer centricity, which was pre-defined using five statements related to customer profiles and permission capturing; message personalisation; omni-channel device usage, orchestration of customer interactions based on their lifecycle and use of marketing automation to enhance client engagement and profitability, as summarised in Table 4.1, column three, below. In most cases global marketers did not present a stellar picture of their organisation's customer centricity, leaving room for improvement (marketingcharts.com).

Table 4.1 anchors the choice of primary research in this study, by contrasting qualitative and quantitative approaches followed, as well as theory versus the primary research as it relates to customer centricity.

Table 4.1: Operationalised variables in theory and primary research

Operationalised variable	Theory (Habel <i>et al.</i> 2020)	Theory (Marketing charts.com2014)	Primary research
Perceptions and perspectives of customer centricity (CC)	Examined organisation in totality and sales force specifically. Specific functions in the organisation, for example Marketing, Finance or Product Development were not examined.	Marketers' rating of their organisations' customer centricity, which was pre-defined using five statements related to customer profiles and permission capturing; message personalisation; omni-channel device usage, orchestration of customer interactions based on their lifecycle; use of marketing automation to enhance client engagement and profitability.	Employee perspectives of a bank's customer centricity in different roles and areas in the bank (e.g., Marketing, Finance, Product Heads) and seniorities (e.g. CEO, CFO, Product Heads, Marketing Heads and Marketing Managers) in the selected bank, were explored.
Sample Scope	Customers.	Employees.	Employees.
Method	Quantitative. Exploratory factor analysis.	Quantitative. Rating agreement with set statements.	Qualitative. Single embedded case study.
Themes identified	Deductively.	Deductively.	Deductively and inductively.

Locations where data was collected	United States and Europe. Developed economy.	Primarily in Europe. Developed economy.	South Africa. Emerging economy.
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Sources: Habel *et al.* (2020); marketingcharts.com (2014)

The comparison in Table 4.1 above provides a view of the contribution the researcher made by exploring the perspectives of selected employees rather than customers, qualitatively measuring their perceptions related to their organisation's/employer's customer centricity, using qualitative methods and deductive analysis, in the context of a retail bank in an emerging economy.

The section below provides the rationale for using qualitative research in the primary research that qualitatively examined perspectives on customer centricity.

4.3 Using qualitative research to study perspectives on customer centricity among employees

To address the research problem and answer the research questions, the researcher explored, investigated and reflected on marketing leaders. Mainly the Marketing Head and Marketing Manager role titles were included at the time. The collection of perspectives on marketing leadership's key internal stakeholders (mainly CEOs, CFOs, Product Heads in product houses/solution manufacturers), aimed to gain a deep understanding of the current and potential future role of marketing leadership in directing key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity. The research was conducted in the context of the head-office of a retail bank in South Africa.

To extract rich and descriptive responses from high-ranking employees on their perceptions related to customer centricity, the researcher selected a qualitative research method (as anchored in Table 4.1) and individually interviewed a select number of participants (Zikmund, 2003:115) in senior leadership roles in the head office context of a prominent retail bank in South Africa. The sample participants were carefully selected from executive and top management who are responsible for leading

a significant percentage of the bank's work force and are highly influential on matters impacting customer centricity. Participants were carefully selected as the researcher believed that they hold information, insights and perspectives that, if properly explored and interpreted, can help shape the potential future role of marketing leadership in directing key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity in the retail bank. A total of nineteen participants were included in the first round of data collection in 2018 and 2019 and seven participants from the original group of participants were interviewed to the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 (thus one phase of data collection was conducted prior to the outbreak of Covid-19 and another four years later, after the height of the immediate impact of the global pandemic). The research method enabled in-depth exploration through individual interviews and the suitability of the method to evaluate and understand potential for misalignment of key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity, as a phenomenon referred to in theory, matched the researcher's objectives for the study and signalled the ability to unlock value for the study. Most of the pre-Covid interviews were in-person face-to-face interviews, while all but one of the seven interviews in the second round were conducted virtually.

The selection of participants afforded the researcher the opportunity to gain deep knowledge and a clearer understanding from the deeper meaning of how others in similar circumstances interpret their shared environment, events, activities, and experiences, as it relates to the alignment of marketing leaders' key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity. The research aimed to examine the customer centricity related perspectives of marketing leaders, as well as their key internal stakeholders with whom the marketing leaders have regular interactions and share a high level of interdependence and interaction. Relative to the marketing leaders, key internal stakeholders could be peers, more senior or more junior in ranking. Hierarchy or seniority was not the primary focus of the study in relation to customer centricity alignment but was rather about functional capability to direct customer centricity in a relatively democratic or egalitarian ecosystem.

4.4 The Research Onion™ – “outside the The Research Onion™”

The primary research was based on the interpretivist tradition. The ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives of the researcher, as it relates to the study, are described below.

4.4.1 Ontology

The interpretivist ontology assumes the existence of multiple realities that are socially constructed and is focused on understanding behaviour rather than predicting it (Harrison & Reilly 2011:8). In the case of primary research, the researcher is interested in the expressed realities of marketing leaders and their key internal stakeholders, in as much as this relates to the ongoing improvement in the bank employees' alignment to evolving customer centricity. Most of the stakeholders, with professional training in the fields of accounting, actuarial sciences or engineering, operate in thought worlds that are different to those of professionals trained in marketing (Whitler 2014:90).

For agile marketing leadership teams, wanting to direct the customer centricity alignment of key internal stakeholders, sensemaking implies bridging the different “thought worlds” of employees from varying functional backgrounds (Kalaiganam, Tuli, Kushwaha, Lee and Gal 2021:40). Despite using similar terms and sharing new product development goals, different stakeholders may also attribute very different meanings to the same words, according to Kalaiganam *et al.* (2021:40). The perspective and unique lens through which the primary research problem was observed derives from the researcher having been part of the bank's marketing fraternity for more than two decades, and subsequently three and a half years in a business ownership role more closely associated with the key internal stakeholder functions, so the researcher's reality, perspective and lens has been shaped over a long time.

4.4.2 Epistemology

Subjective epistemology was utilised based on the view that knowledge is socially constructed, and that the external world is subjectively accessed. The researcher

directly interacted with research participants to generate knowledge. Themes and concepts could be identified from interpretation and co-creation of meaning from the data, derived from dialogues, social interaction and observation. The researcher believes that the contribution to the body of knowledge matters in the sense that it will enable marketing leaders to direct key internal stakeholders' alignment to evolving customer centricity, which the researcher believes to be an objective with broad and valuable application.

4.4.3 Axiology

The aim of the research was to obtain a deeper understanding of observed phenomena, described as the role of marketing leadership in strategically (not necessarily hierarchically) directing alignment of key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity, by conducting individual in-depth interviews with marketing leaders, as well as their key internal stakeholders to understand perspectives from multiple angles or realities, at specific moments in time (two phases). While the research process can be influenced by the values, ethics and unique appreciation of aesthetics exercised by the researcher, care was taken to not introduce researcher bias, by ensuring full transparency during every step of the process.

The research was approached based on full participant consent and agreement being obtained throughout the process. The research process complied with the Da Vinci Ethical Committee's requirements at the time of data collection (both phases). The support and approval of the banking group and bank division's Legal, Risk and Compliance areas were obtained. The relevant business unit's Learning and Development, Human Resources, as well as the bank's Industrial Relations area also supported the study.

The research aesthetics (beauty, art, and harmony) are summarised in the "Rack and Pinion" concept, which follows in Chapter Six and depicts the intelligent interplay between the three main components or phenomena of the research study, namely customer centricity, marketing leadership and key internal stakeholder alignment.

4.5 The Research Onion™ – “inside The Research Onion™”

The section below explains the inside of The Research Onion™, which includes the philosophical stance, approaches, strategies, choices, time horizons and techniques and procedures used during the primary research data collection phase.

4.5.1 Philosophical stance: Interpretivism

The researcher was the interpreter of the experiences and perspectives of the selected participants’ responses and assumes a socially constructed reality to explore the value-bound meaning it brings to them. The researcher remained aware of her own assumptions and biases and how these may impact on the analysis of the findings. The context was considered to avoid overlooking or misinterpreting patterns and themes. Given the interpretivist philosophical stance, the research was intended to interpret, rather than just describe, the phenomenon under review to identify commonalities and differences in the context of the participants’ lived experiences, and how they make sense of these (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019:45).

4.5.2 Deductive research approach

The literature review was undertaken to establish the theoretical framework within which the case study would be conducted. Through this process, the main phenomena of the framework were identified as customer centricity, marketing leadership and key internal stakeholder alignment. Sub-components used to support the theory on customer centricity included product versus customer centricity, customer centric organisational culture and reward structures under the main customer centricity component; responsible leadership and marketing leadership’s evolving role under the marketing leadership component and the symphonic C-Suite, collaboration challenged given different thought worlds, as well as siloed organisational structures under the key internal stakeholder alignment component.

Following two rounds of data collection, the coding and analysis of the participants’ individual in-depth interviews took place in 2019 and 2020 (pre-Covid-19) and 2022 and

2023 (following the height of the global pandemic) respectively from which themes emerged, as explained by Bloomberg and Volpe (2019:95): “data is analysed for themes, patterns and issues”.

4.5.3 Strategy and mode of enquiry: Case study

In general, a single embedded case study is a study exploring how or why things are a certain way, which would indicate the suitability of a qualitative approach (Gay & Airasian, 2003:13). Case studies provide deeper insights in the context of a specific setting, which helps with sense-making and sense-giving (Gioia, 2021:21). A case study should generate a plausible, defensible explanation of some phenomenon of interest. It is not about chasing some version of a correct explanation (Gioia, 2021:27). Individual in-depth interview responses from a select number of participants provided the input data for a study of individuals in their real-life context. The primary research strategy selection, as well as the distinct assumptions, are discussed below, prior to a discussion on the application of the layers of The Research Onion™, as presented by Saunders *et al.*, (2009:108).

4.5.4 Methodology selection: mono-method

A mono-method was used, meaning that qualitative research was selected as the method of choice, based on the problem statement and purpose which informed the research approach. A conceptualisation of the matter, as well as its various parts, was required. An understanding of the context, circumstance, environment, and milieu (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019:38) needed to be obtained. Qualitative research also enables an understanding of subject matter in its real-world complexity and allows for the description, explanation and communication of the understanding (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019:38).

4.5.5 Time horizon: longitudinal

The time horizon of the primary research in terms of data collection was longitudinal. The literature review commenced in 2016 and was completed in 2023, when the second

phase of the primary research data collection was also concluded. The first phase of data collection in the primary research phase was the empirical study serving as a qualitative audit or stock-take of perspectives of participants related to the current and future role of marketing leadership in directing key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity against the background that the selected retail bank focus specifically on customer centricity, since it introduced its new operating model. The first phase's interview guide was finalised to the end of 2018, whereafter suitable participants were identified and invited to participate in the individual interviews. The researcher conducted most interviews in the first half of 2019, sent interview recordings for verbatim transcription and did quality checking of verbatim transcriptions in 2019, and commenced coding and analysis.

In the second phase of data collection as part of the primary research, the researcher went back to some of the original participants who were still in the country and working in the organisation in either marketing leadership or key internal stakeholder roles (original or close to original roles). This phase (post the height of Covid-19) was started to the end of 2022 and concluded early in 2023. The researcher continued to consult and review new publications as part of the ongoing literature review to reflect on progress and insights gained from the first phase of the primary research data collection, based on new content published between 2019 and 2023, parallel to the longitudinal data collection approach, which highlights the dynamic and ever evolving nature of the phenomena as well as a different world context given the onset, height and decline of the global Covid-19 pandemic, which rapidly accelerated market and organisational use of digital interfaces and the 5th Industrial Revolution. This was as a consequence of widespread lock-downs as a result of the Covid-19 global pandemic, causing an even more urgent need for improved customer centricity in the face of many new opportunities and challenges.

4.6 Population

The rationale for selecting the chosen retail bank as the preferred ecosystem is that it is the ecosystem within which the researcher observed the phenomena that lead to the identification of the research opportunity. The population framework spans the relevant

divisions in the Banking Group, where each of the Customer Segments had a Segment CEO (Tables 4.2 and 4.3 below). The manufacturer Pillars (Transact, Lend, Invest, Insure) have multiple CEOs in a number of product houses; for example, the Invest Pillar had a CEO for “off-balance sheet” investments (e.g., shares, unit trusts) as well as a CEO for Retail Cash Investments and a CEO for Commercial Cash Investments (or “on-balance sheet” savings and investments), while the Lend Pillar had a CEO for Home Loans, Personal Loans, Credit Card and Vehicle Finance. The “Enablers” (in this instance, the data and analytics team enabling quick data-driven decisioning models in the organisation) also have senior executives, but they are not necessarily CEOs.

4.7 Sampling

Sampling was used during the primary research instead of interviewing the entire population of CEOs, CFOs, Product Heads in product houses and Heads of Marketing (the population framework in the previous section) as it would have been impractical, inefficient, costly, time-consuming and unnecessary, given the exploratory nature of the research objective. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants, which allows for the collection of rich information that can lead to valuable insights. The purposive sample size of the primary research eventually consisted of nineteen (19) participants in total, including ten marketing leaders (including segment marketing heads, select sub-segment marketing heads and select product houses’ heads of marketing) and nine key internal stakeholders (CEOs, CFO, Product Heads in select product houses and select representatives from business units called “enablers”). The sample size of 19 participants, as well as the split between marketing leaders and their key internal stakeholders, was not pre-determined as explained below. The researcher initially intended to ensure the inclusion of marketing leaders and key internal stakeholders from the Transact, Invest and Lend Pillars, which was achieved. These pillars account for most of the retail bank’s strategic impact. The inclusion of senior segment marketing leaders and an enablement representative was based on participants’ references to these areas, which suggested that the perspectives of these areas should be included in the study. Since the first round of data collection was concluded in 2019 prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher decided to conduct a second round of data collection to assess the impact of the pandemic on the case retail bank and the

main phenomena (marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity). The second round of data collection also served as a form of triangular validation of the study. Seven participants were included in the sample.

4.7.1 Phase one of data collection

This resulted in eighteen (18) participants in the first phase of data collection, at which point saturation was reached as evident from the responses from participants.

The primary research participants hold executive and senior leadership positions with considerable influence, and they represent some of the largest business units in the retail bank (excluding the corporate bank and private bank, for example - see Tables 4.2 and 4.3 below), with a significant number of direct and indirect reports, which should positively impact the trustworthiness and creditability of the data on which findings are based.

- 1) Nine Marketing leaders representing product houses in the Transact, Invest and Lend pillar, with some spanning both Retail and Commercial Banking and others either Retail (for individuals) or Commercial Banking. Segment (Retail and Commercial) and sub-segment (e.g., responsible for Private Wealth, Affluent, Mass Affluent and Middle Market clients) marketing leaders also participated.
- 2) Nine key internal stakeholders, ranged from *CEOs* in product houses representing the Transact, Invest and Lend pillar, *CFOs* in product houses representing the Invest and Lend pillar and *Product Heads* in product houses representing the Invest and Lend pillar, were involved in interviews, with some spanning both Retail and Commercial Banking and others only Retail or Commercial Banking.

Table 4.2 Phase 1 - Nine Marketing Leaders participated in the in-depth interviews

Nine Marketing Leaders participated in the individual in-depth interviews				
Participant Nr.	Role:	Segment: Business, Retail, or both (responsible for both	Seniority	Interview duration: (minutes:seconds)

	Marketing Leader	Retail and Business segments, so the role straddles both segments)		
1.	Marketing	Retail Segment	Marketing Head	47:31
2.	Marketing	Retail Segment	Marketing Head	68:07
3.	Marketing	Retail Segment	Marketing Manager	89:09
4.	Marketing	Retail Segment	Marketing Head	86:37
5.	Marketing	Retail Segment	Marketing Manager	58:02
6.	Marketing	Business Segment	Marketing Head	56:59
7.	Marketing	Both Segments	Marketing Manager	60:56
8.	Marketing	Both Segments	Marketing Head	66:54
9.	Marketing	Retail Segment	Marketing Head	61:55

Table 4.3 Nine Key Internal Stakeholders participated in the in-depth interviews

Nine Key Internal Stakeholders participated in the individual in-depth interviews
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Participant Nr.	Role:	Segment:	Seniority:	Interview duration:
	Key Internal Stakeholder	Business, Retail, or both segments (responsible for both Retail and Business segments, so the role straddles both segments)		
1.	Key Internal Stakeholder	Retail Segment	Product House CEO	First session: 57:10 Second session (continuation of pilot interview): 33:23 PILOT INTERVIEW (One participant, two sittings, due to time constraints – which highlighted that the interview time had to be extended)
2.	Key Internal Stakeholder	Both Segments	Product House CFO	72:02
3.	Key Internal Stakeholder	Both Segments	Product House Product Head	67:04
4.	Key Internal Stakeholder	Retail Segment	Product House CFO	54:36
5.	Key Internal Stakeholder	Retail Segment	Product House Product Head	78:48

6.	Key Internal Stakeholder	Retail Segment	Product House CEO	28:40
7.	Key Internal Stakeholder	Business Segment	Product House CEO	54:57
8.	Key Internal Stakeholder	Both Segments	Enablement function	47:38
9.	Key Internal Stakeholder	Both Segments	Pillar Head	60:04

The purposive sample included eighteen carefully selected participants. Knowing when enough participants have been included in the survey and whether all the required data have been collected can be difficult to gauge. From literature, the principle of saturation is given as a guideline. Saturation here means the point at which no new themes or categories emerged from the data collection process. If new data does not contribute new insight, one can say that research has covered all possible understandings of the phenomena. Quality, originality of contribution and saturation were some of the guiding principles used to decide sample size in the qualitative research (Modha *et al.*, 2017:29&30).

4.7.2 Phase two of data collection

Phase two of data collection involved seven (7), six former participants from the first phase of data collection and one new participant.

The participants hold executive and senior leadership positions with considerable influence, and they represent some of the largest business units in the bank (see Tables 4.4 and 4.5 below):

- 1) Two marketing leaders were included, since several marketing leaders included in the first phase had either left the country or the organisation. No further participants were available to be interviewed.
- 2) Five key internal stakeholders, ranged from *CEOs, CFOS and Product Heads* in product houses, were involved in interviews spanning both Retail and Commercial Banking.

Table 4.4 Phase 2 - Two marketing leaders participated in the second phase of in-depth interviews

Two marketing leaders participated in the individual in-depth interviews				
Participant Nr.	Role: Marketing Leader	Segment: Business, Retail, or both (responsible for both Retail and Business segments, so the role straddles both segments)	Seniority	Interview duration: (minutes:seconds)
1.	Marketing	Both Segments	Marketing Head	1:03:15
2.	Marketing	Retail Segment	Marketing Head	27:47

Table 4.5 Phase 2 - Five Key Internal Stakeholders participated in the in-depth interviews

Five Key Internal Stakeholders participated in the second phase of the individual in-depth interviews				
Participant Nr.	Role: Key Internal Stakeholder	Segment: Business, Retail, or both segments (responsible for	Seniority:	Interview duration:

		both Retail and Business segments, so the role straddles both segments)		
1.	Key Internal Stakeholder	Both Segments	Product Head	1:01:10
2.	Key Internal Stakeholder	Both Segments	Product House CFO	1:10:14
3.	Key Internal Stakeholder	Business Segment	Product House CEO	48:44
4.	Key Internal Stakeholder	Retail Segment	Product House CEO	1:02:37
5.	Key Internal Stakeholder	Retail Segment	CEO-level - Revealing title could reveal individual	58:23

4.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical principles were followed. The participation of respondents was voluntary. The discussion guide was pre-approved by the academic supervisors and respondents were informed that they were at liberty to end the interview at any time. No vulnerable adults were involved in the research and no sensitive personal information was required. There were no known risks or dangers associated with this research.

Stored voice recordings of interviews stated:

- 1) The nature and purpose of the research.
- 2) The identity and institutional association of the researcher.

- 3) The fact that participation was voluntary.
- 4) The responses were and will be treated in a confidential manner.
- 5) Limits on confidentiality may apply.
- 6) Anonymity will be ensured where appropriate (such as Coded/ disguised names of participants/ respondents/ institutions).
- 7) Participants were free to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves.

Researchers have a responsibility to avoid or at least limit any negative effect on participants. Da Vinci Institute's Ethical Committee clearance was not a requirement at the time the first phase of data collection was conducted, but the fieldwork process followed was still presented to the committee for noting, following the publication of the new requirements. The committee confirmed that there were no further requirements following the submission for noting. The Da Vinci Institute's Ethics Committee granted ethics clearance for the second phase of primary research data collection, prior to the data collection being conducted to the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023.

The bank's Legal Department's Intellectual Property Legal Counsel provided written confirmation that the recordings of the first round of data collection may be shared with an external research house for transcription, given that the interviews were conducted with participants in senior and executive roles of the bank. The Legal Department did not have access to the content of the recordings. Furthermore:

- 1) None of the bank's customer data were accessed or used.
- 2) The bank is the owner of the intellectual property (IP) that subsists in the research.
- 3) The bank requires an exclusive royalty-free, worldwide, perpetual licence to use and/or commercialise any aspect or element of the research.
- 4) The bank's employees and research will not disclose any of the bank's sensitive or confidential information/trade secrets/IP (considering that even though confidential information and/or the name of the bank may not necessarily be mentioned in the research, it will necessarily relate to the bank).

4.9 Data Collection

The researcher conducted each of the interviews in full in both rounds of data collection, which were all individual, in-depth, face-to-face (with one exception where the interview was conducted via Skype) in round one, using the semi-structured interview guide, with marketing leaders and their key internal stakeholders as participants as indicated in Tables 4.2 and 4.3. The second round of interviews were conducted using MS Teams, except for one participant's interview, who preferred a face-to-face interview.

The individual in-depth interviews were scheduled well in advance and at times that suited the participants. It was agreed that there would be no interruptions during the interview period.

Interview questions were open-ended, so participants could answer from their unique perspective and experiences. The data collection process, from first contact with the participant, through to booking interview time and conducting the interview, to sending the thank-you note post interview, was managed carefully and professionally by the researcher, throughout the process.

4.9.1 Access to elites

The literature explains that "elites" are groups of individuals in societies who are superior because of their position of power, authority, talent, and privileges, hence the influence that they may exert on others. These elites are often difficult to access because of the need to alleviate time pressures around their commitments. Maramwidze-Merrison (2016:157) observes that building relationships and trust and maintaining relationships, for example, are useful practical ways to obtain access to individuals.

During the primary research data collection phases, it was clear that the more senior the research participant, the more difficult it would be to obtain an interview commitment. The researcher had the benefit of having been an employee of the

organisation for a long time, which helped in securing interviews with senior executives and ensured better researcher interpretation of data in the context.

4.9.2 Interviewing principles

The importance of applying good interviewing skills, thoughtful question formulation and the ability to navigate complex conversations to optimise learning was considered in preparation for, and applied during, the interviews. The principles of ethical academic interviewing including honesty, patience, accuracy and objectivity were applied by the researcher. Care was taken to ensure the confidentiality of participants.

4.9.3 Pilot Interview

A pilot interview for the first round of data collection was conducted in November 2018 with a follow-up session to complete the interview in January 2019 since the original time allocation was not sufficient. The clarity of the discussion points, as well as the logistics, including venue set-up, minimised noise-levels and interruption management and interview recording were tested and optimised. The learnings were integrated to enhance future interviews, most of which were conducted in the first half of 2019. Enhancements post the pilot interview were primarily based on the duration of the interview, which needed to be extended to 1.5 hours from the original 1-hour period. Although there was technically only one pilot interview (conducted over two sittings), every additional interview gave the researcher an enhanced foundation to work from as the researcher became more mindful of tactics to use for optimum results in relation to time management, as well as awareness of participant attention span and energy level.

4.9.4 The data collection instrument: semi-structured interview guide

The use of a semi-structured interview guide for both rounds with open-ended questions for the individual, face-to-face or virtual in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to be flexible and navigate the conversation to pursue and discover new paths within a framework as information emerged. Discussion points for the interview guide were crafted with the aim of addressing the research question and sub-questions

as informed by the review of literature and the theoretical framework. The interview guides are provided as Appendix C and D. Open-ended discussion points were introduced, allowing participants to provide their own comments. Vogt, Brown, and Isaacs (2003:1-12) emphasise the importance of asking the right questions and argue that engaging questions that spark interest and curiosity may reveal more of what needs to be known and that powerful questions can transcend boundaries. Learning to engage thoughtful questions can lead to insight, innovation and action, and doing so will become an essential strategic capability for leaders of organisations who want to create sustainable results in the face of both short-term and longer-term challenges and opportunities (Vogt *et al.*, 2003:8).

The interview guides used to collect data for the two data collection phases were developed in the last quarter of 2018 and 2022 respectively, based on customer centricity, marketing leadership and key internal stakeholder alignment literature reviewed by the researcher. The theoretical framework informed the design of the interview guide about the emphasis on shared understanding of terms used in organisations to aid sense-making, the importance of organisational alignment to evolving customer centricity, marketing leadership challenges and opportunities, as well as stakeholder management considerations. The same semi-structured interview guides were then used in all the interviews, although each interview called for a unique approach to ensure that responses were captured and understood as they were intended.

Given the importance of shared understanding of how phenomena are defined (Kalaighnam *et al.*, 2021) and as a point of departure in conversations, the first phase of data collection's interview guide started off with questions requesting participants to share their understanding of the main phenomena of the study, including customer centricity, marketing leadership, key internal stakeholders, and alignment. These terms are often used in the selected bank, and it is the researcher's observation that employees assume they mean the same thing when they use the same word/s. The intent specific to enquiry about shared understanding was to explore if there is misalignment in the use or understanding of key terms given the different thought worlds of different disciplines, which could then be a source of further misalignment as

stakeholders assume a shared understanding as a basic point of departure in a conversation. When it is the case that phenomena are understood differently, it may create a weak foundation for discussions and debates to take place in a positive manner. Further questions in the semi-structured interview guide were informed by quotes or references from literature to provide context or structure to the guide. Questions were included in the interview guide to explore participants' perspectives on marketing leadership directing their key internal stakeholders' alignment to customer centricity, despite conflicting needs and interests.

The interview guide for the second phase of data collection was organised into sections, starting off with a few warm-up questions about the perceived general, organisational and global impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, after which the discussion shifted to the three main phenomena of the study: customer centricity, marketing leadership and key internal stakeholder alignment and lastly, the dynamic interaction and interdependence between these main phenomena were explored and discussed in more detail and depth.

4.10 Transcription

The verbatim transcription process for the first phases of data collection was outsourced. The interview recordings were converted into Windows Media Audio (WMA) file format via an app called Audio Converter to allow the transmission via Dropbox™ to transcribers. This was done to save time as transcription takes several days and the intention was that the process should not be delayed unnecessarily by waiting for all the interviews to be completed first. The researcher performed quality control on the transcripts to explain acronyms used or fill in blanks where the transcribers were unable to follow the recording.

Since most of the interviews for the second phase of data collection were conducted virtually via MS Teams, which has recording and transcription functions, the researcher did not need to make use of an external transcription service.

4.11 Quality controls

Academic supervisor approval of each step and outcome of the research journey, oversight by the Da Vinci Institute Ethics Committee, as well as the transcription of the first round of interviews by an external party and the subsequent checking for accuracy by the researcher serves as evidence of the researcher's commitment to delivering high quality research.

4.12 Data Analysis

The data analysis section provides insight into the open, axial, and selective coding and qualitative data analysis, as well as trustworthiness, credibility, validity and reliability of the research process as described below.

4.12.1 Qualitative coding

Three coding techniques were used for analysing text data derived from verbatim transcriptions in the first phase of data collection of each participant's recorded interviews. Open, axial, and selective coding and analysis were conducted by the researcher; open coding (identify categories; coding begins to identify major categories), axial coding (flesh out and link to sub-categories; identification of possible relationships between categories identified during open coding) and selective coding (form theoretical scheme; as the final process, interrelationships between categories were confirmed and a storyline emerges), according to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019:56/7).

Coding was conducted to compare participants' responses with company and academic literature, as explained below and informed by the definition of a code as described by Saldana (2016), as quoted in Bloomberg and Volpe (2019:239): "A code (word or short phrase) is a researcher generated construct that symbolises and therefore attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purpose of pattern detection, categorisation, theory-building and other analytic processes. A code is therefore

basically an insignia which captures meaningful content or insights as an essential basis for signalling analytical utility in future”.

In the case of the primary research, the text or texts are the verbatim transcriptions of the in-depth, face-to-face interviews conducted, as clarified by Bloomberg and Volpe (2019:240). There is no counting or measurements.

Thematic analysis was used. Thematic analysis is not for purposes of generalising beyond the case but for rich description of the case in order to understand the complexity thereof, according to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019:51). The goal is more transferability – how can the knowledge be applied in a similar context or setting. The researcher attempts to address the issue of transferability by way of thick, rich description that will create the basis for relevance and potential application in a broader context.

The first step in the coding process for the first phase of data collection was to read all the verbatim transcriptions in Microsoft Word format to obtain a general sense of the participants’ contribution to the study. This was followed by re-reading verbatim transcriptions, this time with a better view of the holistic body of content generated through the data collection phase. After re-reading all transcriptions, words and their synonyms, phrases and powerful and meaningful verbatim quotes that capture participants’ thoughts and ideas were identified. The CTRL+F keyboard function was used in each participant’s transcript in Microsoft Word format to ensure all references to identified ideas are considered; for example, reward/incentive/bonus/increase/monetary recognition. Common items or recurring references were then grouped, for example:

- 1) Group 1 – Reward, including words and phrases such as financial gain from effort for reward/incentive/bonus/increase/recognition
- 2) Group 2 – Culture, including words and phrases such as culture, walking the talk, the way we do things.

In both phase one and phase two of the data post-collection coding process, meaningful verbatim quotes were identified, for example:

- 1) Reward: “You need to make sure that people are rewarded if they achieve success within those criteria...”
- 2) Culture: “The fact that a leader of one of the big tech companies in the world spends all his time talking about culture and empathy...”

More detailed notes were developed to help structure the open coding from words, phrases or quotes to more meaningful emerging themes. During axial coding, potential connections and relationships were highlighted. Exceptionally positive or negative sentiments were noted. Interview recordings were reviewed multiple times, and further notes were made, capturing words, phrases and themes and establishing connections and relationships and picking up on exceptionally positive or negative sentiment in participants’ tone, which may not be as clear in transcriptions.

A key component of analysis is the coding of the material to be investigated and this can be approached inductively or deductively. In the primary research, an inductive approach to coding was used. As explained by Bloomberg and Volpe (2019:240) and (Gioia, 2021:24), “If approached inductively, the researcher begins the research with a brief list of themes and identifies more as the research as the coding and research process occurs. Regardless of the approach, the researcher must create a coding scheme that places the content of the text into systematic categories that can be related back to the research questions”. Conceptual analysis which establishes the existence and frequency of concepts and relational analysis which establishes relationships among concepts are conducted and the method is “inherently reductive” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019:241). Rather than counting the frequency of occurrence of concepts, the pondering, categorising, organising, synthesising, and conceptualising are most important, also enabled by axial coding (Gioia, 2021:25). Total immersion and closeness to the data is an outcome of coding well, as noted by Bloomberg and Volpe (2019:241), “Coding is the first step to really rethinking the data”.

4.12.2 Data analysis

The mono-method research design ensured that rich data was collected and analysed using qualitative analysis methods and working with new and original themes that emerge, rather than to structure categories upfront based on existing models.

Each participant's response was analysed before comparing participant responses to identify similarities, differences, and inter-relationships (Gioia, 2021:25). Categories that were identified were then explored and confirmed guided by analytical principles rather than rules. The aim was to understand the phenomenon holistically (Bloomberg & Volpe 2019:105), despite complexity, and to obtain a perspective overall, rather than just a sum of the parts. The focus is on complex interdependencies (such as marketing versus finance/CFOs or marketing versus CEOs) and ecosystem dynamics (for example, the power of a product houses versus customer sub-segments or marketers versus key internal stakeholders) that cannot be reduced in any meaningful way to linear cause-and-effect relationships and/or a few separate variables.

A researcher's own voice, perspective, and reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2019) could impact on qualitative methodology. A credible voice conveys authenticity and trustworthiness. The researcher aimed for objectivity and actively tried to prevent subjectivity and data manipulation which can undermine credibility (Mohajan, 2018:28). Presenting a balanced grasp and honest portrayal of a complex world with a considered awareness of the political context at play, was an aim of the researcher (Patton, 2002:495).

4.12.3 Trustworthiness, credibility, reliability or dependability, and validity

Quality in qualitative research involves assurance of trustworthiness (including credibility and confirmability), truth value and internal validity, applicability or external validity, consistency or reliability and neutrality or objectivity. Qualitative researchers must try to ensure validity by using evidence collected during the research process itself to prove that any alternative explanations for a phenomenon are unlikely to be accurate (Harley & Cornelissen, 2022:31). The following criteria were used: trustworthiness in

qualitative research; credibility (believability), dependability (consistency), confirmability (ability to corroborate) and transferability (applicability), in line with guidelines from Bloomberg and Volpe (2019:202-206).

4.12.3.1 Trustworthiness, credibility, and reliability or dependability

To ensure *trustworthiness* of chosen participants during the research process the researcher selected senior employees with successful careers who made significant contributions to the bank and who are trusted with large portfolios, significant performance targets and sizable staff complements. Additional detail is provided in section 4.7 on participant selection during the purposive sampling process. The researcher and participants acted in good faith; there would be no benefit to a participant wanting to undermine the study. Being open, transparent and truthful would carry more benefit since honest input can help improve the bank's customer centricity.

Credibility in qualitative research means that the findings are accurate, and the researcher attempted to present a true picture of the phenomenon under investigation. To achieve credibility the researcher's representation of the participant's views should be consistent (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017:49-50). Interviews conducted for the primary research study were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure responses were accurately captured and can be verified. Credibility was established through a detailed description of processes used as a trail of evidence for the research, including the thematic data analysis process, as suggested by Roberts, Dowell and Nie (2019:1).

With regard to the choice of participants, individuals with proven track records in the industry and specific organisation were selected. All participants are significant stakeholders in the bank and would potentially benefit from an open and transparent approach to participating in the research. Since participation was completely voluntary, it was unlikely that a participant would take the time to participate in the research and then undermine the research project by acting in a manner that will bring their credibility into question.

Given the subjective nature of qualitative data and because it is set in a single context, it is difficult to apply conventional standards of *reliability* or *dependability* (Mohajan, 2018:40). Coding by the researcher and oversight by two academic supervisors with significant research experience increased reliability. Reliability of good research increases transparency and decreases opportunities to insert researcher bias in qualitative research (Mohajan, 2017).

4.12.3.2 Validity

It is suggested that validity in qualitative research can be established by investigating four aspects (Bloomberg & Volpe 2019: 203), namely:

- 1) content (sampling frame and instrument development description);
- 2) criterion-related (comparison and testing of the instrument and analysis tools between researchers, for example, inter-rater, or inter-coder testing); and
- 3) construct validity (appropriateness of data-led inferences to the research question using reflexive techniques);
- 4) triangulation through the two-stages approach taken

The determination of validity can be best achieved by a detailed and reflexive account of procedures and methods, allowing the reader to see how the lines of inquiry have led to conclusions.

Table 4.6 below suggests questions to ask to assess validity and a response that is applicable to the primary research conducted is provided.

Table 4.6 Questions asked to assess validity

Question	Application from primary research
How might the results and conclusions be wrong?	While the researcher was careful to confirm understanding of the participant’s answers during the interview, there may still be some room for misinterpretation of meaning, intent, or sentiment. The researcher may incorrectly conclude that there is a

	correlation or causality between elements, which may not be the case.
What are the plausible alternative interpretations and validity threats to these, and how will they be dealt with?	The transparency of the coding and analysis process largely mitigates the risk of invalid interpretations. Results were also reviewed by academic supervisors to critically evaluate the interpretations or offer input to suggest alternative interpretations that may have to be considered.
How can the available data support or challenge the ideas about what is going on?	Support: Direct quotes and verbatim transcriptions can provide clarity. Density of data between participants can also help confirm a result as it is perceived by several different participants. Challenge: Words or phrases used out of context can undermine the quality of results and impact the findings. Where participants have trouble expressing or articulating their exact thoughts, the results and findings could be compromised, although the data was captured and processed correctly. The researcher did clarify participants' intended meaning during interviews if they were not immediately clear.
Why should the results be believed?	Every step of the research was carefully designed, presented and approved by experienced research supervisors and conducted with integrity and ethical intent. Interviews were all recorded and transcribed verbatim. Coding and analysis were done by the researcher. Results and findings were based on the data collected and processes as indicated.

Four questions to assess validity of data analysis in qualitative research are shared in the above table and their application to the primary research case study is discussed.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019:203/4) suggest the following research strategies to increase validity which informed the primary research as detailed in Table 4.7 below.

Table 4.7 Ensuring validity in qualitative research

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019:203-204)	Application in primary research
Clarify any biases upfront	Researcher disclosed involvement in the organisation and discipline upfront. Every step of the research process was presented to and agreed with the researcher to ensure full transparency.
Discuss engagement in field	Protocols set out by the Da Vinci Institute Ethics Committee at the time of each of the rounds of data collection were followed and confirmed.
Present necessary detail	“Thick descriptions” are provided in the research report and more detail is available on request.
Triangulate	Data from interview participants, organisational reports, as well as literature will be triangulated to support the researcher’s findings.
Peer-briefings or “thought partners”	Several discussions were held about the research between the researcher and the two academic supervisors.

The application of data analysis theory to ensure validity in qualitative research presented in Table 4.7 above details the strategies employed, such as upfront clarification of biases, triangulation, and peer briefings, as well as their practical application, including researcher disclosures, treatment of data from interview participants, organisational reports, as well as literature to support the researcher’s findings and thought-partner discussions, debate, and guidance.

4.13 Conclusion

The research methodology chapter details the contrast between quantitative and qualitative research in customer centricity studies and examines the use of qualitative

research in a study to understand perspectives on customer centricity among employees. The ontological, epistemological, and axiological context of the primary research, together with The Research Onion™ guidelines, population framework, sampling design, ethical considerations, data collection, transcription, quality controls and data analysis used during the primary research were also discussed. Finally, transparency, credibility, reliability or dependability, and validity considerations were addressed.

5. CHAPTER FIVE

EMERGING THEMES AND KEY FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The emerging themes, as identified through thematic data analysis, will be presented in this chapter, with a view to addressing the research problem, primary and secondary research questions, as well as the research objectives. This chapter follows the research methodology described in Chapter Four. Emerging themes identified after extensive thematic data analysis of both round one and two of data collection are discussed in the section below.

5.2 Emerging themes

Emerging themes and sub-themes were identified after listening and re-listening to interview recordings, reading and re-reading verbatim transcripts and significant researcher reflection which resulted in the coding structures, as influenced and informed by the research problem, question, and sub-questions, as well as the consideration of the theoretical framework. The themes include modernising the role of marketing leadership in the retail bank being studied, the intention to become more customer centric and the conditions required for the successful implementation of customer centricity, bridging gaps, setting boundaries and achieving balance, as well as understanding the dynamic interaction and interdependence between the main phenomena. Emerging themes have sub-themes and, in some cases, a sub-theme could fit under more than one emerging theme; in those cases, the sub-theme was placed under the most appropriate emerging theme, since emerging themes are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Given the rapidly evolving nature of customer centricity and its status as independent variable, the researcher again asked participants about their understanding of the construct named customer centricity during the second round of interviews to the end

of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, to source their views on a more recent attempt to understand customer centricity, offered by Habel *et al.* (2020).

References made to participants' contributions are attributed using a participant code, "K" for key internal stakeholders and "M" for marketing leadership. The round in which the data was collected is indicated by an "R", with "R1" for the first round (2018/9) and "R2" for the second round (2022/3).

5.2.1 ROUND ONE: Emerging theme one: Modernising the role of marketing leadership in the retail bank

This emerging theme contributes to addressing the following research sub-question one: How could marketing leadership direct key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity? The first emerging theme highlights the opportunity to modernise the role of marketing leadership in a retail bank by adding the responsibility to marketing leadership to direct their key internal stakeholders' alignment to evolving customer centricity. Since the overall emerging theme is quite broad, the results are divided into sub-themes to help structure the discussion of results, findings, recommendations and management implications. The sub-themes include understanding the current role of marketing leadership and reframing the future role, directing key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity, role expansion or contraction.

5.2.1.1 Understanding the current role and reframing the future role of marketing leadership in a retail bank

Three marketers and two key internal stakeholders commented on change and growth in marketing leadership's role. Participant (M3R1) observed that the role is changing and there is growth but it is not adequate, while (M8R1) noted the scope has become greater and broader. Another marketer (M4R1) noted that the role of marketing leadership has shifted: "I think there's the one end which is around the regulatory environment that is fundamentally shifted and focussed against the customer led thinking. You've got

market conduct. You've got treating customers fairly". Key internal stakeholder (K4R1) noted that marketing leadership is doing better than before, and the participant is happy with the progress and mentioned that marketing leadership missed a trick in the past. Stakeholder (K9R1) challenged marketing leadership to continually change and enhance their outputs. The need is to shift and change the market and do it differently by changing the game. The same participant noted that the scope of marketing leadership is to change the hearts and minds of customers. Participants (K1R1, M5R1, M8R1) stated that marketers must use and enhance their skills to connect with customers to the benefit of the solution set they are responsible for. Marketing leadership should, according to another participant (K3R1), regulate all touch points with bank customers and it was also noted that marketing leadership should positively drive client thinking in their role and that the role and scope should include entrenching existing clients, not only attracting new clients to the bank.

5.2.1.2 Directing key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity

All eighteen participants, nine marketing leaders and nine key internal stakeholders, actively contributed to the discussion of the role of marketing in directing their key internal stakeholders' alignment to evolving customer centricity during the first round of interviews. Marketing participant (M1R1) suggested marketing leadership should be helping with framing of future messages and they should clearly define, interpret and disseminate the strategic business principles that the bank wants to achieve. Once principles are mapped out, buy-in is important, emphasised (M3R1). Marketing leadership should be the custodians of the bank's customers with a deep understanding of the market in every sense, observed a marketing leader (M5R1). Marketing leadership must be close to internal data, as marketers play a critical role. Marketing leaders are storytellers who need to translate back and portray things back into the market in a way that the customer will understand and internalise (K7R1, M5R1). Marketing leadership should be central, observed another marketing leader. "It is the glue; it should help with customer centricity; we should understand the bank's customers at a far more granular level. Where are the South African consumer insights based on customer research?" (M9R1)

Responses from marketing leaders highlighted the following challenges, including an opportunity to increase consistency, a need to have difficult discussions with each other and challenge those in authority as necessary where they did not present a client centric posture. A mindset change could be a challenge; it must start at the top if all bank departments are not currently clear on strategy. Depending on whether marketing leadership already have a mindset of thinking of the market position in time and over time, they need to give feedback continuously to stakeholders to confirm what the market is looking for and what they like, *inter alia*; the job is to get them into that mindset first and then continuously present what the market looks like. Marketing leaders are the communicators for the bank. “We need strategic intent, we must know where we’re going and we must understand the market in which we operate”, according to (M8R1). “Marketing leadership is a critical role for every organisation”, concluded (M8R1) with (M4R1, M5R1, K7R1) sharing the sentiment.

Practically, the Chief Risk Officer (CRO), for example, should be in partnership with marketing to ensure the creation of risk-based models and dashboards for the bank, which inform marketing and vice versa, noted participant (M4R1). If a solution is not working, do market research, even including naming of products, and building sales journey in digital channels; all of this requires ongoing conversations. Marketing leaders are also involved in project management, motivation and reward and dealing with teams, not only individuals. An analysis of where the bank is versus where it is going is important, as is getting the right support and skills and having the right infrastructure. It is the role of each area in business to deliver against frameworks such as the South African Customer Satisfaction Index (SAcsi) results (M4R1). Credit or debit card delivery issues or not granting a home loan to an existing customer impacts the brand, and it must be highlighted to the business where issues originate from. “An ongoing challenge and opportunity to refine and ensure a better understanding of customer centric approach is required”, observed (M4R1), and acknowledged that it is a difficult job. If they are not of that mindset, the job is to get them into that mindset first and then continuously present what the market looks like (M3R1, M4R1, M8R1). “We can do disservice to the customer centricity of the bank if we don’t understand markets”, noted marketer (M5R1). Marketing leaders’ responses in terms of suggestions for improvements included the need for views from external marketing sources and looking

to first-world countries to see what trends are on the way. As observed by (M1R1), “We should ask ourselves, are we creating a better country and world? It is an ongoing challenge and opportunity to refine and ensure a better understanding of customer centric approach”.

Of the nine key internal stakeholders who contributed, participant (K2R1) noted: “The Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) is ultimate custodian and deployed functional area representatives who execute on the agenda”. It is critical to bring the bank’s marketing function into the discussion. Marketing leadership should be the voice of reason and of customers, who need to be consulted in key decisions from a customer perspective, even operationally and how the bank functions as a business, they concluded. Another participant noted that it was important to identify certain operational or business issues that are detracting from the goal, or are counter-productive, not just communications. Marketers take information in the bank and present a holistic message to customers. “It is a natural thing; they are the unifiers of facts and a unifier of views between stakeholders” (K4R1). Participant (K5R1) noted that: “Marketing leadership is the glue that gets people to talk, holds things together, helps to course correct when they’re going in a different direction, to get people to collaborate towards customer centricity”. Part of marketing leadership’s role is raising the level of understanding of what the market requires, thinks, wants and needs as well as bringing together stakeholders to understand where the market is and what is trending. Marketing leaders should also, formally and informally, bring stakeholders together to explain what is trending in the market, observed stakeholder (K9R1).

Challenges according to key internal stakeholder responses include that a lot happens at a strategic marketing level that is not shared with the rest of the bank (K6R1). Marketing leadership should challenge business to design a step-by-step client journey from sales, onboarding, regulatory and other requirements which makes marketing more strategic, helps everyone to understand the business better and puts the bankers in the shoes of the customer (K4R1, M5R1). It is also important to prevent people from running in different directions (K2R1, K9R1), or “Seeing the wood for the trees”, added participant (K9R1). Key internal stakeholder (K6R1) suggested that marketing leadership should, as part of their role, establish a platform to share more market research.

5.2.1.3 Strategic listening and branding versus focussing mostly on operational outcomes

Rather than focussing mostly on short-term operational outcomes, marketing leadership and key internal stakeholder participants agreed that marketing leadership's role should be more strategically driven and should focus more attention on hearing the voice of customers and sharing it in the organisation, providing holistic and integrated brand management. Sub-themes, including the voice of the customer in the organisation, branding, strategic versus operational support or enablement function and setting strategic direction and drive, are discussed, starting with the voice of the customer.

1) Voice of customer in organisation (customer custodian)

Participant (M2R1) explained that marketers need to be more explicit about being the voice of the customer and stated that the scope of marketing leadership should be very broad, given that marketers are the links between customers and the organisation as they connect and communicate with the market. Marketer (M9R1) noted that marketing leadership is about championing the customer, and there is no other natural fit to lead that conversation.

2) Branding

Four participants, two marketing leaders and two key internal stakeholders, mentioned brand in the context of the role and scope of marketing leadership. One marketing leader was critical of brand management being separated from marketing and marketing leadership and all levels not being informed of developments in the brand space. Participant (M5R1) observed that the frontline staff are not aware of what is happening from a brand perspective. Other marketing leaders focused on the more quantifiable aspects of the brand, including building brand value, growing brand equity, affinity and brand love and the need to build these in collaboration with stakeholders. A key internal stakeholder (K6R1) in turn stated that the role of marketing leadership is to "let the brand be out there". Stakeholder (K9R1) stated that the brand helps the business to switch clients across and that the strong brand helps the business although the market may be fickle in its affinity.

3) Strategic versus operational support or enablement function

In the individual in-depth interviews, twelve out of eighteen participants (six marketing leaders and six key internal stakeholders) mentioned the strategic versus operational or enablement nature of marketing leadership's role and scope. Marketing leaders' more positive sentiments included that they feel the prominence of strategic thinking in their role is starting to come to the fore, but the scope is too narrow as it should include product development, data analytics and interpretation of results in future. Marketer (M9R1) agreed, stating there is room for a bigger role for marketing leadership in strategic thinking and noting specifically that marketing leaders in product houses should not be relegated to only below the line marketing. While two participants (K7R1, M9R1) stated that marketing leadership's role is still skewed to doing what business wants, acknowledging that there is a seat at the ExCo, SteerCo, ManCo and StratCo tables for marketing, another noted that the marketing leadership role is still seen as one that supports business objectives rather than designing, directing or driving these objectives. Participant (M4R1) noted that marketing leadership's role should include more than promotional activity and mentioned the opportunity for marketing leadership to elevate their understanding of customer needs, psychographics and behaviour to be more prominent in the expression of their role. Furthermore, the role of marketing leadership should also include design of customer experience and challenging business on acceptable levels of complaints. On the more critical side, participant (M9R1) argued that the role of marketing leadership in the bank conflicts with marketing as a support function, whereby in other sectors, such as fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), it is a much more strategic role, whereas in banking, marketing is seen as a support function and marketing leadership's role and scope is impacted by that view. In the bank, according to participant (M4R1), marketing leadership only looks at the one "P" of the seven Ps of marketing, namely promotions, with little involvement and influence in the other six "P"s (price, product, place, people, packaging, and process).

Six key internal stakeholders' responses included comments about the strategic version of the more operational or supportive nature of marketing leadership in the bank. One participant (K1R1) noted that marketing leadership spent a large amount of time trying

to align and coordinate marketing activities in the bank's size and complex structure, which could ideally be spent impacting clients in the way that only marketing leadership is specifically skilled to do, namely connecting with customers (internal versus external focus). Another key internal stakeholder (K4R1) challenged marketing leadership to be more vocal in their role and enthuse the business with the brand agenda. A key internal stakeholder (K3R1) referencing the largely promotional role of marketing leadership stated that context should be present in all operational, direct and customer value management (CVM) related activities (contextual messaging). Participant (M8R1) felt strongly that marketing leadership's role includes being part of all strategic conversations at business unit and segment level and that these conversations should not proceed without marketing presence. Participant (K7R1) stated that the marketing leadership role in the bank is confined to a support function, with another (M8R1) saying that while the description of order takers may be too strong, marketers are not leading a marketing leadership transformation conversation, although promotional and communication campaigns were acknowledged as being executed well under the guidance of marketing leadership.

4) Setting strategic direction and drive

Three participants, of which two are marketers, one junior and one senior, as well as one senior key internal stakeholder, stated marketing leaders are not seen as drivers of strategic direction (M5R1, M6R1, K8R1). Marketing leaders need to take and interpret what business wants to do and put it in customer context in order to respond to customer need. They also need to steer conversation that the market hears and receives from bank messages and create a monolithic plan so everyone has a blueprint, stated marketer (M6R1): "Make sure there are milestones to achieving it, maybe a three-to-five-year plan", "and keep everyone motivated, give team direction and trust". According to (K9R1), "There is also a greater need to look into the future. Look at the north star so you don't lose your way and know your values. Marketing should ideally be at the centre of the organisation, continuously challenge the norm, change the game, and change the hearts and minds of customers".

5.2.1.4 Challenges to conquer

Challenges, as captured in the data, noted by marketing leadership and key internal stakeholders that may be or are encountered by marketing leadership as they examine their current and future role, suggest it may range from structural, career path, leadership credibility, influence, getting the credit due to them, and accurately gauging the impact they make on a strategic and business level.

1) Structure and career trajectory

Six participants commented on challenges faced by marketing leadership in terms of their role and scope. Four marketing leaders and two key internal stakeholders (KIS) made observations related to the sub-theme, with marketing leaders' responses noting that their scope feels limited and their voices are sometimes overruled. One participant (M5R1) noted that the structure limits marketing leaders in their role and the structure does not always facilitate customer centricity since everything is fragmented and siloed where marketers are restricted to an area of specialisation, which could do customer centricity a disservice. Marketer (M8R1), with a broad portfolio of responsibilities, commented on the owner-manager culture entrenched in the system and how that is "interesting", and also challenging. Stakeholder (K4R1) noted that a challenge for marketing leadership is to "raise its voice" to give more prominence to the role in the organisation. Another challenge facing marketing leadership is its career trajectory, as stated by participant (M9R1): "In FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) marketing is at the centre of the organisation and the CMO has a shot at becoming the CEO; this is not the case in the bank".

2) Credibility, influence, credit received and impact (strategic and business)

Five marketers made comments related to the credibility, influence, impact and credit received from a strategic and business impact point of view. One marketer (M5R1) noted that the influence and impact feel mainly theoretical but is not displayed in practical terms. Another marketer (M3R1) observed a shift in a more positive direction in terms of being taken more seriously, based on the way in which marketers interact with key internal stakeholders. Participant (M3R1) stated that marketing leaders have

gained credentials and are seen as more credible partners who are brought into conversations sooner. Participants (M6R1) and (M7R1) noted that marketing leadership has some impact, but can have more and broader impact and suggested marketing leaders should ideally influence business objectives (M2R1), rather than be told what these objectives are and then be expected to create supporting campaigns.

5.2.1.5 Leading responsibly

During round one of the interviews, all eighteen participants actively commented on leading responsibly and managing across potentially conflicting needs and interests. Two sub-themes emerged related to the main emerging theme, namely character and skills. Both character and skills are discussed further below.

1) Character

Character is an important ingredient when leading responsibly and managing across potentially conflicting needs and interest, according to participants. Marketing leadership noted that being honest with oneself and understanding who one is as an individual are important character traits. “Your decisioning, leadership, actions and thought processes are all linked to your core”, observed marketer (M1R1). Being open and honest with teams, acknowledging that there are differing views that may be separate but similar, such as courage and vulnerability, is required according to participant (M2R1), who further noted that character includes “having the courage to stand up for what you believe in and have tough discussions and vulnerability when you fall on your face”. Each person will bring their individual values to the table, so it is important to have and encourage honest and authentic conversations on an ongoing basis that leads to successful brands, observed participant (M1R1), further suggesting: “Look for people who are not subjective and ask: what is the culture, what are the values and how is that instilled in people?” Participant (M8R1) noted that, “Transformational leadership means giving people power and trust in an owner-manager culture, but when the trust is broken, something must be done about it while participant (M9R1) stated, “Truth and facts are the cornerstone to leading responsibly”.

Key internal stakeholder responses, when asked about leading responsibly, noted maturity as an important requirement. “In this ever and fast changing world, if you want to be relevant and play, you must be mature and know what you can tolerate”, said participant (K1R1), representing and leading a large product house. Responsible leaders know how to be a catalyst and how to rally people around a vision, instead of exerting pressure on people. They are inspiring, idealistic, and practical. They also know how to instil discipline to look after and understand customers and be a trusted financial partner, which is part of the organisational journey. Responsible leaders know how to put differences aside and they know that “leaders eat last” (K4R1), meaning they place their followers’ needs before their own. The best leaders unify people, noted participant (K4R1) and people must buy into what the organisation is all about, “otherwise the organisation is not for you”. Participant (K9R1) observed that, “When there is a potential controversial trap based on basic principles, values or morals or ethics of organisations, go back to purpose of being and ask how do we deal with this? Approach it from a principled perspective. What is the required outcome? What are we here to do? Gut feel also helps a lot too, asking what is inherently right or wrong”, observed participant (K9R1).

2) Skills

Having good character may not be enough, and specific skills are also required. According to marketing leadership and key internal stakeholder participants, some of these skills include:

- a. Good judgement - how to reach compromises where required and understanding what can be given up or pushed back against when required (M1R1).
- b. Balance and authenticity - learning how to strike a balance and being true to oneself, as well as considering consequences, are valuable skills as noted by a marketing leader (M2R1).
- c. Protecting the brand - it is a difficult job to manage and involves presenting the market, ensuring what goes to market is the best representation of brand and discipline of marketing, pushing back when necessary and create a win-win situation for everyone, not just the business (M1R1).

- d. Voice of customer - participant (M3R1) explained that being the voice of the client, understanding data, using all the tools available and having a clear understanding of legal, risk and compliance are important, since legislation governs how things are done, are these are also important skills to have.
- e. Think customer first - “There is a shift now that everything is anchored through the customer lens, so people should be challenged to think customer journey and customer expectations” (M5R1). Everyone wants to do what is right for their jobs, but they must have a customer hat on. If a customer view is not considered, it should be highlighted, notes stakeholder (K6R1).
- f. Credible insights from data - participant (M5R1) further noted that data helps to bring empirical evidence to the fore, and it brings sanity to the conversation so all the literature and experience and data from third parties should be used, since there are different sources of information – integrating all the data available into coherent customer insights is a scarce skill.
- g. Truth seeker - individuals need to accept and appreciate the evidence or correct information that is brought to the fore and rally behind that, observes (M5R1). “Make sure things are fact-based; as soon as opinions creep into the conversation and personalities are at play, then things unravel (K8R1).
- h. Anti-territorial -it was necessary to sense-check against customer insights in all engagements. Marketing leadership should not be protective of their specific portfolios and must say how to launch products and campaigns from a customer journey point of view (M5R1).
- i. Reliable value creator – “we deal with this every day; we deal with suppliers, and we deal with a lot of money. There is exchange for services we want third parties to render” (M9R1).
- j. Mastering the art of the possible - key internal stakeholder (M9R1) also noted that marketing leadership deal with problems from different angles and there is a need for an experienced individual who understands that there may be a very idealistic vision, but who can be practical and negotiate trade-offs and negotiate a settlement, while keeping in mind what people are striving for.
- k. Positioning benefits from different angles - when dealing with a cross-functional situation, marketing leadership should use their skill to lead with the benefits, suggests stakeholder (K5R1).

- l. Consult with experts - “Ask for views, understand where people are coming from, since Finance people would come from a Finance perspective and listening to the other side is important and it requires daily balancing” (K6R1).
- m. Narrative integration - prioritise appropriateness and think through client experience, to knit the whole story together; this is a critical role, and it depends on the marketer (K8R1).
- n. Solution implementation - organisation must have well defined process as to how they solve and implement”, concludes participant (K8R1).

5.2.2 ROUND TWO: Emerging theme one: Modernising the role of marketing leadership in a retail bank

The section below covers marketing leadership’s role expansion or contraction and any added responsibilities taken up by marketing leadership due to Covid-19, as extracted from the analysis of data collected, as part of exploring the modernisation of the role of marketing leadership in a retail bank.

1) Marketing leadership’s role expansion or contraction due to Covid-19

In round two of data collection, two marketing leaders and four key internal stakeholders contributed to the discussion of marketing leadership’s role expansion or contraction compared to the first round of interviews, four years earlier. Marketing participant (M7R2) noted that not much had changed at the top, but at lower levels things had changed (M10R2). Participants noted that the role of marketing leadership has changed because of a marketing operating model change which took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. Some could not say whether the role expanded or contracted, while others noted that marketing leadership had lost some power and credibility because of the change in the bank’s marketing operating model, which is a hybrid of a centralised versus decentralised marketing operating model, whereby each business unit has a marketing representative on their ExCo, but the marketing lead does not have a marketing team reporting to them in the business unit. They now engage capability leads, such as public relations (PR), direct marketing, digital marketing, social media or market research to brief the requirements from a business perspective, to these assigned capability leads. “Everything became a lot more specialised” observed (M7R2).

Stakeholder (K4R2) noted that marketing is not bold enough and it does not seem to be in the bank's DNA to be a challenger brand, compared to Nando's, for example. According to participant (K6R2), the bank's social media presence expanded somewhat during the Covid-19 pandemic and she also noted that it is often difficult to gauge the holistic benefit of marketing and the role it plays. One key internal stakeholder noted that there is a different energy to marketing now, compared to when it was still residing in business units. They continued that marketing is more involved in internal structures now, so business must make its own plans when it comes to marketing. Participant (K9R2) noted that marketing recently underwent a significant restructuring (of the marketing operating model), and they lost some power and credibility as a result.

2) Additional responsibilities taken up by marketing leadership during Covid-19

Four participants contributed to the conversation in the second round of interviews, related to additional responsibilities taken up by marketing leadership during the global Covid-19 pandemic.

Marketing leadership did not mention any additional responsibilities taken up during Covid-19. Key internal stakeholders would like marketing leadership to take responsibility for ensuring marketing communication uses plain language given that many customers consume communications in a second language, rather than marketers mainly focussing on pictures and colours. Therefore, segmentation and the different needs of various customer groupings based on deep customer insights must carry more weight than the presentation of information to customers. While marketing leadership is an evolving space, a lot of traditional marketing is still being done, rather than to experiment with newer forms of marketing, noted one key internal stakeholder (K6R2). She added: "there is little positioning of the bank as the place to bank – making it more attractive than competitors".

Many participants noted that marketing material should be more fun, creative and engaging. "Advertising should be made more exciting and marketing leadership should take on the responsibility of testing e.g., gamification principles and other tactics to make marketing more memorable. The use of influencers should also be considered",

noted (K6R2, M10R2). Marketing leadership should be able to create anticipation in the market and a sense of losing out if you don't pay attention to the bank, as they did at the height of one of their most successful advertising campaigns, early in the previous decade, which is still memorable and being talked about often (M6R2). During Covid-19, marketing leadership's responsibilities changed in the business and commercial banking space where marketing leadership supported frontlines and relationship bankers more directly, so they can help their customers, rather than to put out brand, sponsorship, or value proposition advertising (K8R2).

In summary, according to the results, the organisation does not appear to benefit from the marketing leadership to the extent that it could. Marketing leadership can deliver a lot more than the short-term branding and promotional campaigns it is currently mainly responsible for. Marketing leadership can help answer the big strategic questions in organisations and can contribute to strategic planning over the long term, given their customer insights and competitive differentiation skills. Marketing leadership can also make a significant contribution to an organisation's future survival and outperformance. One of the most effective ways in which marketing leadership could direct key internal stakeholders' alignment to evolving customer centricity, in the organisation being studied, is by modernising the role of marketing leadership in the organisation; after understanding the current role, the future role can be reframed, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The modernisation is required to position marketing leadership as credible, influential, and equal business partners to their key internal stakeholders who come from different thought worlds, often shaped by professional qualifications such as actuarial sciences, accounting and engineering. This repositioning is required to enable marketing leadership to direct key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity.

In round two of data collection, seven participants commented on the theme of marketing leadership's voice in the organisation as customer custodians, of which three were marketing leadership and four were key internal stakeholders. The marketing leadership participants noted that the role of marketing leadership includes taking and interpreting what business wants to do and putting it into customer context in order to respond to answer customer needs. Marketing leadership could also take more

intentional ownership of their role as customer custodians in the organisation and ensure they represent the voice of the customer through ongoing market sensing, re-engage in branding conversations and proactively and expressly demonstrate their ability to focus and deliver on longer term strategic deliverables, rather than short term operational campaigns, as well as direct and drive strategic imperatives. They also need to conquer the challenges facing them (e.g., structure, credibility and influence) and responsibly lead, through unique skills and good character, a transformative journey in the organisation such as directing their key internal stakeholders' alignment to customer centricity.

In the second round of data collection, participants noted, the role of marketing leadership changed, rather than expanded or contracted, with some key internal stakeholders and marketing leaders believing that marketing leadership is seen as less credible and influential as a result. Digital technology is also reported to be used "a bit", but not optimally. The bank is good at using its own digital platforms for marketing. Following the marketing leadership operational model change, which pulled marketers out of business units, leaving one representative to connect the business with marketing capabilities, marketing leadership feel they do not have interactions with key internal stakeholders while key internal stakeholders say they do not have enough interaction with the marketing leaders.

5.2.3 ROUND ONE: Emerging theme two: Customer centric intent and conditions for implementation

This emerging theme contributes to addressing the research question two: "How could the dynamic interaction and interdependence between each of the three main constructs of the study, marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity be better understood and optimised?" Intent and implementation emerged as a combined theme when analysing organisational customer centricity data. Sub-themes such as culture, strategy, structure, reward and incentives also emerged from participant responses to customer centricity related questions in the discussion guide.

5.2.3.1 Intent – culture, vision, and values

All eighteen participants, nine marketing leaders and nine key internal stakeholders, included an expression of intent as an important condition for the successful implementation of customer centricity in an organisation in their answers. Responses from marketing leaders included the need for deliberately creating a customer centric culture (K4R1, K7R1, M4R1, M9R1). “We’ve got people that have got a DNA of an owner-manager that are now grappling with aligning towards solving client needs”, observed participant (K7R1). Conditions for the successful implementation of customer centricity, according to a range of participants, also include making customer centricity part of the values (M4R1), making mindset changes, providing clarity of philosophy, purpose, vision, direction, strategy, customer insights, system capabilities, frontline buy-in, value propositions (VPs) and expectations through authentic leadership (K2R1, M1R1, M5R1, M6R1, M9R1).

Responses from key internal stakeholders included conditions such as the need to understand the risk of not transforming the bank into a customer centric organisation as per participant (K1R1), a uniform mission, vision (M4R1) and strategy as well as mature, aligned decision-making and a willingness to evolve and change. Holding beliefs and attitudes that align to customer centricity is an important condition. Demonstrated leadership buy-in (K3R1, M3R1) and a culture of respect for the humanity of employees and customers were expressed. Keeping promises and having employees who constantly gauge market needs with an understanding that the business will not survive without customers were also noted conditions. “I think there needs to be an unequivocal buy-in from senior management that some financial objectives will not be met for reasons of being customer centric. In the short term, it might lead to some targets not being met, but in the long term it then manifests into market share”, noted participant (K3R1).

Customer centricity needs a custodian to drive it as a culture, suggested a marketing leadership participant representing a sub-segment (M1R1). “Build customer centricity as part of the culture and part of values so we really challenge ourselves to be customer centric”, they suggested. Customer centricity should be integrated into product design

and marketing campaigns and enable a culture of putting the customer first, which is not always in favour of financial targets, so trade-offs will be required, according to a stakeholder (K2R1). The philosophy and culture must be well articulated. Some leaders are talking and referencing customer centricity at present, but not many are necessarily walking or implementing it; it needs more than just lip-service, noted a senior marketing leadership participant (K5R1) representing a large (“beast”) product house. Setting a culture that sets customer centricity as a high priority requires that people live for and deliver customer centricity through work, interactions and activities. A culture of respect for employees and customers, irrespective of professional or social standing is required, incorporating humanity, humility, diversity, ethical philosophy, and delivering quality solutions that best fit customer needs. The bank used to profess an owner-manager culture (K7R1, M8R1) but there has been a shift in culture due to the old form product house/“beast” with profit and loss statement (P&L) and the mandate to “run business as if it is your own” (on balance – nimble, focus, entrepreneurial, but mono-line/silo approach not ideal). This would need to change to greater collaboration to deliver more holistic and contextual solutions, as the “holy grail”, noted participant (K7R1). Shifting from “owner-manual to holistic solutions” (K7R1) was also required. People may struggle with a shift from historical culture when transforming to new ways. “What made us successful in the past won’t all serve us in the future” noted a senior key internal stakeholder (K7R1), noting that the best of historical culture should be retained as well as influence without owning. A-type personalities would find it difficult to become less territorial and more influential, observed participant (K7R1). The culture needs to drive the understanding and attitude that “we’re nothing without the customer, we’re out to win, out to delight customers” (K7R1).

Key internal stakeholders suggested that for a good culture there should be alignment the following principles: maturity (K1R1), honesty, trust, integrity, respect, avoiding arrogance when an organisation expands (M2R1). Also:

- 1) “We should try to be a genuinely loved brand rooting for simplicity and transparency and stack up well against alternatives. Consistency in language and communications are important when it comes to sharing values. “Customers want to resonate with brand values” (M4R1), and we must show we have

customers' best interests at heart, so we need to "be diligent and serve against customer needs" (M3R1).

- 2) Given the strategic intent of being more customer centric, we should also consider our public reputation, so activities must link back to principles and we must know what the market really wants, while we "put our own feelings aside" (K4R1), so we should consider feelings of another person and be less selfish.
- 3) We should deliver on promise and purpose, so practically, we can't collect debt from a person on the one side and offer investments to them on the other (K3R1, M4R1). Accountability (K6R1), ownership, respect (M1R1), empathy (M4R1) and innovation are key.

5.2.3.2 Implementation of customer centricity in a retail bank

The organisational and operational structure of the organisation, behaviour changes, putting customers first and the impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic are sub-themes to the emerging theme on the conditions to the successful implementation of customer centricity.

1) Supportive and enabling organisational and operational structure (pre-Covid-19)

Twelve participants, five marketing leaders and seven key internal stakeholders, commented on the need for an enabling and supportive organisational and operational structure as a condition for successfully implementing customer centricity, during the first round of interviews. Marketing leaders, including participant (M5R1), suggested that customer experience capability needs to be driven centrally and distributed broadly, scorecards need to measure customer centricity, infrastructure, and systems and frontline need to be shaped around the customer centricity vision. There is also a need to be agile: "Don't let legacy systems hold you back", noted marketer (M5R1). Segmentation including addressing different psychologies of people in different income groups, as well as organisation-wide customer in-depth views with easy access, are required. Customer experience responsibility, which is important, is currently not clear for face-to-face (f-2-f) and digital interactions. Reassessment of the entire operating model is required, and merely adding sub-segments will not assist. In business banking, the bank should segment clients according to sector in addition to income, turn-over

and business format (M8R1). Customer centricity must be integrated into the value chain, also into the people value chain, for example, customer centric character and skills need to be in the job specifications, recruitment criteria, training angles and rewards, plus incentives structures, concluded a senior marketing leader (M9R1).

Seven key internal stakeholders commented on the need of an enabling and supportive organisational and operational structure as a condition for successfully implementing customer centricity. The conditions required included structure and responsibility shifts, increasing the depth and breadth of employee understanding of organisational operations, the leadership team needing to address friction points (K2R1), supporting technology and digital enablement, the operating model in terms of customer centric interactions including one point of contact for customers, and a change in culture from old form product house or “beast” structures to profit and loss (P&L) statements, “as if it is your own” (be nimble, focused, entrepreneurial, but the mono-line or silo approach is not ideal (K7R1, M8R1).

Practically, despite good design processes and wide consultation, enablement through channels and operationalisation needs to be user-friendly, intuitive and easy to use, noted participants (K4R1, K7R1). This all leads to a good customer experience. People, customer-facing or not, must feel what frontline are dealing with – complaints and compliments – urged stakeholder (K9R1). Market sensing is important and a suggestion was made that there should be employees who are responsible for clear and constantly updated understanding of customer wants and needs.

2) Behaviour changes (pre-Covid-19)

Eleven participants, six marketing leaders and five key internal stakeholders mentioned the need for behaviour change as a condition of successfully implementing customer centricity. Marketing leadership’s responses included the need for customer centricity to be lived throughout the organisation, that customer centricity should be integrated into product design and marketing campaigns, with promises being kept beyond lip-service (M3R1, M5R1). In addition, participant (M5R1) noted the importance of “walking the talk”. Filtering the vision through to employees who have different backgrounds, the

need to have empathy with different contexts of different employees and customers was important, noted a senior marketing leader (M4R1). Furthermore, what is inconvenient for customers should be removed and customer solutions that are best geared to support customers and living and delivering customer centricity through work activities and interactions with customers was emphasised.

Key internal stakeholders mentioned the need for the correct trade-offs and a longer-term view as some customer centric activities may take longer to derive benefits (K3R1), but will lead to better market share, brand loyalty, a higher ability to attract and retain clients and eventually the financial targets will be met over the longer term, which will require leadership maturity, according to a senior participant from an enablement function (K3R1).

Understanding customers' holistically (needs and wants), ease of client access to organisational offerings and solutions and proactively removing barriers on behalf of clients were mentioned by stakeholder (K4R1). Understanding of customer context through data can also assist in predicting client needs, so it will need to change to greater collaboration to deliver more holistic and contextual solutions, the so-called "holy grail", noted participant (K7R1).

5.2.4 ROUND TWO: Emerging theme two: Customer centric intent and conditions for implementation

Intent as a precondition to all the other conditions for the successful implementation of customer centricity is noted. This means the intent to be customer centric needs to be evident in vision, strategic intent, values and culture statements, for example. The other conditions for the successful implementation of customer centricity are generally more tangible or evident, such as a supportive organisational structure, enabling systems, visible customer centric behaviour changes, strategy execution by practically putting customers first, as well as the shared experience and memories of customer centricity throughout the bank, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Without these supportive structures, enabling systems, strategy execution commitments and recent examples of lived experiences, it would be difficult or impossible to drive or support the successful implementation of customer centricity sustainably.

The Covid-19 pandemic also changed the bank culturally. There is more flexibility and agility for employees, but there was an impact on organisational culture. “As an organisation, we made it work” (referring to working from home) explained participant (K6R2). People continue to work remotely so it is difficult for leaders to sense how employees are really doing. Leadership will try to get staff back for cultural reasons, not just productivity, so leaders can better gauge the pulse of the organisation’s human resources (K7R2). There will also be smaller and more dynamic workspaces. Some employees feel they need to accommodate work outside official office hours, and incorporate their domestic demands into the work schedule as required.

From round two of interviews, participants noted the bank’s culture is becoming more customer centric. During Covid-19, the banks had to respond to the realities affecting customers in near real-time, while still considering the longer-term effect of any solutions provided, especially in the lending space. Although the bank’s culture is moving closer to being more customer centric, the customers’ behavioural information required, such as digital channel usage or search behaviour to predict changed in life stage, it was not always possible to be more proactive and resources did not always enable or support the manifestation of the culture (M10R2). The bank can help clients with day-to-day solutions but helping them adapt to ensure their longer-term financial independence and wellbeing, such as helping them save for the future, is more challenging, since customers are also sometimes reluctant to be agile, unlearn limiting behaviours and adapt quickly to changing landscapes (K6R2).

Having a customer centric strategy and putting customers first includes:

- 1) an understanding of customer needs and wants
- 2) removing obstacles and inconveniences
- 3) addressing frustrations and being easy to do business with
- 4) using appropriate segmentation based on meaningful “buckets”
- 5) creating value propositions
- 6) amplifying what makes clients happy
- 7) working on solutions that support customers in daily life

- 8) mapped customer journeys, enabling single points of contact between the organisation and customer
- 9) ongoing market scanning is also required to understand trends and changes in customer expectations (needs and wants)
- 10) integrated advice, consumer education, sharing good money management practices
- 11) delivering superior value
- 12) building strong relationships and partnerships are seen as complementary to the drive to become more customer centric
- 13) richer customer information and insights are needed to enhance customer centricity
- 14) self-interest or being internally focussed will hinder the drive to become more customer centric.

5.2.4.1 Putting customers first

During Covid-19, the bank tried to put customers first by helping with responsible debt relief, but the initiative was not well understood by customers as having their longer term best interest at heart. The bank did help senior customers with higher interest rates to ease the blow of the drops in the prime rate. Old age homes were also assisted with personal protective equipment (PPE) and bankers and advisors reached out to vulnerable clients to check if they were coping with challenges.

Two marketing leader and five key internal stakeholders contributed, so all participants contributed actively during the second round of interviews. It was noted, in terms of putting customers first during the pandemic: “at least there is an intention, but it doesn’t always play out that way, for example, relief efforts for loans, etc (M10R2). A brand campaign also tried to encourage customers to adapt to the new reality presented by the pandemic”, according to participant (M7R2).

Key internal stakeholders noted that during Covid-19 a more concerted effort was made to be customer centric and to place customers front and centre. Participants state customer centricity is a journey and the intent and proof, for example the integrated advice philosophy, is that the bank is moving in that direction (K7R2). Employees are trying to do the right thing for customers, but there are still examples of where this is

not working as expected (K7R2). The bank is moving from a very product centric approach in the past and is now much more attuned to customer needs (K4R2, K7R2). The bank is also using richer information and better customer insights to create and promote solutions. Customer education and promotion of good money management practices are testament to the drive. Providing more value and building strong relationships and partnerships are also in line with the intent to be more customer centric. Although the intent to be more customer centric is there, the bank must be careful to not allow internal issues to take employees' eyes off the customer (K4R2, K8R2).

A key internal stakeholder (K4R2), in response to the question of whether the bank is putting customers first, agreed that the bank is putting customers first "based on the money management and integrated advice drives in the retail banking space". Focus on market conduct increased, although there is always room for improvement. There is also a well-entrenched commercial relationship model in communities which served the bank well during Covid-19 (K8R2). The volumes in the retail banking space are challenging, so the operating model needs support to avoid bottlenecks (K8R2). Retail clients will switch faster, while commercial clients will fight and fix the relationship. In the commercial space, there were no major disruptions, while there were more disruptions in the retail banking space, during Covid-19, based on client feedback who have both retail and commercial relationships, according to a key internal stakeholder (K8R2). With regard to putting customers first, in the private banking (higher income or asset value) space the client dictates, while in the personal banking (lower income) space, the bank decides for the customer (more Apple-like than Google-like), as explained by a key internal stakeholder (K8R2). Technology, people and processes help address volume challenges, but sales skills are different between the retail and commercial space. As noted by participant (K8R2), "We need more integration in the individual private banker space", but a large, qualified sales force is expensive and there is a need to position the bank as a value player (K8R2). This value can be created by presenting the market with differentiated and integrated advice on financial service solutions. Commercial relationships tend to be taken more seriously, while retail relationships do not commence and grow in the same rate and manner as commercial relationships. Commercial banking is more of a partnership (K8R2). Stakeholder

participants (K6R2, K9R2) agreed, “the bank does put customers first”, but cautioned, “when there is internal focus there is less focus on customers”, and acknowledged, “the strategy and plan for the bank to be customer centric is stronger than before”.

When participants were asked: “Is the bank more or less customer centric?”, they stated: “The bank is more customer centric” and it is understood that becoming more customer centric is a journey. Some participants observed and accepted that the bank may never be 100% customer centric. When asked: “Does customer centric behaviour get rewarded?”, the answer was: “No” and the explanation was: “rewards are based on relative business unit performance compared to others’, so outperforming other business units drive behaviour and rewards, not customer centricity”.

5.2.4.2 Impact of Covid-19 on the implementation of customer centricity in the retail bank

Findings relate to the effect the global Covid-19 pandemic had on the bank, if and how it affected the bank’s agenda, as well as a discussion of global megatrends observed and how they might have impacted the successful implementation of customer centricity at the bank. In terms of impact on the bank’s agenda, there was no real shift in the bank’s agenda or strategies because of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Digitisation was accelerated (K4R2, K6R2, K8R2, K9R2, M7R2) while some of the more people-centered (client and staff) strategies may have been delayed somewhat (K8R2). The bank remained committed to helping customers and did so in a manner that was relevant to the context at the time. Customers were challenged to trust companies as they had no choice (M10R2) and suppliers had an opportunity to earn that trust, which they may not have had without the pandemic.

The drive to becoming more customer centric was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, but adapting to the times helped implementation in some instances, given the need to pay close attention to customers’ wellbeing and the heightened service need (K8R2), as well as the scaling of digital solutions and forcing a larger group of customers to become comfortable with digital interfaces, since their preferred channels were not always an option, given the health risks of going out in public at the beginning of the outbreak (K6R2, M10R2). One of the main effects of the Covid-19 pandemic was that the ways and places of work changed as physical office interaction ended during the height of the

pandemic; how and where people work changed significantly (K5R2). Work from home (WFH) gave a greater sense of freedom and was supported by the ability to work from remote places. The bank could help with innovative payment solutions, such as virtual cards, since people did not want to touch or exchange physical cards due to the associated health risk (K4R2). Covid relief loans were introduced (M7R2, M10R2) to help clients with cashflow challenges. Given the more severe impact on the elderly, the bank could help with preferential interest rates on investments, following steep and sudden drops in their income generating investment interest rates (K6R2).

5.2.4.3 A human touch and digital dream acceleration

The social importance of the bank was realised and recognised more strongly during Covid-19, as the bank could play an important role in making access to money better or protect businesses to prevent job-losses (K4R2). People, operations and social factors, as well as digitisation, played important roles. The Covid-19 pandemic slowed down some of the solution positioning work and the articulation of value to the market (K7R2), but on the positive side, “customer service was taken more seriously, given the circumstances”. Bankers proactively checked on customers (virtually or physically if safe and allowed) to see if they were well and everyone adapted quickly, initially. Subtle things happened behind the scenes and some “balls were dropped”, which was only discovered later in some instances, observed (K7R2). Solutioning is said to be more difficult, when colleagues do not see each other in person for long periods of time (K6R2, K7R2, K9R2).

Participants agreed that the bank was already on a strong digitisation journey (K4R2, K6R2, K7R2, K8R2, K9R2, M7R2, M10R2). Digitisation and the platform journey were already happening and to become more efficient and improve customer experience was accelerated by Covid-19 (K8R2, K8R2). The use of technology has grown immensely, due to more online platform purchases and accelerated trust built due to circumstances (K6R2, M10R2). People are trying out smaller online suppliers, not only those provided by large supermarket chains, and e-commerce has expanded (K4R2, K6R2, K9R2, M10R2). There was also an accelerated onset of small business using large platforms to sell. Due to Covid-19, where people would normally go to a branch or agency to open an account, make a new investment, or give notice on a term deposit, buy shares or

foreign exchange, take up a loan or insurance, they would now have to use a digital channel (K4R2, K6R2, M7R2). The bank strategy was already on a digitisation or platform journey, so Covid-19 accelerated operations in a digital world.

5.2.4.4 Customer centricity - helping customers was a key focus of the retail bank

During Covid-19, in line with the bank's customer centric agenda the bank focused on helping clients in the context of the pandemic, which is also as part of its market conduct imperative. For example:

- 1) the bank took great care in looking after senior customers in terms of investments and lending solutions (K6R2)
- 2) solutions for relief were created very quickly; the bank is good at adapting quickly if needed in the interest of the customers, stated (K6R2)
- 3) The bank needed to focus more on transact and credit parts of business (K7R2).
- 4) Investment and insurance businesses did well during Covid due to client's circumstances, as they couldn't spend as much money, so saved more (K4R2, R7R2, K9R2)
- 5) People spent more time at home and had time to experiment with share/stock trading – this business got a good boost from Covid-19 lockdown where people had more time to learn about trading (K7R2)
- 6) The intent is to help people build their wealth over time, also for example, insuring people and their possessions (K7R2)
- 7) Competitors are headed in the same direction, to help clients become wealthier via adviser and platform (open banking) or on the owned platform, so competitor integration, so it is an independent financial advisor and/or platform (own or third party) play (K7R2).

5.2.4.5 Covid-19: agenda changes in the bank and global megatrends observed

This section addresses participant responses related to questions about the impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic. The effect of the pandemic on the bank, on its agenda, as well as observed global megatrends with local resonance is discussed as a background

and foundation for other discussion points related to the pandemic and more specific to the main constructs of the study.

1) No changes to bank's agenda during Covid-19, as it relates to customer centricity

According to marketing leadership and key internal stakeholders, when asked whether the bank's agenda or high-level strategy changed because of Covid-19, participants agreed that the agenda did not change, but the tactics changed because people conducted their lives differently. How things are distributed now (reference to omni-channel distribution of banking services) are completely different (M7R2). The core strategy of customer centricity didn't change, but some adjustments and modifications were required (K8R2, M7R2). The bank strategy didn't change (K4R2, K6R2, K7R2, K8R2, K9R2, M7R2, M10R2). The integrated financial services and platform strategy drive, which was in existence for a while, but the integrated financial services part of strategy was delayed somewhat due to Covid-19 (K7R2). Some areas of the bank's agenda, e.g., with digitisation the bank saw accelerated strategy implementation. Nothing major was de-prioritised, that participants could think of. The same rails were traveled, in some cases at a faster pace. The pandemic gave a tailwind in some instances (K8R2). It is good to see the strategy was robust, so there was no change to strategy or agenda, participants noted.

2) Megatrends observed internationally that may impact the retail bank being studied in terms of implementation of customer centricity

Participants were asked about the global megatrends they observed during the height of the pandemic, as they may relate or may have some impact on the implementation of customer centricity in the organisation being studied.

Political, economic and employment factors affecting employees and customers and work from home options were mentioned by most participants. Some mentioned fake news, social media impact and the struggle between science and popular opinion (K4R2). Financially, a health crisis led to an economic crisis, which led to pumping of money into the system (K4R2). There was a flood of funds in the system, trade networks slowed down and supply shortage and pumped-up demand created high inflation (K4R2,

K9R2). There was also a realisation that more emphasis needs to be placed on health versus military and other investments. Covid-19 showed the importance of investments in health by governments (K4R2). There was also notable positive climate impact such as clearer skies when industrial activity slowed down during lockdown. Employers are now encouraging people to come into the office with free incentives because people no longer want to work in the same way they did prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore:

- a. Collective trauma was experienced. We haven't fully transitioned in terms of how we live in the new work, we haven't figured it out yet (K6R2)
- b. Some South Africans live in a bubble, for example private banking clients showed growing lending, low defaults and great investment growth (K7R2)
- c. Job losses abroad is a major concern, so there are job security issues (more internationally), for example Goldman Sachs, Facebook, Amazon (K7R2)
- d. There is also significant geopolitical pressure (K4R2, K8R2, K9R2)
- e. Work/life balance challenges with work from home (WFH) boundaries are also playing out (K5R2, K6R2)
- f. Supply constraints clogged up logistics networks and created inflationary impact (K4R2, K8R2, K9R2)
- g. Employees benefitted from companies willing to pay for skills due to skills shortage (K9R2)
- h. Companies didn't realise impact of what was happening at the time, concluded stakeholder (K7R2).

5.2.5 ROUND ONE: Emerging theme three – Bridging gaps in the retail bank

This emerging theme named bridging gaps (in shared understanding, physical location, organisational structure, and professional thought worlds) contributes to addressing the following research sub-question: How could the interdependence between each of the three main constructs of the study (marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity) be better understood and optimised? Sub-themes that emerged include ensuring a shared understanding of the main constructs between marketing leadership and key internal stakeholders, connecting the head office and

customer facing regional frontlines, silo-busting and linking the different thought worlds of marketing leadership and their key internal stakeholders.

5.2.5.1 Shared understanding of the main phenomena

In the first round of data collection, early in the interview process, participants were asked to share their understanding of each of the main phenomena of the study, including marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity. A shared understanding of language used to describe abstract phenomena that are regularly used is important in an organisation as it increases the likelihood of employees having fruitful conversations when words used have close to the same meaning to all involved.

This section gauges the existence of a shared understanding of the main phenomena based on participant responses in the first round of interviews conducted in 2018 and 2019, which reflects their understanding at the time and gave the researcher the opportunity to identify commonalities and discrepancies in understanding, which may help or hinder key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity.

1) Shared understanding of the marketing leadership phenomenon in the retail bank

In this section, participants' responses to marketing and leadership, as well as *marketing leadership* is discussed.

a. Marketing

Marketing as a discipline is often misunderstood or underestimated (M1R1). Many participants, especially the marketing leadership participants, noted that marketing is generally associated with client communications or eventing (M1R1, M2R1, M3R1, M5R1, M7R1). Marketing is about strategic thinking and answering the big questions in an organisation (M2R2). It is about differentiation, looking over the competitive and social landscape over the long-term, understanding customer needs (which most

participants agree with, whether they are in marketing leadership or key internal stakeholders) (M1R1, M2R1, M4R1, M9R1). Marketing leadership participants all agree that marketing is about a lot more than it is currently credited for in the bank, including giving strategic direction, contributing towards achieving business objectives, value proposition creation and positioning and market segment identification and selection. Most key internal stakeholder participants want to see marketing leadership play a much more proactive role and as participant (K8R1) noted, “marketing leadership should be a co-creator of strategy by bringing insights into the discussion in terms of demographics, competitive pressures and complementary products”.

A key internal stakeholder (K3R1) stated marketers must use their skills to connect with customers to the benefit of the solution set they are responsible for. Marketing leadership should, according to another participant, regulate all touch points with customers (K3R1). Marketing leadership was said to positively drive client thinking in their role and it was noted that the role and scope should include entrenching existing clients, not only attracting new clients.

There was a strong focus on what marketing leadership *is not*, including “the core skill of marketing is not just about pretty pictures, posters, balloons, parties, and events”, according to one marketing leadership participant (M1R1). Key internal stakeholder participants said marketing leadership is not about the day-to-day operations or just day-to-day things marketing people used to do. Marketing should not only be considered post the fact, but it is also not an afterthought and not reactive (K4R1, K7R1, K8R1).

b. Leadership

The leadership aspect is captured in the long-term, strategic, proactive nature of the role and function as mentioned, as well as the need to take accountability and contribute towards achieving business goals and looking beyond the internal organisation to competitors and customer segments, mentioned by both marketing leadership and key internal stakeholder participants (K6R1, K8R1, M1R1).

c. Marketing leadership

Both marketing leadership and key internal stakeholder participants noted benefits to customers and benefits to organisations, when asked to discuss marketing leadership. Benefits to customers related to marketing leadership's role was defined by many participants and included marketing leadership's ability and skills to differentiate offerings solutions and experiences based on customer needs and then to speak and connect to targeted customers to promote solutions that serve society and solve customers' problems, based on a holistic understanding of customers (K3R1, K8R1).

Marketing leadership responses included comments and questions as to:

- i. how the organisation will differentiate in a market that is changing rapidly, and where the future form is not known.
- ii. design of solution relative to customer, as the customer is the core, and we need to understand customer needs.
- iii. Core of it is solution design against customer, how you take it to market, how you serve them, how you speak to them, various channels, looking at total value proposition business enablement structures (K3R1).
- iv. We need to understand customer thoroughly and ability to interpret business drivers into how we serve customers holistically. Entire value chain is anything the internal or external customer should experience (M9R1).

Key internal stakeholders' and marketing leadership responses included inputs on:

- i. traditional marketing forms versus what is taking shape through millennials' input, which is more about how you connect with customers (K1R1), in a way that serves society and solves customer problems, so "what problems are we trying to solve in society?", asked a participant (M8R1).
- ii. Strategic marketing is a more targeted type marketing in terms of the specific customers you're looking for, according to participant (K1R1).

Benefits to organisations according to marketer responses note that:

- i. marketing leadership and its full benefit to organisations are misunderstood (M1R1)
- ii. The core skill of marketing is answering the big questions in the organisation (M2R1), such as what are the long-term plans, what does the competitive landscape look like in 3 to 5 years and how are you going to keep your company afloat?
- iii. Marketing leadership also can influence and impact the business financially and deliver against bottom line, effecting marketing, tapping into ability to deliver customer centricity and end-to-end delivery (M4R1)
- iv. Marketing leaders are critical resource in any organisations, with multiple applications (M8R1)
- v. Organisations should consider full 360-degree marketing component, not only the communications layer (M5R1), so include customer insights, value proposition design, influencing business orientation, pulling the right business levers, understanding of traditional context and any other platform on which customer engages with product or service also involves the Ps (Pricing, place, promotion) and should not be limited to comms (communications) the organisation puts out there. Added to that is a more generalist requirement: a clear understanding of how marketing levers influence customer, income statement and business objectives also benefit the organisation.
- vi. Well thought through marketing, understanding the competitive environment the organisation operates in, including a PESTEL (political economic, social, technological, environmental, and legislative) analysis, are vital and can deliver great benefits to the organisation (M3R1).
- vii. A senior marketing leader described marketing leadership as looking at the entire value chain of marketing, where it sits in the broader value chain of the business (M9R1). It also involves design and developing strategies and execution plans to address the business requirements of growth profit or other objectives. The entire value chain is anything the internal or external customer should experience, he concluded (M9R1).

Furthermore, deeper thinking, questioning, challenging the status quo, making tough decisions and trade-offs and creating a holistic differentiating narrative are part of

marketing leadership. Stakeholder (K3R1) asked: “what brand do you perceive, or would you like to project into the market and what position do you take on products?” Marketing leadership needs to:

- i. decide on the direction; “the rails you wish to operate on” (M4R1)
- ii. Think about where the organisation should be playing, which markets and which segments (M4R1)
- iii. Marketing leadership involves deciding what makes sense to you as a business and solving for the strategic part of marketing and future thinking (M4R1)
- iv. Being able to navigate reality and do future thinking are important aspects (M4R1)
- v. It involves knowing what you want to drive in the organisation and knowing how to differentiate from competitors (M4R1)
- vi. “I’ve always thought of marketing as strategic”, confirmed stakeholder (K7R1) research participant and added: “strategy is the story we tell ourselves about what we are about. Coming up with arrangements in terms of structures and people who can help in its entirety. It is what makes business sustainable.
- vii. Turn story into real life; marketing is a way you tell the story and knit the story together by asking” “why should customers come to you”? The proof-points prove in actual experience, what you say is going to happen”. Part of design process relates to how people communicate and becomes a key input into strategy (K7R1).
- viii. Marketing leadership is not where business decides on a direction and marketing is just informed, noted stakeholders (K4R1, K7R1, K8R1). A participant (K8R1) observes: “Marketing is a co-creator of strategy by bringing insights into the discussion in terms of demographics, competitive pressures, complementary products”.

2) Shared understanding of the key internal stakeholder phenomenon in the retail bank

The key internal stakeholder construct was divided into two sub-themes during the analysis process, namely destiny, direction, and journey, and secondly enablers.

a. Destiny, direction, and the journey

Destiny enabler are people needed along the journey to get to where you want to go, notes a marketing leadership participant in a segment role. With purpose and objectives in mind, key internal stakeholders give strategic direction to help in reaching a specific goal or in achieving goals on the critical path or journey to success to make progress or be successful, adds a key internal stakeholder (K3R1).

b. Enablers

Key internal stakeholders are enablers to deliver against objectives and they could also be internal clients based on what objectives need to be achieved. A key internal stakeholder (KIS) is anyone that you're responsible to and vice versa. Together, everyone must buy into the value propositions and those who serve customers and engage with outsiders, states marketing leader (M5R1). These stakeholders are in a vertical chain of operation, and buy-in is needed from key internal stakeholders to move to the next step in an approval or promotional process. A KIS is a person who contributes to a strategic direction leveraging their own skills and speciality to help in reaching a specific goal and all play a role in achieving a goal (K2R1). Business key internal stakeholders include a range from Sales, Human Resources to the CEO. They are decision makers, those who are accountable, responsible and those who need to be informed, concluded a marketing leadership participant (K2R1). Stakeholder (K1R1) says, "different stakeholders look at things differently given their mandates they have". KIS can influence into lower levels, and they are mandated and able to take a decision. It should be a technically competent person, adds a Chief Financial Officer key internal stakeholder participant (K2R1). Key internal stakeholders (KIS) are people who influence your critical path to success, who you need to convince as without their buy-in you will not be able to make progress or be successful. KIS have vested interests and support each other in achieving goals and they are not always only very senior people, but they can be highly influential. People who own distribution (physical and digital, systems, finance and support structures, data people) are also internal stakeholders (K3R1) including people who help you track what you're doing, such as project managers. KIS are decision makers whose opinions carry the most weight, so you need buy-in, participation or help from them to execute, concluded participants (K2R1, K3R1, K5R1).

3) Shared understanding of the alignment phenomenon in the retail bank

Alignment as a phenomenon was divided up into two sub-themes during the analysis process in terms of participants' understanding; a way of being and a way of doing.

a. As a way of being

Being aligned is about:

- i. "Multiple structures acting as one or being of one mind, one accord, driving for the same objective", noted a marketing leadership participant (M1R1).
- ii. Everyone having the same understanding of the strategic imperatives and the outcomes (M4R1).
- iii. It is the degree to which everyone understands the strategy and can interpret and deliver against the ultimate objective; it is "having a single-minded thought", states participant (M4R1).
- iv. Given an optimal structure, alignment brings the potential to integrate across business silos to achieve business objectives, as everyone will be on the same page, adds a key internal stakeholder participant (M6R1).
- v. When everyone is thinking the same, you know what decisions were taken and you take it into consideration when taking future decisions, so two (or more) things working towards the same goal are aligned (M4R1).
- vi. The sum of parts works together for greater whole, notes another senior marketing leader participant (M9R1).
- vii. Depending on the context and lens, the way you structure human capital, products and how we solve for customers, also needs alignments stated a key internal stakeholder participant and "in tune with internal stakeholders", added another participant (K1R1).

b. As a way of doing

To achieve alignment, participants noted:

- i. Words and actions need to match, so words and deeds are aligned and true and the one should speak to the other. How they are delivered may differ. The word alignment gets used a lot, as well as complementing, working in perfect conjunction with something else (M7R1).

- ii. Working in different directions results in misalignment (K9R1). Align business objectives to marketing, sales, procurement strategy, so as to ensure congruency from conceptualisation to delivery.
- iii. Everyone is reading off the same page, collaborating, working together and everyone in the organisation is moving in the same direction. “It is like herding cats”, notes stakeholder participant (K7R1) and continues to list that it is about the order of selling, deciding on distribution channels, trade-offs, jockeying and consistent negotiations, arrangement, and co-ordination.
- iv. Having consistent conversation to organise in a consistent way is important and “it is very hard”, says one participant (K7R1).

4) Shared understanding of the customer centricity phenomenon in the retail bank

Questions about the customer centricity construct were included in both round one and round two of the data collection, unlike the other constructs. The rationale is the reference to the evolving nature of the construct in the title of the study. The analysis therefore reflects emerging themes from the first round as well as the second round of data collection. Sub-themes emerged from the first round of interviews question related to gauging a shared understanding of the customer centricity phenomenon. These sub-themes included employee character and values that can help organisations drive customer centricity, putting customers at the centre of the organisation, acting in customers’ best interests, understanding and delivering against customer needs, behaving in a customer centric manner, shifting towards more customer centric behaviour on the journey to improved customer centricity and ensuring sustainability. Each sub-theme will be discussed in more detail below, starting with putting customers at the centre.

1) Character and values

Marketing leadership responses included: “so for client centricity, honest, trust, integrity and respect are big. I don't know if it's a South African phenomenon, but I think generally there is a lack of respect between brands and customer and I think, unfortunately when you become big, a certain amount of arrogance sets in, and we've seen that with other financial institutions, that they got so big and they're so arrogant

that they're still making money but they're not particularly loved brands", according to Marketing Head (M1R1). "When another brand comes up, that is simple and more transparent, people quickly switch because they've just been waiting for an alternative to your product", participant (M2R1) concluded. "The language that the organisation uses when speaking to customers needs to be consistent. So, it's the communication as a brand (the overall brand) that needs to be consistent with the values and the strategies that we're trying to drive whether it's the same with competitors or not; we must have our own language as a bank brand" (M4R1). Living the brand values is important as "customers will see that, and it will resonate with them better which means they will probably come stay with us because they feel that we have their best needs at heart", notes participant (M3R1). Being diligent and consistent and understanding what needs we're going to be serving, basically knowing what's the strategic intent, is important. "We should consider, how are we going to be seen by the public? I think it's almost like a value chain of activities that put a need to orientation and in that value chain each one of the links in the chain must link back to principles. "I guess the principle would be just based on experience a lot of the time, decisions have been made on maybe personal feelings or experience on certain things, not necessarily considering what the market really wants" (K4R1). So, I guess the principle would be to always put your own personal feelings aside and put yourself in the feelings of the person that you're talking to (K4R1), that's what the principle should be. "To be honest about the definition, what does it mean to us? And why is it important? In our case, why is it important to deliver on our promise and our purpose and our mission, you know, why is it important?" (K4R1).

Stakeholder (K3R1) noted: "you can't collect from me on the one side and then sell to me on the other side and not know that I'm in trouble on the one side. So I mean there is always going to be principles around; accountability, ownership, respect, innovation, I think there has been general values and also principles around which we organise in a business unit, but you know where you just have that accountability, you need to be aligned on that to say who is taking accountability of what, because often if it's not clear then you're going to have a confusion aspect. People are going run the show and ownership of stuff also goes hand in hand with that and then respecting each other for that", he concluded (K3R1).

b. Putting customers at the centre

Customer centricity, according to the marketing leadership participants, is about building solutions, products, and services with your customer at the centre of every decision and putting the customer in the heart of the organisation. It means keeping the customer in mind in every aspect of the organisation. Ensuring that the delivery is consistent across and delivering your promise to the market and ensuring you deliver against what the customer expectations might be, are important according to a senior marketing leadership participant. Stakeholder (K1R1) stated that “the customer is in the middle” and another key internal stakeholder adds it is about “putting yourself in the customer’s shoes” and providing customer solutions that meet clients exactly where they are. It is important to understand the customer and driving a demand driven focus.

c. Customers’ best interest

Marketing leadership responses when asked about customer centricity noted that it was about what’s right for the customer. “It should be about what we do daily and what the customer needs, but it is easier said than done, noted one segment marketing leader participant. It is also about doing the best for your customer, so don't try and manipulate a customer for a one deal sale, think long term, think about your relationship with the client. We must consider the seriousness or the extent to which we want to put the customer at the centre” (M8R1).

Key internal stakeholders noted: “the way in which you organise your activities around customers must be aligned, so I think it’s just to remain that all operations in the bank must put the customer first” (K3R1).

d. Understanding and delivering against customer needs

Customer centricity is the understanding that customer needs are important, it’s about fulfilling the needs of the client, observe participants (M3R1, M6R1). Taking customer needs into account for the product or service and understanding client needs come first. Customer centricity involves giving customers what they want and need, not just what the business thinks they want and need, so you start with the client need first. Once you understand what the client need is, you then work backwards to provide solutions that

cater to those needs. It's understanding your customer needs and wants, and then establishing what can be delivered in terms of the organisational goals. All products built should therefore reflect what the customer needs.

e. Shift towards more customer centric behaviour in the retail bank

Customer centricity also requires specific behaviours, such as communicating with customers in the right way, hearing the voice of the client and ensuring that the delivery is consistent all across. When delivering your promise to the market, ensure you deliver against what the customer expectations might be and make information relevant to their life stage (K4R1, M5R1).

Turning a ship around takes time, so still be product centric in some processes. The bank may never be 100% customer centric. New businesses (even in a larger organisation) may need to be a bit more product-centric to get things off the ground, then the balance can shift toward customer centricity. It can't be totally customer or product centric. The more mature a business/pillar is, the more customer centric it can/should be (K4R1).

The bank makes money when clients like what it does and employees also benefit from this. In the bank, income statements are still product house focused, so some evolution still needs to take place. "Segment (structure) pays bonus, but the process may not be as transparent as it needs to be, we therefore also need an evolution here", states a senior ranking participant (M7R2). All actions may not be perceived as directly customer focused, e.g., regulatory or prudential processes – fraud prevention, and similar, observes a KIS participant (K9R2).

It is critical to understand how a client's best interest is determined – the example Apple versus Android mobile phone providers; the difference is, Apple develops products based on what they perceive, observe, and deduce customers want, while Samsung bases their design based on what customers say they want, but customers may not be able to fully articulate their needs or may say what they've heard from friends and family (K8R1). Organisation should be taking a facilitating role. Also in business partnership, the bank plays facilitation, negotiating, debating, and co-creating roles. Mutual interest should be at play, to create a win-win outcome for all parties involved. The bank should

co-create with its community, to resolve angst points. This happens more naturally in the commercial banking space, according to participant (K8R1). The corporate bank is an order taker and in retail it is more inclined to dictate to customers. In retail banking one must just keep promises. People expect more from corporate South Africa than government and then they get very frustrated when things do not work in corporates. Customers have more voting rights in corporate versus government – they can walk out and find a suitable alternative supplier immediately (K8R1).

f. Ensuring sustainability

Marketing Leadership responses acknowledged that customer centricity doesn't exist to the detriment of the organisation. The organisation must translate the implications of customer centricity from a growth perspective, be it acquisition, attrition, and similar, and the way the organisation executes and goes to market (K2R1, K3R1).

According to participant (K8R1), for customer centricity, all stakeholders need to have a common set of goals and the organisation needs to be aligned on common purpose and what it is that it is trying to achieve. "Make sure that people are rewarded if they achieve success within those criteria otherwise they will always go back to traditional financial measures", he concluded.

5.2.5.2 Connecting the head office and the customer-facing frontline of the retail bank

Participants' responses included a sub-theme that emerged related to connecting the bank's head office and the regional client-facing frontlines to ensure alignment to evolving customer centricity. Carefully considering the methods of communication, ensuring two-way interactions are included in the approach and involving the frontlines in the content generation of internal communication efforts, were seen as important aspects of success.

1) Methods of communication

Six marketing leaders mentioned forms of one-way communication to bridge potential gaps between head office and frontline staff and noted that personal accountability

should be taken by head office staff to ensure communication with frontlines. Methods of communication noted by the participant included general communications, internal communication channels and specifically mentioned the importance of communication from senior leadership such as CEOs using roadshows (physical presence of leadership in regions) to reinforce messaging. Roadshows were mentioned by three marketing participants (M3R1, M4R1 and M8R1), and one stakeholder (K4R1). Training was mentioned by two marketing leaders and one key internal stakeholder (K4R1, M1R1, M9R1). Communications with operations teams was also stated as being important. While high-quality physical interactions are important the effective use of technology to help with scaled communications, via video conferencing and digital media distribution, were also mentioned by several participants as an effective means of communication (M5R1, M8R1).

2) Two-way interaction with intent of getting feedback from frontlines

Three marketing leaders commented on two-way communication between the head office and regional customer facing operations. One referred to the regional insight that can be gained by head office staff when they engage with frontline staff and another on the need to ensure frontline views are included. Another participant mentioned the need to get input from frontlines (“bottom-up approach”) when creating a new philosophy (M3R1). They also mentioned the need to do more formal surveys to get inputs from across the bank. It was noted that philosophies and strategies should not be dictated down the line. “I think that 2-way flow of information is not happening and its quite evident in the way in which we deliver things and the way in which we execute things”, noted participant (M5R1), representing a large (*beast*, as it is called in the bank) retail product house.

Five key internal stakeholders (K1R1, K2R1, K3R1, K5R1, K9R1) emphasised the importance of two-way communication between head office and frontline. “There needs to be a continuous loop, so frontline must be able to feedback to head office and say this is not working or this is working. Continuous interaction is important, its way more difficult easier said than done”, said one CEO-level key internal stakeholder participant (K9R1). Two participants noted that regions don’t have a lot of say and they are recipients of decisions and directives pushed to the “outer-parts” of the organisation

from head office (K3R1). There was said to be room for greater collaboration between head office and regional frontlines. Another participant noted the importance of frontline employee involvement in strategy formulation and to get buy-in from regions and frontlines. A participant noted the importance of really listening to the feedback from frontline staff. One participant suggested head office staff sit in on client meetings to get insights regarding customer engagement and challenges. “Mutual understanding of the way forward is vital” (K9R1).

3) Content suggestions

Content to be exchanged includes strategy, customer needs, structure, operating model, product, or value proposition solutions. Content suggestions from marketing leadership participants should ensure alignment between head office and regional customer facing frontline staff include sharing rationale for changes or shifts in operational models to adapt to evolving operating environments, emphasising the need for greater collaboration, and working towards a common goal. Clear articulation of the strategy, delivery requirements, strategic drivers and imperatives, the desired end state as well as each person’s role in delivering on promises were also mentioned. Two marketing leader participants including (M5R1) noted the importance of sharing marketing activities with frontlines, prior to taking it to market so they are prepared to support campaigns. Another participant (K9R1) mentioned the importance of constantly upskilling frontline staff to be able to have money management rather than product conversations. Sharing how frontline will get rewarded and incentivised was also noted as important content for head office and frontline conversations and communications.

A key internal stakeholder (K3R1) noted that there is not a lot of differentiation in communications, which may allude to a “spray and pray” approach, which may lower communication effectiveness over time, since communications are not perceived to be relevant to individuals or smaller groups. Another key internal stakeholder mentioned the importance of aligning meaning and understanding, possibly commenting on the potential gap between intent of the message and how it was received (K4R1). The same participant noted that providing context is important when communicating. One participant (K1R1) noted the importance of equipping frontline with the ability to address customer needs and to show empathy.

5.2.6 ROUND TWO: Emerging theme three – Bridging gaps

Analysis of the second round of data collected resulted in additional findings under theme three, bridging gaps, including a shared understanding of the main phenomena, silo-busting and linking different thought worlds.

5.2.6.1 Shared understanding of the main phenomena

In general, during round one of interviews, participants had at least a basic understanding and could provide some explanation of what customer centricity entails. Participants were again asked to comment on their understanding of the evolving construct of customer centricity during round two of interviews, based on a newer attempt to understand the construct, described as: “The degree to which a customer perceives a firm to put customers’ interest at the centre of all its actions”, according to Habel *et al.* (2020:28) and Osakwe (2020:1).

The question in the second round was based on a definition of perceived customer centricity published in Habel (2020), after the initial data collection round, so the researcher wanted to get a sense of how well the newer definition matched participants’ understanding of the phenomenon.

1) “Perceived” is problematic for participants

In the second round of interviews, participants were asked to comment on the matter of defining perceived customer centricity during round two of interviews, based on a more recent attempt to define the construct, as follows: “The degree to which a customer perceives a firm to put customers’ interest at the centre of all its actions”, according to Habel *et al.* (2020:28) and Osakwe (2020:1). Participants voiced different opinions in response to the definition of perceived customer centricity. Some agreed fully, others agreed somewhat, and some didn’t agree, stating it is not the best definition. Participants raised concerns with the word “perceived” as they think it is too subjective (K6R2, K8R2). “Perceived” is a problem, voiced a participant, it is subjective, based on personal expectation, not concrete, and not always based on research (K6R2).

Customers need to research more to get to an informed position, opinion, or perception. Perception can also roll-over into a community, e.g., Nedbank was seen (perceived) as *the* business bank in some communities. That can stick for a long time, stated one Chief Financial Officer KIS participant. In terms of: “all of its actions”, shared purpose didn’t exist in the past, but future generations will want companies to do the right thing holistically, beyond core business. Another stakeholder (K8R2) also noted “perceived” is problematic and difficult as it is subjective and gave the example of high bank fees versus national sport team sponsorship; a customer complained that fees could be much lower if it wasn’t for the sponsorship for which the bank is taking all the credit. It is a double-edged sword, positioning versus facilitating, debate, co-create, culture of inclusion in creating customer solutions. A newer entrant is perceived as cheap, but it is not the case on objective comparison, so perceptions can be very problematic.

5.2.6.2 Silo busting

Marketing capabilities (execution responsibility who operate more like agencies) are not in contact with key internal stakeholders – very much an arms-length relationship, via a marketing lead (strategic responsibility), noted a marketing leadership participant.

During Covid-19, it further became more siloed as people wouldn’t even have informal corridor interactions with key internal stakeholders, as everyone worked from home and interactions were mostly scheduled. Two key internal stakeholders (K6R2, K9R2) noted: “individual, team and cross-functional silos exist”. Marketers need to work more closely with other key internal stakeholders and marketers need to immerse themselves into each other’s work. “Customer experience is too broad to place it in one area. We need to understand how everyone’s work contributes to the organisational goals, so we can appreciate the interdependence, interconnectedness and need for regular interaction”, noted stakeholder (K6R2).

5.2.6.3 Linking different thought worlds

In general, key internal stakeholders acknowledged that everyone should work harder to understand each other’s areas intentions and imperatives. A request for more

planning from marketing leadership side was posed by key internal stakeholders. Marketing is still seen as very operational, rather than strategic. Marketing leadership also must work harder to gain key internal stakeholders' trust, when it comes to strategic direction contributions based on customer insights.

Stakeholder (K4R2) stated, "marketing is too isolated", but acknowledged that CEOs and SteerCos need to play a role to direct collaboration between marketing leadership and key internal stakeholders, to bring the different thought worlds closer together. There is a need to balance Marketing and Business towards active involvement. Senior leadership could offer encouragement and provide a mandate to marketing leadership, they concluded. Finance (department) is about measures, but Finance must realise not everything can be tied back to activities, e.g., award-winning advertising campaign and good sales results, noted participant (K6R2). Different disciplines need to be intentional in working together. Marketing also needs to present plans more proactively and there is an expectation of more innovation in the marketing disciplined required, she concluded.

Stakeholder (K8R2) stated: "Marketing is very operational and just take instructions. Marketing doesn't give proactive market insights into the business. There are no marketers, people "do marketing", they proclaimed. An example of a marketing leadership opportunity is based on market share research survey, rather than just present results, marketing should identify business opportunities and challenges based on research findings and work with business to solve, the participant suggested. Generally, key internal stakeholders are more likely to play a role in solving for market research findings. Marketing doesn't define opportunity in creating business cases, he continued. Marketing is involved right at the end, to update a website (K8R2), for example. It is also a positioning thing, marketing leadership must think how marketing plays out in the organisation. The problem arose when marketing lifted themselves out of businesses; it is now more esoteric – just brand, image and public relations (PR). Businesses won't trust marketers to provide insights who are not close to business and who can directly influence business strategy, they concluded. A participant noted, in terms of the different thought worlds, there should be a shared business understanding

of what must be solved and having a common goal is important, but we must also celebrate specialisation and unique contributions, they concluded (K9R2).

In conclusion, emerging theme three, entitled bridging gaps, highlighted the opportunity to narrow gaps in understanding of the main phenomena of the study, connecting the ivory tower and the coalface, busting organisational silos, and linking different thought worlds of marketing leadership and key internal stakeholders.

5.2.7 ROUND TWO: Emerging theme four – achieving balance and setting boundaries

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a significantly elevated need for focus on employee wellness, as a pre-condition to expecting customer centric attitudes, behaviour, and habits from employees. When asked, “how was the bank affected by Covid-19?”, participants noted that banking was marked as an essential service, staff had to work from home, customers needed debt relief, senior clients (aged 60+) needed better interest rates after the sudden and severe drop of the prime rate by the SARB, so their investment income needed to be secured. Stock market value impact, much of trading activity, Covid-19 protocols had to be observed by frontline staff, and old age home personal protective equipment was provided as part of corporate social investments. Staff worked longer and harder and had to attend more meetings to establish how to adapt to new reality and how to continue to be of service to all customers. Advertising on out of home channels stopped as people were not allowed out the house, except to gather essentials. Covid-19 did not change the bank’s agenda – it remained committed to creating value for shareholders and stakeholders. Strategically, it accelerated some aspects such as digital acceptance and delayed some aspects, such as the integrated advice journey. Global megatrends observed by participants, which they believed had local relevance includes wellness, work from home (WFH), job security, lockdown, death of family, friends, colleagues, fear for own health, bad habits, social isolation. The role of marketing leadership could include directing key internal stakeholders’ alignment to evolving customer centricity. Marketing leadership can direct key internal stakeholders’ alignment to evolving customer centricity, but the global Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the urgent and intense need of all employees to work in organisations that understand

they need to intentionally put their employees' wellness first, so their employees can put their customers first.

Wellness, dealing with more stress, attending more meetings, working longer and harder, observing a change in organisational culture, needing to break bad habits, professional and personal postures, and pouring from an empty cup are the sub-themes covered in the section below, underpinning emerging theme four named achieving balance and setting boundaries.

5.2.7.1 Wellness

People seem to be more reluctant to leave the house to run errands, although they now have the full freedom to do so again. This may affect their mental and physical health due to less social interactions and less physical activity, fresh air and sunlight and increased food and alcohol intake. Working from home also adds pressure as some feel they need to work harder to prove their worth, since showing up at the office and being seen at work and while working are not part of the perceived contribution anymore. People also need to balance home and family related responsibilities, sometimes during traditional office hours, which adds to uncertainty and fluidity in a day. Participants feel the need to work over weekends to keep up with the work that they can't do during the day because of all the meetings. The collective trauma suffered by everyone due to the pandemic affects their work resilience, professional relationships, and energy to ultimately be customer centric. South Africans were already stressed before the pandemic, so Covid-19 just added to additional stress on top of an already worn-out workforce. People seem to want to go on holidays more and some want to go out more and catch up on all the social interactions they missed out during Covid-19. The pandemic helped participants realise that life is short and there is more to life than a 9 to 5 job – they want to do more enjoyable “stuff” (K6R2, K8R2).

This emerging theme contributes to addressing the following research sub-question: What were the evolution/s or regression/s of customer centricity in the organisation in the past four years; how did Covid-19 help or hinder these? Being customer centric despite the employee wellness challenges of both the marketing leadership and their

key internal stakeholders, at the height of the global Covid-19 pandemic, as an example of a high-impact unpredicted event and thereafter, is discussed under this emerging theme. The wellness challenges may hinder key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity. While the discussion guide commenced with open-ended questions related to the organisational impacts and global trends observed during Covid-19, participants were not asked to specifically comment on wellness related issues, yet the effect of the traumatic shared experience became evident as the adverse wellness impact on bank employees and customers were prevalent in responses to questions related to the pandemic.

During the second round of interviews, conducted to the end of 2022 and early in 2023, after the height of the global Covid-19 pandemic, everyone needed to deal with and adapt to the ongoing impact of the pandemic. The prolonged general uncertainty, physical (including Long-Covid), mental health related issues, loss of loved ones, loss of physical freedom during lockdown, fake news, threats to food security and other essential supply chains (K4R2, K9R2), concerns over job losses and diminished financial security, took its toll. In addition, the reality of working from home for more than two years and having to change general life habits and routines such as attending exercising, religious gatherings or sport and cultural events at very short notice and with little warning because of Covid-19 restrictions, seriously impacted the wellness of the workforce and customer bases, according to participants' responses (K8R2, M7R2).

5.2.7.2 More stress, more meetings, and working longer and harder

More stress, more meetings and working longer and harder necessitate setting better boundaries to ensure a balance can still be achieved and employee wellness can be improved. Each of the causes that may impact negatively on employees' sense of a balanced life, will be discussed below.

1) More stress

Employees and customers alike had to deal with a lot of macro events on top of and some because of the pandemic itself. These include geopolitical instability, financial uncertainty, inflation, job losses, supply chain disruptions, trust issues with

governments, global bodies, social and traditional news media, causing more overall stress (K4R2, K8R2, K9R2).

In South Africa, the considerable trauma of the pandemic, didn't happen in the context of an otherwise normal reality, noted participant (K7R2). Covid-19 had to be dealt with on top of the stress caused by a weak local economy, rolling electricity black-outs, devastating floods, political turmoil, civil unrest which peaked in July 2021, lack of employee bonus and increase freezes, as well as recruitment halts meaning more had to be done by fewer staff. South Africans were fatigued by an onslaught of mishaps, many completely out of their individual daily control. The sudden shift to working from home in the middle of March 2020, while interesting in the beginning, also started to take its toll as people worked much longer hours, the stress of technical connectivity cost and reliability issues, struggling to set the boundaries between work, home, family life, fitness routines, socialising, and leisure time as highlighted by most participants in the second round of interviews (M7R2, M10R2). For those directly impacted by the virus, contracting Covid-19 themselves or caring for a loved one added additional stress and if the patient didn't survive, it set off yet another massive additional weight on the shoulders of everyone impacted, especially if it is someone in the same household, family, or circle of friends. While the bank in which the study was conducted adapted remarkably well in the first couple of days and weeks of the pandemic, "As an organisation, we made it work" (working from home), noted participant (K6R2). Employees adapted to remote work in good spirits and with humour at first, but the relentless nature of the pandemic was bound to take its toll over time. Some of the changes mentioned by participants are highlighted below.

"We have less time to do the work", stated a marketing participant (M7R2), who interacts with a significant percentage of the marketing fraternity in the bank. The expectation seemed to be that people can work longer hours. Employees felt like they must accommodate work outside official office hours, also since they sometimes needed to dash out to buy groceries or fetch children from school. Work spilt into weekends, which was less the case before, according to participants. Work output was the only evidence of work, where presence used to count towards engagement pre-Covid. The participants mentioned that it was difficult to find time to do work and have proper

breaks, given all the meetings. It was more difficult to find one's own routine and structure when not imposed by office hours and rules. It was also more difficult when you lived with others who also worked from home; it was challenging to synchronise breaks and serious meetings, noted a participant (M7R2). There was a lot of fluidity and lack of structure, which can be difficult to navigate. Everyone moved away from the conventional ways of working in the industrial age. Burn-out of employees became an issue (K7R2). People were stressed and traumatised. Data from MS Teams (the bank's virtual meeting platform) reporting suggests that people worked much harder and longer under very stressful circumstances. Burn-out of employees who were already working hard, was evident, although it also resulted in outperformance compared to bank's peers (K7R2). Participant (K9R2) remarked "The idea of work hard-play hard was gone".

2) More meetings

More meetings were held, initially to address the new challenges introduced by the pandemic and later to make-up lost revenue and to catch up on other KPIs that may have been neglected during the height of the pandemic. Physical meeting rooms have capacity restrictions, but a virtual meeting doesn't so more people were invited, and more opinions were given which sparked more debate and impacted more people in terms of actions out of the meetings, which increased workload. People also didn't spend hours every day in traffic or to go out to lunch, so more time was available to have meetings.

Specific to the organisation in which the study was conducted, participants noted the pandemic resulted in more meetings, since virtual meetings don't have meeting room capacity constraints and people couldn't have quick check-in chats at the water cooler or coffee station. Participants had to adapt to online meeting protocols and felt guilty at first if they were not behind their laptops every minute of the working day, and beyond. Covid-19 resulted in more meetings (K4R2, M7R2, M10R2). "Now everyone is expected to be in every meeting and being engaged", noted participant (M7R2). It is difficult to gauge engagement in virtual meetings "with only a few speaking and cameras not being on", said one marketing leader participant.

3) Working longer and harder

Clients understandably became more demanding at the height of the pandemic, given the economic impact of the health crisis. More time was available to work as commuting time and other chores like getting children ready to go out to school wasn't required during the lockdown phase of the pandemic. More meetings lead to more work. Uncertainty about job security created by the pandemic, although never an expressed threat from the bank's side, although the gratitude to have a job when family and friends were not always as lucky did add to a sense of responsibility to work harder and longer.

Some participants (K4R2, K6R2, M7R2) believed there was an unspoken expectation that people would work longer hours since they didn't need to sit in traffic, fetch children from school, go grocery shopping and during the height of lockdown, they were not even allowed out of the house. Several participants felt they needed to be available at all hours, since they were stuck at home. Work started to spill into nights and weekends and the lines became very blurred (M7R2). Since the organisation was very clear in its commitment to secure jobs, employees felt the responsibility to go out of their way for customers, since it was evident that not all South Africans were in the privileged position to have job security. This meant that employees worked even harder, not realising that it is not a sustainable approach, given everything everyone had to deal with.

5.2.7.3 Change in organisational culture

Informal water cooler chats and regular lunch conversations or quick coffee meetings in person were no longer an option, so people needed to make more of an effort to check in with colleagues for work or social interactions. Every interaction had to be much more deliberate, and co-workers didn't have the benefit of reading body language as one can mostly only see the person from the neck up in virtual meetings. Since virtual meetings also happen from home, there was an advantage of seeing a person more in their own environment, which in some cases was good, but in others may have felt invasive to people who value privacy.

Culturally, Covid-19 changed the bank, noted a CEO-level key internal stakeholder participant. Physical office interaction ended during the start and height of the pandemic; how and where people work changed. Work from home (WFH) gave a higher sense of freedom and ability to work from remote places. There is more flexibility and agility for employees, but there was an impact on organisational culture. People are still working remotely, so it is difficult for leaders to sense how employees are really doing, said a CEO-level key internal stakeholder participant (M7R2). Leadership will try to get staff back for cultural reasons, not just productivity, so leaders can get their finger on the pulse of the wellness of the organisation's human resources (K7R2, K9R2). There will also be smaller and more dynamic workspaces.

5.2.7.4 Breaking bad habits

Breaking the routine of getting into the office daily, maybe going to gym afterwards or meeting up with friends, also influenced professional, personal, and social habits. Not all new routines created healthy habits. Some unhealthy personal habits needed to be identified and intentionally changed, post the height of the pandemic as they had negative consequences, such as eating or drinking too much, exercising less, or using too much time on social media that could be used to study or engage in a hobby.

Participants reported spending more free time watching TV or streaming entertainment and diets, exercise plans and relaxing social interactions with anyone outside one's household, suffered as a result. Changes in routines impacted on wellness. A marketing leader participant reported now being lazier to drive or leave the house, than they used to be. One can still get everything from your phone, so it's just continuing. "Now that we're out of Covid, or the eye of the storm, I need to get out of the habit and cut down on things, *because it is not good for me*, said one marketing leader participant (M7R2). When we went to the office, I would go to gym afterwards, which I don't do now", said a participant. Many employees gained weight and started consuming more alcohol. "I was just bored", noted a participant. Now employees must unlearn the things that are not good for them. "I'm just in a rut", observed one participant (M7R2). Some report watching too much television or other content. "You forget about all the things you can do outside the house – seeing the birds and the trees". Once participants did leave the

house they said: “it is refreshing to be out and experiencing things for real again”. One participant mentioned the need to go to church again. A good thing from Covid is to see family more and that continues, and it is good. Country alcohol dependency was also indicative of a different alcohol dependency pandemic (depending on alcohol to deal with stress – the country’s reaction was a sign that people need help). People were making dangerous plans to get alcohol resulting in desperation. “It was good that they shut it down” (access to alcohol), stated one participant (M7R2). Wellness (physical, mental, and spiritual) and mental wellness focus needed to increase to counter the impact of isolation and more pressure.

5.2.7.5 Pouring from an empty cup

Balance and boundaries are required between employees’ healthy self-interest and self-care and customer interest, to ensure there is sufficient reserve energy and resilience to deal with unexpected events. One needs to ensure one’s own survival to ensure the survival of those who depend on you - the principle of fitting your own mask first on an airplane in the unlikely event of a loss of cabin pressure refers. Guiding principles are needed to establish what influences or impacts the perception of fair self-care from the perspective of the individual, the dependents (impacted) and the audience (present, but not directly or immediately impacted). Leaders (marketing leaders and their key internal stakeholders) are placed in a delicate position as a result. While they themselves were affected by the pandemic to different degrees, they remain responsible for keeping the doors open and the lights on. In dealing with their own trauma and adapting to the pandemic, they also had to look after their employees and the company’s short, medium- and long-term interests. In addition to understanding and empathising with what employees are experiencing, they must keep the bigger picture in mind and ensure they balance what is right for the collective with what is right in individual circumstances.

Trends observed, such as the Great Resignation and Quiet Quitting and movements now advocating more strongly for a 4-day work week, more flexibility to work when and where preferred and tolerance for asynchronous work, are gaining traction. Organisations are responding by giving up rented office space and selling off unused

offices. Some organisations are increasing perks such as free high-end coffees and beverages at the office, better gyms, childcare facilities and more restaurants and retail outlets such as small grocery stores or pharmacies on the premises, all in a bid to lure employees back to the office and in some instances, with organisational culture sited as a major reason, especially for younger and less experienced employees, while for others it is back under the watchful eyes of their managers, some who struggle in assessing productive contributions and output beyond physical presence. Covid-19's impact was felt far and wide.

During the first round of interviews, responses were purely professional, but markedly, the second round of interviews were filled with noteworthy emotion, humanity and humility, meaning the professional pretence and guards were lowered and participants responded on a more human level, rather than saying what they think is the appropriate response, they were courageous and straightforward in reflecting and responding from their personal truths and realities, which is deeply valuable, since this is the reality of the workforce expected to deliver significant results in the face of considerable adversity.

Organisations cannot realistically expect employees to (physically or virtually) show up at work unencumbered and the same reality is true for the customers they dealt with; many customers were exhausted and very stressed at the height of the pandemic, making them more demanding and irritable with the bank's people, policies, and processes. The well-known axiom: "you can't pour from an empty cup" comes to mind as a metaphor to explain that employees cannot put customers first if they are not equipped with the physical and mental health support required to excel at their jobs. General employee wellness is also required for healthy stakeholder interactions, which in turn benefits customers.

More recently, in terms of a post pandemic reality, the stress of returning to work at offices, even on a part-time basis, introduces a different kind of stress altogether, especially for those who have adapted their routines to include caring for dependents such as children, elderly parents or other family members or friends. This was exacerbated by having to deal with elevated stages of loadshedding severely impacting

morning and evening home and commuting routines, such as traffic flow when traffic lights are out, stealing precious hours from a day, which could otherwise be used productively for work or personal responsibilities.

The general impact on organisations includes the political, economic and employment factors, such as working from home, fake news, social media impact, science versus popular opinion affecting employees and customers. Financially, a health crisis led to an economic crisis (K4R2), which pumped money into the system (K4R2, K8R2, K9R2), resulting in flooding of funds in the system. Trade networks slowed down and supply shortage and pumped-up demand, resulting in high inflation. Job losses abroad continues to be a major concern (K7R2), but job security issues are more prevalent internationally, while South Africa has a skills shortage, Goldman Sachs, Facebook, Amazon, Twitter, and others are letting large numbers of staff go. Geopolitical pressure also adds to global stress and pressure (K8R2).

Impact of the pandemic on people in general includes the mental wellness focus, dealing with isolation and more pressure experiences during the pandemic. Mindsets shifted due to trauma. People are more focused on their family. People want to get out of the house, go on holidays, almost like we've forgotten about the event, noted a few key internal stakeholder participants. In the South African market people are frazzled, said a C-Suite-level key internal stakeholder participant (K7R2). People need or want to go out more, but also make it nicer at home, in case they are locked in again, added one product head key internal stakeholder participant. In first-world countries, people wanted to return to life and living, but now they want to work in a job and location of their choice, even for a lower salary. There is a big move away from 9-5 jobs. A participant (K6R2) said: "life is short, I need to do more enjoyable stuff".

Employers, on the other hand, are encouraging people to come into the office with free incentives. People don't want to work as collective trauma was experienced. We haven't fully transitioned in terms of how we live in the new world, and we haven't figured it out yet. According to one CEO-level key internal stakeholder participant (K7R2), who represents a significant part of the retail bank, some South Africans live in a bubble [Private segment (high income or net asset value) clients – growing lending, low

defaults, great investment growth]. Work/life balance challenges are seen with work from home (WFH) boundaries. Supply constraints clogged up logistics networks and created inflationary impact, noted three key internal stakeholder participants. Employees benefitted from companies willing to pay for skills due to skills shortages. Companies didn't realise the full impact of what was happening.

In summary, an emerging theme was identified through the data collected during the second round of interviews, post the Covid-19 pandemic, and presented the researcher with an unexpected, yet significant consideration to be included in the conditions for the successful implementation of customer centricity in a South African retail bank. Covid-19's impact (financial, political, individual) was felt far and wide and the result was also evident in responses from participants in the study, when asked about the impact of the pandemic, as well as global trends (i.e., Quiet Quitting, The Great Resignation) shaping as a result. Employee holistic wellness (mental, physical, and spiritual) and the need to find a new balance and set boundaries, based on the new realities at work and at home, surfaced. These realities, such as more meetings, working longer hours, under more stressful conditions or circumstances, changes in organisational culture, breaking bad habits acquired during the pandemic, blurring of professional and personal lines and postures, the need for resilience and adjusting to the post pandemic world, were discussed, together with the impact on the drive of the organisation to become more customer centric. The impact on the research proposition was also discussed, which confirms that the organisation could benefit from marketing leadership directing key internal stakeholders' alignment to evolving customer centricity, through the steps to realise the benefits described.

5.2.8 ROUND TWO: Emerging theme five – dynamic interaction and interdependence between main phenomena

Emerging theme five namely, dynamic interaction and interdependence between the main phenomena in the ecosystem addresses the research sub-question: What might an integrated conceptual framework for marketing leadership direction of key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity look like? The data was collected during the second round of interviews.

Participants were asked about the interaction and interdependence between the three main phenomena namely marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity and whether they think the dynamic interaction and interdependence between the phenomena changed because of Covid-19.

5.2.8.1 Working together towards improved alignment to evolving customer centricity

Responses from marketing leadership participants (M7R2) included that they did not believe the new marketing operating model was designed to be more customer centric, but rather “to be more efficient and serve the business better”. Courses to introduce the model covered looking at business’ financial statements, yet this is not the current way of operating, with views of business’ opportunities and challenges. No market research is shared, and no customer insights required for briefing meetings. Marketing capabilities are about execution. Capabilities don’t have time to do a deep dive to understand businesses. They are just churning out marketing material. Actual performance of material can be gauged, but impact on business’ profit and loss (P&L) is not evaluated.

CEO-level key internal stakeholders (K4R2, K9R2) noted that a concerted effort is required to understand the interconnected nature of everything we do. We should know how to impact financials and growth and sales and do more client immersion for all marketing leadership and key internal stakeholders, to better understand clients from all the different perspectives to be more client centric. What stops us from client immersion, he asked and answered: “the rat-race and death by meetings, while we should be finding five or ten things to focus on, cut the clutter and manage governance issues better (K4R2). The bank has comparatively more meetings than competitors, we need to spread the load better” (K4R2, M10R2). “Covid impacted meeting sizes, which is good and bad”, noted participant (K4R2).

During the time of an award-winning advertising campaign a decade ago, nobody cared about the marketing structure, because marketing worked. There wasn’t an internal focus, as we had an external focus. We need to think of how we can convey messages

in a way that resonates. If you don't understand something it is difficult to convey it to someone else, so it is important for marketing leadership to be immersed into the business so they can understand the essence of the business and customers. Do key internal stakeholders have realistic expectations of marketers? "The expectation is that they need to create a wow". Marketing leadership needs support and can then be quite powerful. Nando's marketing is very powerful, but it is in their DNA (K4R2). Also, it was important to understand the South African DNA and the organisational DNA and then it resonates. A rhetorical question posed by a participant was: "What is the DNA of the bank?" – technological innovation, *there to help* (DNA), but we won't insult someone, we're a safe brand. We can tell a good story about technology" he argued in conclusion.

A product house CFO noted that we need a strategic view of the current marketing reality and then an updated view on a regular basis. Elevator pitches for product positioning purposes, for example, need to be created in a collaborative manner between the different stakeholders and ensure we talk to customers about the right things and then we can measure or describe the benefits from a customer perspective, she added. Collaboration will drive innovation and the process of solving problems together will spark creativity. "We need more informal discussions and connections", she noted (K6R2). "Disney is a good example of inventing and creating magic. My thinking evolved and I think customers also changes – I want something quick and efficient, but I also want a human connection and shared purpose" (K6R2). The bank's approach must be more human, not just technology solutions. We need to innovate within and between disciplines and build relationships and partnership before we sit down to solve problems behind desks. We should also facilitate less of an industrial mindset and build more of an innovation mindset; "What is the grown-up version of a sandpit, playdough, etc". It mustn't feel like work. "How do we bridge the excel spreadsheet aversion between Finance and Marketing?", she asked in conclusion.

Participant (K8R2) suggested: "Rather than billboards and posters, marketers must be skilled in showing new opportunities, emerging technology, and fintech". They must show strong research capability to reveal opportunities and have good business acumen. Mature communication with business owners, that are not too academic, are also required. Marketing leaders need to foster relationship with business owners; the

marketing community currently sits on the side-line, so marketing is not part of major debates and contributors to conversations, he concluded.

Participant (K9R2) stated that experience and focus are key in ensuring a concerted effort between role players. Marketing leaders should avoid multiple foci even if the person is experienced. “Magic is required, that sparkles and shimmers”, which would be the result of years of grappling with issues and solutions, engaging cross-discipline and cross-business unit to spark ideas.

5.2.8.2 Visual representations of the alignment imperative

Figure 5.1 below, created by the researcher, and initially introduced in Chapter One, seeks to demonstrate the challenge organisations face when the main phenomena of the research study are not optimally aligned to create dynamic interaction and interdependence, with the result that while they may be moving or show activity, it revolves around itself in isolation, losing out on the energy and outputs that could potentially flow from aligned interaction towards a common goal.

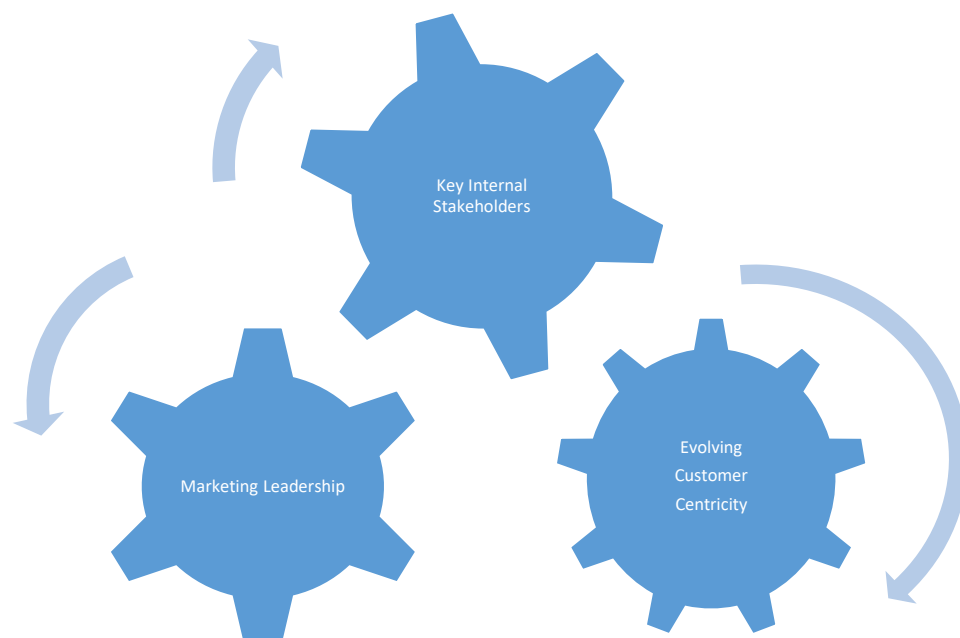


Figure 5.1 Misalignment: Phenomena (marketing leadership, key internal stakeholders and customer centricity) are only revolving around themselves and evolving in isolation

An opportunity exists, however, to create a more optimal alignment of the phenomena at play to ensure a more desirable outcome, which is depicted in Figure 5.2 below whereby using the analogy of a vehicle's steering system, the steering wheel represents customer centricity, and the pinion represents marketing leadership directing key internal stakeholders, depicted by the wheel in the figure, towards improved customer centricity. In essence the pinion ensures that the wheels keep the intended direction of the steering wheel, which is customer centricity in this analogy.

The "Rack and Pinion" depiction provides an intentionally simplistic way of thinking of the interplay between the major phenomena, marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity, in the context of a larger organisational eco-system.

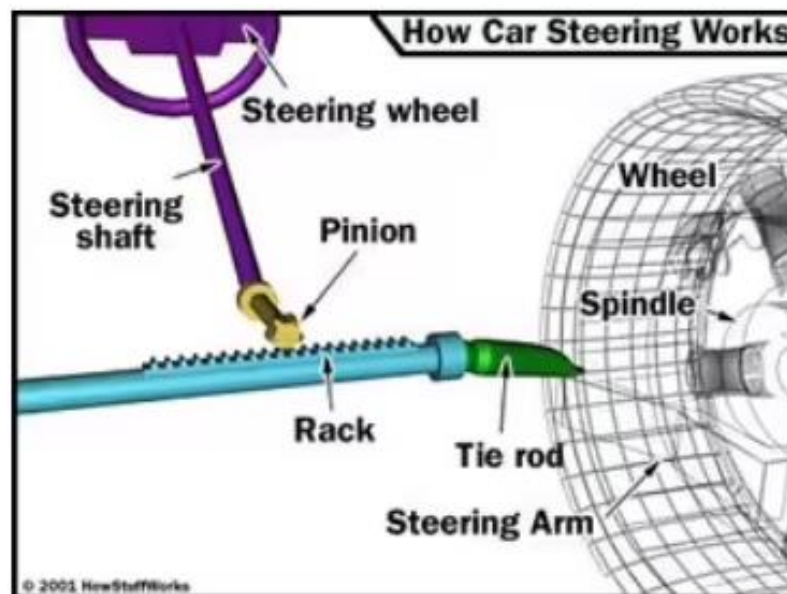


Figure 5.2 How car steering works

Source: Adopted and applied to this study based on the idea originating from <https://auto.howstuffworks.com/steering2.htm>, accessed 22/8/21.

Analogy:

Steering wheel: Customer centricity

Pinion: Marketing leadership

Wheel: Key internal stakeholders

5.3 Conclusion

Five emerging themes were identified through the analysis of the data collected and coded. The themes are 1) modernising the role of marketing leadership; 2) the intention and implementation of customer centricity; 3) bridging gaps; 4) achieving balance and setting boundaries and achieving balance; and lastly, 5) dynamic interaction and interdependence between the main phenomena of the study. Each theme and its sub-themes were discussed in detail.

Chapter Six will cover conclusive discussions, address the key findings, recommendations to leadership and managers, management implications, research contributions and recommendations for future research, related to each of the five emerging themes, as well as research limitations.

6. CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSIONS, FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

6.1 Introduction

Chapter Six provides a high-level summary of the research methodology, analysis and results, before addressing the secondary objectives and confirming that these objectives, as well as the research propositions, have been achieved through a combination of the critical review of literature and the empirical study. Each secondary objective will be discussed together with the research question it addresses, before concluding with a reflection on the primary objective of the study. The emerging themes and their associated key findings from analysis of both rounds of data collection from the selected retail bank's employees, the recommendations and implications will be presented. Recommendations for future research will be addressed thereafter. The achievement of the primary objective will then be confirmed. The limitations of the study will be stated, and the conclusion section will follow to end off the chapter and the thesis.

6.1.1 Secondary objectives

The following secondary objectives were set for the study:

- 1) Provide a deep understanding of marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity perceptions and perspectives.
- 2) Examine and describe the antecedents and potential consequences of key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity.
- 3) Evaluate the potential role of marketing leadership in directing key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity.

Each secondary objective will be addressed together with the supporting summary of the related literature reviewed or the empirical research's sub-questions, research propositions, emerging themes and their corresponding key findings, recommendations

to management and leadership and management implications, thereby contributing to the achievement of the relevant secondary objective. Recommendations for future research will also be shared.

6.1.1.1 Secondary objective one: Provide a deep understanding of customer centricity, marketing leadership and key internal stakeholder alignment perceptions and perspectives

Secondary objective one was set to provide a deep understanding of marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity perceptions, and perspectives. This objective was achieved through an extensive literature review. A high-level conclusive discussion and application to the selected case of each of the three main phenomena (marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity), and their related key finding/s, recommendation/s, and implication/s for each phenomenon, will be presented below, starting with marketing leadership.

Marketing leadership

While the specifics of the selected case set in a leading South African retail bank may be unique in many instances, the overarching idea that marketing leadership could play a broader role in organisations is debated in a compelling manner in prevalent international literature. Section 3.2.3 of Chapter Three addressed marketing leadership as an evolving phenomenon, with Section 3.2.3.1 focussing on the broadening of the role of marketing leadership (Moorman 2019; Rant & Cerne 2017; Ananda *et al.* 2016; Brunswick 2014; Ismail 2014). For some time, scholars including Moorman, van Heerde, Moreau and Palmatier (2019); Rant (2017); Varadarajan (2017); Kumar (2015); Brunswick (2014); Kumar (2011); Kotler (2010) and Varadarajan (2010) debated the strategic role of marketing leadership, with some, including Moorman (2019) and Varadarajan (2010) fearing that marketers' influence and impact are dwindling among strategic decision-makers, despite noteworthy research on marketing representation in top management teams (Whitler, Krause & Lehmann, 2018:86). Vargo, Koskela-Huotari and Vink (2020:28) state: "Traditionally, marketing has been understood as a small sub-domain of economics and business focused narrowly on the techniques of the marketing department of a firm".

Looking and acting beyond this traditional understanding could open up a wealth of opportunities for marketing leadership and the organisations where they are employed; this is also true for the retail bank being studied. Broadening the focus, in this instance to include the directing of customer centricity alignment, will also benefit the organisation's customers in the long term.

While a narrow focus can reap significant reward, the opportunity to zoom out into a broader view of marketing leadership's potential role and scope is necessary to see the latent benefits waiting to be unlocked and envision a future for the role of marketing leadership that is reimagined and reshaped to include a greater strategic influence and impact that it currently enjoys in the case study retail bank. Ensuring appropriate board and executive leadership support will be necessary if marketing leadership is to optimally fulfil the envisioned future role, thereby breaking out of any current restraining mindsets and understandings of the role of marketing leadership, within the marketing fraternity, but also and most importantly amongst their key internal stakeholders in the bank, as shaping a new role will also mean discontinuing some of the activities, habits and attitudes that formerly shaped understanding and perceptions of marketing leadership. These include marketing leadership being responsible only for the seemingly more entertaining aspects of representing the bank to customers, such as brand positioning, eventing, expos and advertising, rather than being equal business partners in driving growth of the bank's market share, balance sheet, shareholder value, share of wallet and other dominant organisational key performance indicators (KPIs).

Key finding related to marketing leadership

Marketing leadership currently has a unique opportunity to broaden its role and confidently reimagine its standing as an equal business partner to other disciplines and to improve their contribution to the bank based on the unique skills, talents and experience they bring to the organisational ecosystem, with a key focus on the needs and wants of the retail bank's customers.

Since marketing leadership is generally seen as the customer custodians, also in the case bank, and they have a wide range of knowledge, skills, experience and talents, which are currently not employed to full potential, it will benefit the case bank to consider how

the balance between deep specialisation in marketing leadership can be unlocked, accessed, understood and distributed to all relevant areas in the bank, whereby the synergy of collaboration can be ignited intentionally. It will require leadership maturity from marketing leadership and their key internal stakeholders, as well as the broader ecosystem role players, since it will require a different way of working, thinking and interacting, but all with the significant potential benefit of improved customer centricity. Marketing leadership in the retail bank will need to be more proactive in bringing their key internal stakeholders into their world to demonstrate why and how alignment to evolving customer centricity could be a powerful orientation to even further boost performance and sustainability in the bank. The key internal stakeholders of marketing leadership in the retail bank will need to accept that marketing leadership comes from a different thought world which has value and can contribute to the organisation in a unique manner which complements the skill sets of these stakeholders. Working together in harmony, as much as possible and as often as possible, while challenging and encouraging each other in respectful and healthy ways will ultimately give the bank a competitive advantage over peers who are unable to implement customer centricity optimally. It may not be easy in the beginning, but as soon as the results emerge as evidence, the drive will gain momentum.

Leadership and management recommendation

Marketing leadership in the bank needs to take stock of the wealth of unique technical, leadership and strategic skills they have on offer and then intentionally reposition the function in the organisation to ensure that the application of these skills offers the optimum number of benefits to customers and ultimately the organisation. Skills include market-sensing, listening to the voice of the customer, wielding influence, and an ability to influence others, driving organisational growth and ability to forge partnerships with people from different thought worlds. In the context of the selected retail bank, the skills will be employed to direct key internal stakeholder alignment to customer centricity.

Management implications

The challenge will be to reposition marketing leadership away from a short-term, tactical, or operational function to a vital and equal strategic business partner. Specific

measures to take include proactively contributing to strategic discussions and taking the lead in these discussions where customers are impacted, articulating and scientifically proving the impact marketing leadership can have when they take charge of strategic customer related matters, versus being kept busy, in some instances, with what their key internal stakeholders may understand marketing to be. In addition, they should courageously spearhead the customer cause, in the context of the retail bank's key performance indicators (KPIs), which should not be in conflict, but they should work in unison to create stakeholder value across the board. The unique opportunity exists for marketing leadership to reshape their future role. The impact will be mainly on marketing leadership, with support from their key internal stakeholders, especially CEOs.

Key internal stakeholder alignment

The retail bank has a range of talented individuals in its employment. These employees are organised into different business units according to the lines of business the bank wants to drive. Within these business units, an executive committee (ExCo), together with the business unit CEO, will create and execute strategies, in line with the retail bank's overall strategy. ExCos, in the retail bank, will consist of a range of individuals from different thought worlds representing disciplines including Finance, Product Management, Client Segment representatives, Legal, Risk and Compliance officers, Human Resources and Marketing, each with specific and sometimes somewhat conflicting pre-agreed KPIs. Aligning these ExCo members to the agreed strategy is part of the CEO's responsibilities, as well as each of the members in collaboration with one another. Specialist focus, for example marketing leadership focus, on matters specific to customers, in the form of taking responsibility for driving alignment to evolving customer centricity, could ensure the experts are playing the correct role while the "conductors", in this case the CEOs, can focus on ensuring the harmony between role players is achieved, rather than having to play one of the instruments in a "symphonic C-Suite" or ExCo, in the case of the case bank.

In Section 3.1.1 of Chapter Three, the importance of stakeholder alignment as stated by Burger and Pelsler (2018:145), O'Keefe *et al.* (2016:422), Coetzee (2014) and Van Riel (2011), as well as the potential benefits and challenges associated with concepts such

as collaboration (Zhelyazkov, 2018), the different thought worlds in different disciplines and the challenge of finding shared vocabulary between different stakeholders (Whitler, 2014), were examined. The quest for a “Symphonic C-Suite” where all stakeholders perform in harmony and unity (Saha & Katha, 2018), performing proactive “silo-busting” (Gulati & Ranjay, 2007) and making a concerted effort towards improved coordination (Brønn & Brønn, 2017; Halevy, Halali & Zlatev, 2019), cooperation (Sterev, 2017 & Layton, 2011) and employee engagement (MacGillavry & Sinyan, 2016) was professed.

Key finding related to key internal stakeholders in the retail bank

Key internal stakeholders, including CEOs and CFOs, are keen for the bank’s marketing leadership to take on a broader role, but they also need to recognise the interdependence in achieving the organisational objectives that marketing leadership is leading. Focus on silo-busting (between business units and departments in the retail bank), learning to connect across thought worlds (of different disciplines represented in the bank), collaboration, coordination, cooperation and increased engagement will help achieve harmony.

Leadership and management recommendations

The recommendations, based on literature reviewed for marketing leadership, is that it is important to be more aware of the need for and benefits of improved organisational alignment to a shared purpose or objective, such as being more customer centric in the selected bank and to then actively encourage practical ways to achieve alignment through proactive silo-busting, working harder to connect employees from different thought worlds and better collaboration, coordination and engagement. Turning sometimes challenging relationships into productive partnerships between marketing leadership and key internal stakeholders could be achieved by increasing everyone’s awareness of the shared purpose and goals, garnering appreciation for the richness in diversity of thought, building increased tolerance for conflicting opinions, presenting practical ways to resolve conflicts and reaching responsible trade-offs that do not compromise on values and principles.

Management implications

Securing buy-in and building trust through demonstrations of competence, and managing short-term result expectations given potential initial losses, or lower profits over the short term, may present a challenge in a retail bank. The challenge over the long term will be to broaden the scope of marketing leadership directing their key internal stakeholders' alignment to customer centricity to include all internal stakeholders. An opportunity exists to ensure even more long-term prosperity, sustainability, create more significant market share leadership gaps, grow greater competitive advantage, and build increased brand love, while also improving or addressing more human factors such as employee and societal wellness, which aligns well with customer centric principles. Marketing leadership can play a unifying role between stakeholders in the case study retail bank, thereby also paving the way for creating improved key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity. The impact on the retail bank's leadership and management will include the need to prepare for the additional focus and effort it will require to be intentional in working together across business unit silos and different disciplines' thought worlds (such as Finance and Marketing or Product Management and Human Resources), building trust, and having the patience to maturely deal with the delayed gratification (such as profit dips over the short-term) that may initially be related to an increase in customer centric outcomes.

Customer centricity

The retail bank selected for the case study notes customer centricity as part of its strategic intent but has a strong history in which product centricity served the organisation well, so it is understandable that there may be some employees who are a bit reluctant to shift from a winning formula used in the past, to a new way of orientating the bank to the markets it serves. It is also difficult to turn such a big ship, so small or incremental turns toward becoming more customer centric must be acknowledged and celebrated, while forging ahead on the journey to alignment of employees to evolving customer centricity. Identifying and harnessing the best area of expertise to help drive this new orientation is necessary, to ensure there is a strategic driving force directing the shift on behalf of the board. Marketing leadership as custodians of customers are well placed to take on such a task, but observed loss in credibility and influence in some

instances will need to be addressed to allow the full marketing fraternity to make a significant contribution to the strategic drive. Many organisations internationally are driving a more customer centric orientation, in a similar manner to that of the case study retail bank, and this is debated in literature, with a conclusive summary below.

With regard to the evolution of customer centricity, Section 3.4.3 in Chapter Three the shift from product centricity (Colleoni *et al.*, 2021; Kotler *et al.*, 2021; Fader & Toms, 2018:97) is examined, as well as increased interest in customer centricity over time (Kellogg, 2019; Stanford, 2019) and geographies according to Google Trends (2022), and customer centric culture is discussed (Colleoni *et al.*, 2021:7). Value co-creation, and creating value for society, innovation (Duarte & Picchi, 2021) and the need for a holistic approach Goyette, Markelz and Yohn (2018), authenticity, attitude (MacGillavry and Sinyan, 2016:7), consistency across channels, values, mindset (Yohn, 2018:1), assumptions, and artefacts (O’Keeffe *et al.*, 2016:423) were also discussed in the context of the evolution of the customer centricity phenomenon.

Potential benefits of increased customer centricity for the retail bank in this case, as discussed in detail in Section 3.4.4 of the Literature Review in Chapter Three, includes customer centricity enabling a singular and strong market-centred focus according to Birshan, Seth, and Sternfels (2022), Von der Heydt (2017), Bernhard and Olderog (2014:9) and Coetzee (2014:1000). Furthermore, with increased customer centricity, customers are placed at the centre of strategy (Fader & Toms, 2018; Coetzee 2014) such as client acquisition, entrenchment and retention strategies in a retail bank, ensuring the loyalty of the best customers and prioritising high lifetime value customers (Fader & Toms, 2018:42), such as young professionals with high future income potential. Increased return on investment (ROI) and stakeholder satisfaction (Vlašić & Tutek, 2017; O’Keeffe, 2016), lower prices (bank fees in this case), higher responsiveness (to retail banking customer queries, for example) and dependability (keeping the brand promises as well as meeting commitments), and shorter delivery time (Madhani, 2019:7), (of physical debit and credit cards or home loan applications responses, for example, in the retail banking context), supply chain efficiency (leading to cost containment in retail banking) and competitive advantage (Madhani, 2019:7) and increased marketing innovativeness and cross-functional knowledge sharing, according to Osakwe

(2020:455), Moorman *et al.* (2019:2) and Eriksson *et al.* (2020:6) are also benefits of increased customer centricity.

Key finding related to customer centricity in the retail bank

Customer centricity is an evolving phenomenon and while interest in the phenomenon has increased significantly in the past decade in general and over the last five years in the case bank, countries and continents in the Southern Hemisphere, including South Africa, have not been optimally involved in articulating the evolution from their perspective, providing an opportunity to actively and meaningfully contribute to discussions and debates and to challenge the current seemingly lacklustre approach to the discourse, in general, albeit gaining prominence and momentum in the retail bank being studied, where ring-fenced pockets of hyper-focus on specific segments and their unique needs is paying dividends in terms of financial, market share leadership, market conduct and client affinity measures.

Leadership and management recommendations

The bank, its leadership, employees and customers have a lot to gain from actively engaging in discussions and debates about customer centricity, so the recommendation is to create platforms in the bank for in-depth discussions and deliberations between different business units across the transactional, investment, lending, insurance and other lines of business, as well as across different disciplines and departments, ideally starting with the most challenging relationships.

Management implications

The impact on the bank's leadership and affected employees will be the challenge of learning to deliberately think "customer first" and "putting oneself in the shoes of your customers" every time, as a matter of ongoing habit, will not be easy. Maintaining agility and securing ongoing management buy-in, resource constraints and clarifying measures for success may also present challenges. Opportunities, such as incentivising and entrenching customer centric attitudes, behaviours, and habits, living brand values, keeping brand promises and differentiating the organisation from existing competitors and new entrants, in the head office and client-facing frontlines of the bank, in urban and rural areas, exist. The impact will be largely on the bank's marketing leadership to

steer the increased employee engagement required to curb the challenges and realise the opportunities mentioned above.

Discussion - dynamic interaction and interdependence between main phenomena in the retail bank

The literature references, in Chapter Three, to dynamic interaction and interdependence between, for example, the main three phenomena, as well as its depiction through a proposed conceptual framework, include Rintamäki and Saarijärvi (2021), Lindgreen, Salomone and Reyes (2020) and Ananda *et al.* (2016) as discussed in Section 3.5.1. Section 3.5.2 shares some of the basic principles of Systems Thinking, including big picture thinking, balanced timeframes, unlearning linear thinking, valuing non-measurables and functioning in and influencing the system, according to Brønn and Brønn (2017:303). Trust presents as an important ingredient in authentic engagements, and this also applies to retail banking, where building trust with colleagues is vital to progress. A relationship of trust with stakeholders can lead to less conflictual situations and helps to design strategies that engage stakeholders in organisational activities (Langrafe *et al.*, 2020:309). For the system to function properly, the dependencies within the system must be harmonised (like the idea of a Symphonic C-Suite), which requires a great deal of coordination (Brønn & Brønn, 2017:300).

In Section 3.5.6 of the Literature Review it is stated that the financial services industry, in which the primary research single embedded case study is set, remains a complex and dynamic network of socio-economic systems (Deloitte, 2020; EY Global, 2020; PwC, 2020; BASA, 2019; Burns *et al.*, 2019; Schwab, 2016/7; Coetzee, 2014; Jones, 2014; Baird & Gonzalez-Wertz, 2011). Ananda *et al.* (2016:177) argue that organisations adopting a transactional marketing approach will most likely focus on representation actions, while a customer-oriented organisation places more importance on engagement. “The components of an organisation and its interdependent relations can be transformed; the components interact and intersect one another, leading to interconnected dimensions. Consequently, this transformation leads to not only less defined, but also more flexible and dynamic functional groups or elements of the marketing organisation”, according to Ananda *et al.* (2016:178). This dynamic and complex context

will require a continuous reflection on the role of participants and other stakeholders in the retail bank's ecosystem.

Key finding

A basic understanding of the interdependence and interplay in the retail bank between marketing leadership and their key internal stakeholders, to direct key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity, can be based on a simple framework for intentional collaboration towards a shared vision.

Leadership and management recommendations

Leadership and management will need to create a context within which it is possible for stakeholders to build trust and engage more to ensure the synergies and benefits of the interdependent dynamic can be realised in the bank.

Management implications

The challenge will lie in creating fair, reciprocal and authentic relationships in the case of bank's ecosystem so stakeholders can work together in a harmonious manner. The opportunity is optimising the synergies resulting from collaboration, better coordination, and cooperation. The bank's leadership and management will be impacted as they will need to gauge progress related to the building of trust relationships between marketing leadership and their stakeholders.

To conclude, the above supports the achievement of the secondary objective, confirming that a deep understanding of customer centricity, marketing leadership and key internal stakeholder alignment perceptions and perspectives was achieved.

6.1.1.2 Secondary objective two: Examine and describe the antecedents and potential consequences of key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity

Secondary objective two was to examine and describe the antecedents and potential consequences of key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity. The antecedents to be considered, potential consequences, key findings, recommendations, and implications are discussed below.

Conclusive discussion

In terms of antecedents, in Section 3.4.6 Lamberti (2013) shares the importance of having clarity on the conditions for the successful implementation of customer centricity (including, but not limited to, nurturing a customer centric culture, leadership buy-in, a supportive organisational structure and cross-functional collaboration), which marketing leadership and their key internal stakeholders will need to consider when embarking on the journey. Other literature related to the successful implementation of customer centricity include Zengin (2019), MacGillavry and Sinyan (2016) and O’Keeffe (2016). This section will conclude the discussion on the topic of customer centricity implementation (Tirado *et al.*, 2019:231; Lamberti, 2013:589), measurement (di Laurea, 2021; Umemoto, Kizu, Nakazaki, & Hirayama, 2019; Shah *et al.*, 2006:118), as perceived by customers and employees (marketingcharts.com, 2014) respectively. Osakwe (2020), Palmatier *et al.* (2019:8), Tirado *et al.* (2019:231) and Lamberti (2013:589) shed light on the implementation, institutionalisation and transformation towards a more customer centric organisation. From an emerging market perspective (BRICS - Brazil, India, China, Russia, and South Africa, and MINT - Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Turkey) and based on empirical analysis, Osakwe (2020:456) states local market conditions, such as competitive intensity among them, can affect corporate behaviour’s attitude towards the development and/or implementation of strategic activities and in this case customer centricity.

The consequences of marketing leadership directing key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity includes the view that customer centricity may be viewed as far-reaching by giving customer interests priority and putting them at the centre of all the actions in the organisation (Habel *et al.*, 2020:28). This is in contrast with Scheinbaum and Wang (2018:9), who view customer centricity in a more limited manner as they state: “While a broader customer orientation refers to businesses’ belief of putting the customer’s interest first and focuses on developing a long-term and profitable enterprise for a business, customer centricity more specifically entails components of communicating with consumers”. Culture and implementation focus are important, since managers need to remind themselves that actions speak louder than words. As such, managers are encouraged to “walk the talk” with regard to fostering perceptions of customer centricity (Habel *et al.*, 2020:38). With reference to Section

3.4.3 of the Literature Review, research conducted by MacGillavry and Sinyan (2016:6) found a shift in strategy that focused on cultural change from the top down can bolster the link between employee engagement and customer centricity. Their findings show that the results of this effort not only accelerated implementation of the company's customer experience management programme but also identified practical measures for fostering a customer-centric outlook and complementary behaviour throughout the organisation. Encouragingly, also because of customer centricity, "banks outperform their peers", according to EY (2020:23). Through the broader role for marketing leadership directing key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity, the desired consequence is also to make significant progress in the quest for intelligent interplay between the main three phenomena of the study similar to the idea of a "Symphonic C-Suite" where all stakeholders in the bank perform in harmony and unity (Saha & Katha 2018) with coordination (Brønn & Brønn, 2017; Halevy, Halali & Zlatev, 2019), cooperation (Stereov, 2017; Layton, 2011) and healthy employee engagement (MacGillavry & Sinyan, 2016).

Key finding

It is important to take note of the antecedents and consequences (including a customer centric culture in the bank, enabling structures and bank board buy-in) when embarking on a journey whereby marketing leadership directs key internal stakeholder alignment to customer centricity. Understanding the conditions of successful implementation and institutionalisation of customer centricity will increase the chances of success and minimise unintended consequences or allow for proactive mitigation of potential negative consequences, such as a short-term decrease in profit growth. In a retail bank context, buy-in from the board and executive leadership will be necessary, given the potential negative short-term impact on some stakeholders and shareholders, so clearly articulating a customer centric orientation as an investment in the future is pivotal.

Leadership and management recommendations

The recommendation to the bank's leadership and management is to properly prepare for the journey to ensure conditions are favourable for the successful implementation and institutionalisation of customer centricity in the bank and to ensure the direction from marketing leadership to key internal stakeholders achieves the intended

alignment. This means that a customer centric culture, enabling structure and necessary senior leadership buy-in, for example, are in place.

Management implications

Implications to bank leadership and management includes the challenge of listing and assessing the relevant antecedents and conditions for the successful implementation of customer centricity, relative to the opportunities they present and the scale and speed in which the associated benefits can be realised. This should be done in collaboration with the bank's marketing leadership and their key internal stakeholders, so the impact of the collaboration to complete the assessment will also encourage silo-busting and an exercise in cross-disciplinary work involving stakeholders from a range of different thought worlds. In the retail bank under study, busting silos and connecting key internal stakeholders from different thought worlds to those of the bank's marketing leadership can be achieved by intentionally creating project teams, SteerCos, ExCos and other formal and informal work groups to leverage the richness of talent and build a greater appreciation for the diversity of talent, skills and experience in the bank. Meeting structures, agendas and mindful meeting chairpersons can help ensure bank employees from different thought worlds are all given an equitable chance to present, discuss and debate their contributions, opinions and perspectives, and should be encouraged to make for a more well-rounded approach to all opportunities and challenges.

In conclusion, the achievement of secondary objective two can be confirmed through the extensive review of literature as discussed in Chapter Three and summarised above with key findings, recommendations and implications for leadership and management to conclude the discussions.

6.1.1.3 Secondary objective three: Evaluate the potential role of marketing leadership in directing key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity

Secondary objective three was to evaluate the potential role of marketing leadership in directing key internal stakeholder alignment to customer centricity. The research questions are presented below for ease of reference, after which the emerging themes

are introduced. From there the research questions with their related emerging themes are discussed.

6.1.2 Emerging themes

The following emerging themes were identified through the thematic analysis of qualitative data collected during the two rounds of individual interviews. Data was closely and repeatedly examined to identify common themes, through topics, patterns and ideas repeated regularly. The following themes were identified as emerging themes for the purpose of the empirical research study:

- 1) Emerging theme one: modernising the role of marketing leadership
- 2) Emerging theme two: customer centric intent and conditions for successful implementation
- 3) Emerging theme three: bridging gaps
- 4) Emerging theme four (Round Two only): achieving balance and setting boundaries
- 5) Emerging theme five (Round Two only): dynamic interaction and interdependence between main phenomena.

6.1.3 Research question 1: How could marketing leadership direct key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity? Findings, recommendations, and implications

To answer this question, emerging theme one provides more information, together with its associated key findings from round one and two of data collection, recommendations, and implications, in the section below.

6.1.3.1 Emerging theme one: modernising the role of marketing leadership in banking

Following the presentation of the results and findings of the thematic analysis as described in Chapter Five, the section below presents the key findings from round one and two of data collection respectively, as well as recommendations and implications for emerging theme one.

Round One: Key finding

Marketing leadership is keen to take on a broader role in the organisation, but will need to position itself as more consistent, authentic, dependable, unifying and strategic and less operational by contributing more to strategic direction and customer insights.

Round Two: Key findings

Marketing leadership find it difficult to represent the voice of the customer in the organisation since they are so internally focussed. There is very little first-hand interaction or exposure to customers, customer facing channels or focus groups, for example, which also makes market sensing difficult, if not impossible.

Leadership and management recommendations

Firstly, leadership and management need to urgently work with marketing leadership to address the obstacles standing in the way of marketing leadership reaching its full potential to unlock the latent benefits which could accelerate the organisation's journey to customer centricity, by harnessing the power of marketing leadership's key internal stakeholders and directing their momentum towards alignment to evolving customer centricity. Secondly, a platform and opportunity should be created for marketing leadership to connect with their key internal stakeholders in a meaningful and productive manner. Lastly, establish what steps can be taken by marketing leadership to position themselves as drivers of strategic direction and identify the key areas where marketing leadership can shift focus to be perceived as more strategic in their role as opposed to operational and supportive.

Management implications

With regard to being a role model for customer centricity, marketing leadership requires the executive leadership to support them by also "walking the talk". The structure also needs silo-busting, the operating model needs to be enabling not complicating and debilitating, the culture needs to be customer centric and marketing leadership's key internal stakeholders across the different thought worlds should support them in the proposed broader role. Another challenge to marketing leadership is to be more vocal and advocate more intentionally to be perceived and to be more strategic in their role. Marketing leadership can use the opportunity to branch out to product development,

data analytics, amongst others, beyond the short-term campaigning nature of the current role. Create and distribute a marketing leadership responsible leadership checklist with the top five or ten behaviours associated with responsible leadership in addressing conflicting interest. Build these behaviours into the organisation's incentive and reward systems. In terms of impact, key internal stakeholders need to be more aware of the strategic potential of marketing leadership and ensure that marketing leadership are always present in strategic conversation and that their voices and views are given attention and active consideration. While marketing leadership should direct the alignment of key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity, all CEOs in the bank can also play an active supporting and guiding role to ensure success, especially in the beginning phases of implementing a modernised role and scope for marketing leadership.

6.1.4 Research Question 2 – How could the dynamic interaction and interdependence between each of the three main phenomena of the study, marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity be better understood and optimised? Findings, recommendations, and implications

To answer this question, emerging theme two provides greater clarity, together with its associated key findings from round one and two of data collection, recommendations, and implications, in the section below.

6.1.4.1 Emerging theme two: customer centric intent and conditions for successful implementation

Following the presentation of the results and findings of the thematic analysis as described in Chapter Five, the section below presents the key findings from round one and round two of data collection respectively, as well as recommendations and implications for emerging theme two.

Round One: Key finding

The intent to be customer centric is strong in the hearts and minds of the bank's employees, but the implementation commitment and follow-through does not always match the intent.

Round Two: Key findings

Customer centricity was less foreign as a phenomenon during the second round of interviews than it was during the first round. Participants also acknowledged that it is a journey and not a sprint to become more customer centric and again noted that the intent is there to become more customer centric, but the implementation is a challenge. In some instances, participants stated that the bank may never be 100% customer centric as product centricity has value in some instances.

Leadership and management recommendations

In terms of recommendations to management and leadership related to customer centric intent and implementation of customer centricity, it is important in statements of intent, for example when culture, vision and values are discussed, to emphasise the importance of implementation, since customer centricity cannot be achieved only through intent, but also needs intentional implementation, which may require changes in structure, changes in behaviour, and learning to really put the customer first. To ensure the momentum is accelerated in the drive to improve key internal stakeholders' alignment to evolving customer centricity, the suggestion is made to appoint a customer centricity custodian, ideally housed in the marketing leadership fraternity, or at executive leadership level, as a medium-term driver while marketing leadership transforms into their broadened role to include the direction of key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity. Actions and strategies can be employed to create more coordination between marketing leadership and their key internal stakeholders, especially in the context of a crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. This can include breaking down silos and having open and regular communication between different areas related to what is in the best interest of customers in a range of scenarios.

Management implications

Intent without implementation does not advance a matter. The successful implementation of customer centricity will require a shared understanding of the phenomenon, maturity, a supportive and enabling organisational and operational structure and operating model, culture shift capability, agility, and ownership lead via a

customer centricity custodian with aligned scorecards, clear incentives, appropriately measured and rewarded customer centricity, with the understanding that it is an ongoing journey. It is necessary to holistically integrate customer centricity into each value chain design from human resource, including recruitment, training, measures and rewards, marketing, product, finance, and information technology (IT). Leadership, and management need to “walk the talk”. Leadership authenticity is key to ensuring buy-in down the reporting line. During the second round of interviews, data suggests that participants believe the bank’s culture is becoming more customer centric. Customer centric intent was practically displayed during Covid-19 since the bank had to be very agile during the pandemic to ensure it can assist customers in near real-time. The immediate challenge to the organisation is to ignite the intent to be customer centric to create a spark that can be fuelled over time. The organisational structure, operating and segmentation models must enable and support the drive towards increased alignment to evolving customer centricity. A challenge to leadership and management is to not assume that implementation of customer centricity means that the organisation cannot promote its products together with its features and benefits. The condition is that the product/solution was conceived, designed and created based on a deep understanding of the market needs, following market research or other market sensing methodologies. Leadership should call out and prevent marketing leadership being reduced to day-to-day, short-term, promotional, and eventing activities. Key internal stakeholders and the entire organisation will benefit exponentially if they interact with marketing leadership based on an evolved understanding of the strategic contribution that marketing leaders can make to an organisation, including reducing future market uncertainty by keeping a pulse on the market and target customers, for example.

Even through small steps towards increased alignment to evolving customer centricity, the opportunity to start building momentum exists in the organisation, especially since the intent is already there. Leadership can start by appointing a customer centricity custodian. Aligning staff and other resources, including technology, to enable customer centricity is important, including removing frictions and having mature decision-making to ensure responsible trade-offs are made. The opportunity is for marketing leadership to link the expressed and unexpressed customer needs of customers to the benefits the product, service, solution or bundle delivers, positioned in a manner that resonates with

the target market in a manner that provides a significant sustainable competitive advantage over competitors that create products that suit their capabilities and then shift it into the market.

Marketing leadership will need to ensure that customer centricity forms part of every relevant internal value chain to broaden the impact. For example, for staff it means job specifications, recruitment, training, scorecards, performance management, rewards, incentives, and promotions. Leaders must authentically and respectfully demonstrate buy-in into customer centricity through culture and mindset shifts and leading from the front with regard to philosophy, purpose, strategy, mission, and vision articulation. Customer centricity must be included in philosophy, purpose, vision, mission, culture, values, mindset, attitude, behaviours, beliefs, and strategy for the organisation to successfully implement it. The impact on leadership and management is the need to demonstrate an ongoing, unfailing commitment to customer centricity beyond intent, but also practically demonstrating customer centric habits and actions in their day-to-day dealings and decisions. Leaders will need to inspire employees to also act in the way they expect from others in terms of alignment. Self-assessment can be utilised to gauge if personal behaviour reflects the desired behaviour from enabling key internal stakeholders. Regular, clear, contextual and targeted communications are needed from management into frontlines. Leadership visibility in physical and virtual format is required. Opportunity for two-way communication should be promoted to increase conversation and engagement between head office and customer facing frontline staff. Senior management and leadership should intentionally make time for two-way interactions, whether in physical or virtual format.

6.1.4.2 Emerging theme three: bridging gaps

Following the presentation of the results and findings of the thematic analysis as described in Chapter Five, the section below presents the key findings from rounds one and two of data collection respectively, as well as recommendations and implications for emerging theme three.

Round One: Key findings

Firstly, a shared understanding of the main phenomena is important to ensure discussions and debates are productive and stakeholders do not talk past each other. Secondly, the strategic and operational divides between the head office and the customer facing frontlines are gaps to be bridged. Lastly, to link different thought worlds, marketing leadership needs to gain the full trust and respect of their key internal stakeholders.

Round Two: Key findings

Compared to round one, there are still a number of silos in the bank, where in some instances it is better and in some instances it is reported to be worse than before. The challenges related to marketing leadership and their key internal stakeholders' different thought worlds have not been resolved; each group says the other can try harder to engage and CEOs do not see it as their role to facilitate harmony in terms of employees from different thought worlds. In general, there is a perceived arms-length relationship between marketing leadership and key internal stakeholders, which could undermine inter-disciplinary silo-busting. Key internal stakeholders expect excellent results from marketing leadership, but often struggle to articulate what they mean by it (due to lack of marketing vocabulary and different thought worlds, so there is a need to bridge that gap), although many key internal stakeholders will use Nando's, Nike and Checkers Sixty60 as examples of what they see as marketing excellence. The organisation is not currently reported to be fully benefiting from either the intentional or corridor and impromptu interactions between key internal stakeholders and the marketing (capability) roles responsible for creating the communication connection with customers, as it did pre-Covid-19.

Leadership and management recommendations

Management and leadership need to ensure that there is a shared understanding of the main phenomena including marketing leadership, key stakeholder alignment and customer centricity to enable productive and inclusive communication, debate and negotiation related to the phenomena. Management and leadership also need to proactively engage on the ground and spend more time with frontline employees to ensure they have their finger on the pulse of what customers are asking for, rather than

mostly relying on market research and “second-hand” feedback from frontline channels, which could be sanitised for fear of negative repercussions. Regular honest two-way communications will be very valuable in the drive to becoming more customer centric. Cross-functional and cross-business unit collaboration will increase when employees break out of their comfortable silos. It will enrich the employees’ experience in the organisation, which will have a positive effect since more collaborative problem identification and resolution will ensure many perspectives and angles are considered. The challenge is to not include too many stakeholders merely for the sake of including people, but to be disciplined and focused on the purpose of the endeavour. Arranging work or even social interactions, where employees from different thought worlds can express their unique views and have their voices heard, with the intent of linking these thought worlds to empower greater collaboration between different disciplines or functions, can be very valuable. The contribution that marketing leaders bring to organisations as it relates to deep customer insights, which will truly benefit clients, should be acknowledged and employed more widely.

Management implications

To connect the head office and frontlines, methods of communication (internal communications, training, roadshows, video conferences) and ensuring two-way communication were found to be important (involving the frontline in key decisions and to ensure mutual understanding is reached, while avoiding assumptions). To link the different thought worlds, key internal stakeholders will welcome more proactive initiatives from marketing leadership, especially with regard to planning and reporting of business results after campaigns.

6.1.5 Research question 2: How could the dynamic interaction and interdependence between each of the main three phenomena of the study (marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity) be better understood and optimised? Findings, recommendations, and implications

6.1.5.1 Emerging theme four: achieving balance and setting boundaries

Following the presentation of the results and findings of the thematic analysis as described in Chapter Five, the section below presents a conclusive discussion to summarise the context of the Covid-19 pandemic which gave rise to this emerging theme, thereafter the key findings from round two (only) of data collection, as well as recommendations to leadership implications for emerging theme four will be presented.

Conclusive discussion – Covid-19 context and other challenges facing employees in the case study retail bank

Apart from traumatic events such as pandemics, floods or civil unrest, and the toll of the daily stresses experienced by South Africans, given loadshedding, inflation, crime, for example, employees also must deal with long meetings with many attendees with lots of ideas and opinions and sometimes murky prioritisation, which can drain energy and enthusiasm. After a day filled with meetings, work such as catching up on emails, pre-reading exco slides, preparing presentations or memos, connecting with staff and keeping legal, risk and compliance related requirements, as well as training up to date, all has to happen after hours or over weekends, meaning employees can't refill their cups with rest, relaxation, hobbies, religious and sport related activities and time with family and friends, so it becomes a vicious circle leading to exhaustion and other more serious physical and mental health issues. Leadership and management need to tackle this issue with the seriousness it deserves, given that employees are the organisation's greatest asset and cannot easily be replaced given the skills shortages in the country.

Round Two (only): Key findings

The second round of data collection, after the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic had subsided, revealed that employee wellness is an essential pre-condition to the successful implementation of customer centricity, in addition to the conditions described as part of the literature review and by participants in the empirical study, during round one of data collection.

Ensuring organisational employee centricity (focussing on employee wellness first) should precede leadership and management expectations of employees to be more customer centric. While a lot of work may be done in the background to ensure employee wellness, the general awareness of support services and tangible results achieved could be made more visible to employees. Sub-themes include overall employee wellness, dealing with more stress, attending more meetings, working longer hours and harder (higher complexity and uncertainty), the navigating changes in organisational culture, the need for some employees to break unhealthy habits, and preventing having to 'pour from an empty cup.

Leadership and management recommendations

In terms of overall wellness including the additional sub-themes identified, it is recommended:

- 2) Leadership and management should continue to evolve existing wellness initiatives and evaluate efficacy over time, comparing the approach and results during the pandemic, soon thereafter and the longer-term impacts that may continue or still arise, as researchers continue to examine the longer-term effects of the pandemic on many fronts beyond healthcare.
- 3) In terms of employees having to deal with more stress, more meetings, and working longer and harder, leadership should keep monitoring the stress levels, time spent in meetings and working hours and intensity of work expected of employees to get a longitudinal trend to compare the results from pre-pandemic data, data sourced during the pandemic as well as the phases following the pandemic.
- 4) Leadership should continue collaborating with employees to find solutions for sub-optimal outcomes.
- 5) Leadership should gauge changes in organisational culture. Keep a close eye on the gap between desired and actual culture and source feedback from a wide variety of employees as perceptions may differ significantly depending on age, gender, division, and line management.

- 6) Leadership support employees needing to break unhealthy habits and continue to invite employees to reach out to professionals to help them ideally prevent or otherwise address unhealthy habits. Teach all staff to know the warning signs and ways to address issues so they can assist a co-worker to find help if required.
- 7) Leadership must help prevent employees having to pour from an empty cup. Employees won't be able to think and act in a customer centric manner, if they have other issues sapping their energy and focus. Helping employees to be the best versions of themselves and supporting them when they are dealing with additional challenges will aid the bank's drive towards customer centricity and will make key internal stakeholders more receptive to the direction from marketing leadership to increase alignment to evolving customer centricity.

Management implications

With regard to employee wellness, the impact on the research proposition is the need for proactive management of holistic employee wellness as an added condition for the successful implementation of customer centricity and it will need to be significantly different to any wellness initiative or programmes that were in existence prior to the pandemic, since the collective trauma experienced by everyone shifted perspective on stress responses to stimuli, which impacts interactions between employees but also between customer and employees. This therefore has relevance and practical implications in the head office itself, in head office and frontline interactions, as well as frontline and customer interactions, meaning it can affect customer centricity implementation and evolution in an organisation at multiple levels and stages of interaction.

With regard to wellness as a megatrend identified during the Covid-19 pandemic, general wellness poses an enormous challenge and opportunity, with significant potential to help or harm employees and customers, depending on how well leaders and managers approach it. Humility and humanity need to be key ingredients into solutioning since the impact on global human wellness has not been assessed in full and may only be revealed with hindsight in decades to come. Experiments to find better ways of doing things need to be undertaken with caution.

The implications of employees working under conditions of heightened stress, which is almost normalised as the accepted state in which to function can have dire consequences in future and is not a sustainable resource management approach. Distance and meeting room capacity made it possible to have more meetings in a room, which can be positive but can also be debilitating as too many views and opinions can lead to lack of timeous and definitive decision-making. Management needs to investigate global best practice and instil these disciplines into the organisation to ensure effective and modernised meeting protocols. Setting a proper agenda and driving said agenda intentionally is recommended. Management needs to normalise and mandate employees to proactively manage their working hours and workload based on mutually negotiated deliverables.

With employee wellness in mind, different combinations of physical workspace permutations (office, satellite campus, off-site or home) should be tested to identify the benefits and drawbacks of each and attempt to optimise the benefits and reduce the negative effects such as time in traffic, general out-of-home danger, travel cost, family responsibility scheduling, and similar considerations. An updated wellness assessment should be performed in order to gauge residual pandemic trauma and fatigue which may impact agility and resilience, in turn impacting engagement inside the organisation where ultimately customers will be affected. In regular wellness surveys a qualitative rather than quantitative scale-based instrument should be introduced allowing employees to provide richer feedback. Request potential solutions to address the most pressing issues. Test culture statements (especially related to employee interaction and customer centricity) to gauge post-pandemic resonance. A culture needs to be entrenched whereby it is understood that only when employees are well can they care for customers (directly or indirectly) in a manner that aligns with customer centric principles. Employees should therefore be supported to embrace healthy and resilient habits to avoid staff exhaustion, burn-out and depletion.

6.1.6 Research question 3: What might be a useful design of an integrated conceptual framework for marketing leadership direction of key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity? Findings, recommendations, and implications

To answer this question, emerging theme five provides more information, together with its associated key findings from round one and two of data collection, recommendations, and implications, in the section below.

6.1.6.1 Emerging theme five: dynamic interaction and interdependence between main phenomena

Following the presentation of the results and findings of the thematic analysis as described in Chapter Five, the section below presents the key findings from round two (only) of data collection, as well as recommendations and implications for emerging theme five.

Round Two: Key findings related to dynamic interaction and interdependence between main phenomena

Findings related to emerging theme five were grouped into the following sub-themes: interconnectedness, collaboration, and ingredients to success. Firstly, in terms of interconnectedness, it is necessary to understand the interconnected nature of everything that happens in the bank. Key internal stakeholders want a concerted effort. Secondly, collaboration, meaning marketing leadership, needs to bring key internal stakeholders into their world by doing customer immersions so they can understand customer perspectives better. More collaboration, including more informal discussions and connections, is required between marketing leadership and their key internal stakeholders, which should also help drive innovation to the benefit of customers and increased customer centricity. Lastly, in terms of ingredients for success, more human interaction and engagement (not just physical, but finding ways to have meaningful virtual interaction and engagements) and more innovation between disciplines are required for the shared purpose to be reawakened.

Leadership and management recommendations

Adoption of the conceptual framework proposed below should build momentum in the dynamic interaction and interdependence of the main phenomena and thereby accelerate the journey to ensuring marketing leadership's key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity.

Implications

Continuing from the vehicle engine related "rack-and-pinion" analogy used earlier in the research, the implications of emerging theme four can also be described in line with this analogy. In terms of "giving steer", CEOs can play a pivotal role in empowering marketing leadership to direct key internal stakeholders' alignment to customer centricity, but most CEOs expect marketing leaders to resolve it out on their own, which is a challenge. Set a proper agenda and drive the agenda to the agreed destination intentionally. Marketing leadership claim they do not have access or interactions with key internal stakeholders and are thus unable to navigate their roles beyond getting instructions or briefs, often out of context. There is also little to no interaction with key internal stakeholders such as CFOs.

Marketing leadership needs to understand the business; they need to know the "nuts and bolts", as it is difficult to create messages that resonate with markets if marketers do not understand the business and its customers. Marketing leadership needs to be immersed in the business so they can understand its essence, which means they need to know enough to sometimes take charge as required. Marketing leadership and their key internal stakeholders need a "travel buddy" system, meaning they need to build strong relationships and partnerships which are necessary for problem solving to prevent individuals struggling alone behind a desk. This requires a shift from an industrial mindset to an innovation mindset from marketing leadership. The marketing leadership needs to know the actual impact of strategies and campaigns on business KPIs, which are currently not always known, meaning the impact of their actions on growth and financials needs to be transparent so they can plan and create a longer term vision.

In the past when there were highly acclaimed marketing campaigns and they worked well in terms of business results, the internal structure and functioning of marketing leaders and the marketing fraternity and how they interact or depend on their key internal stakeholders was not discussed. It was perceived that excessive internal focus on structures and titles could divert attention from customers. The intention was that science (mechanics and technology) and art (aesthetic and functional design) should combine to optimise performance. A combination of good business acumen and creative problem solving can enrich conversations and improve outcomes and marketing leadership experience and focus were noted to be key ingredients in creating magic and sparking ideas.

The research revealed that too many internal operational meetings can prevent important conversations about customers taking place that will serve to make the organisation more customer centric. Once the challenges associated with the initial adoption of the proposed conceptual framework are addressed, there would be an opportunity to test and refine the framework over time, since all the main phenomena are dynamic in nature and the dynamic interaction and interdependence could be impacted by changes in one or multiple phenomena. Directing key internal stakeholder alignment to customer centricity should be approached as a continuous commitment which will impact the culture or the organisation as well as they day-to-day operations.

In conclusion, secondary objective three, as well as the three research propositions –

- 1) That the role of marketing leadership should include directing key internal stakeholders' alignment to evolving customer centricity
- 2) That the dynamic interaction and interdependence between of each of the three main phenomena of the study, marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity, should be better understood and optimised
- 3) That an integrated conceptual framework should guide marketing leadership direction of key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity

were achieved through empirical research, based on the research questions. The high-level results, key findings, recommendations and implications for leadership and

management were presented under the heading of each of the five emerging themes identified.

6.1.7 Primary objective

The primary research aim and objectives were to propose an integrated conceptual framework whereby the future role of marketing leadership includes directing the alignment of their key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity, in the context of a retail bank in South Africa.

Key finding

Marketing leadership in the case study retail bank could direct their key internal stakeholders' alignment with evolving customer centricity, as depicted in the newly proposed integrated conceptual framework. Apart from the extant conditions to the successful implementation of customer centricity, a new condition resulted from aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, which involved the wellness of the bank's employees (marketing leadership and key internal stakeholders) as a pre-condition to their ability to successfully implement customer centricity.

Recommendation to leadership

The recommendation to leadership is to adopt the integrated conceptual framework as a depiction of the modernisation of the role of marketing leadership by including the direction of their key internal stakeholders' alignment to evolving customer centricity to the responsibilities of the bank's marketing leadership.

Figure 6.1 below depicts the proposed future role of marketing leadership in directing their key internal stakeholders' alignment to evolving customer centricity. To ensure key internal stakeholders' (including CEOs, CFOs, Product Heads) contributions directionally align more closely to evolving customer centricity, marketing leadership can be shaped (triangle, as symbolised below) to provide direction and support on which key internal stakeholders can depend (lean, as symbolised below), since marketing leadership is seen

as the customer custodian, responsible for leading planning in line with achieving the organisational vision (alignment with evolving customer centricity), organising resources, communication of the vision and plans and evaluating progress against desired results (depicted by the prize or award icon in the below).

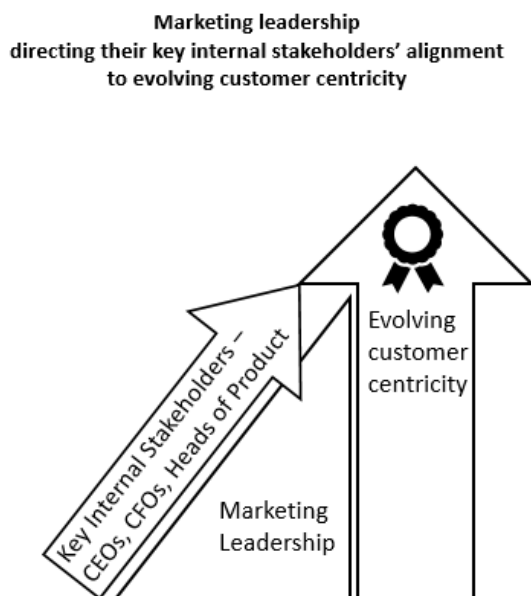


Figure 6.1 New/Proposed Conceptual Framework: Marketing Leadership directing key internal stakeholders' alignment to evolving customer centricity

Management implications

The management implications include socialisation of the proposed conceptual framework (as presented in Figure 6.1) by leadership and management to the employees who are directly impacted first, including all marketing leadership in the bank, together with their key internal stakeholders, including CEOs, CFOs and Product Heads. The more practical implications, such as addressing frequently asked questions, and change resistance as well as progress management, will also need to be planned, managed and evaluated. Successes on the journey (large and small) should be celebrated to ensure traction is gained at first and momentum is maintained over the longer term.

Based on the above, as well as the achievement of each of the secondary objectives as stated earlier in the chapter, the achievement of the primary objective can be confirmed.

6.1.8 Research contributions

The practical, methodological and academic research contributions are presented below.

1) Research contribution impacting practitioners:

The practical contribution includes a single embedded case study in a retail bank in South Africa, as well as a new conceptual framework to demonstrate optimised intelligent interplay between the main phenomena and new emerging themes identified from data analysis, which contribute significantly to the body of knowledge. The practical contribution also includes management implications and practical recommendations to leadership based on key findings in emerging themes identified through a rigorous coding and data analysis process. Specific transdisciplinary application in the context of the realities in the southern hemisphere, including the African continent and South Africa in particular, were also considered.

2) Research contribution to the body of knowledge:

The methodological contribution includes a longitudinal study conducted with two phases of data collection, four years apart, one phase prior to and one after the global Covid-19 health pandemic. The qualitative method was used to gain a deep understanding and insights into customer centricity and the current and future role of marketing leadership in directing their key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity.

The academic contribution is three-fold: firstly, it includes a comprehensive and critical review of literature to provide a broad theoretical framework. Secondly, empirical research was conducted in the context of the Mode 2 mode of enquiry to provide deep insights into the main phenomena (marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity) and their dynamic interaction and interdependence,

in the context of the case retail bank, serving individual and small business owners. Lastly, two literature-based data collection instruments in the form of individual interview discussion guides were created, which enabled the researcher to collect rich and meaningful data. These instruments can be used in their current form or adapted as required to suit the needs of a similar or near similar qualitative study. Recommendations for future research, related to the findings identified during the research process, as well as to bridge the limitations stated, are presented later in this chapter.

6.1.9 Recommendations for future research – content

Recommendations for future research will be presented as they relate to each emerging theme identified, based on the findings, recommendations and implications as presented in this chapter, starting with emerging theme one, namely modernising the role of marketing leadership in banking.

Emerging theme one - modernising the role of marketing leadership in banking:

- 1) Related to the findings in Section 6.1.3.1, there is an opportunity to further investigate root causes of role-related challenges experienced by marketing leadership, including some perceived inconsistency, improving leadership authenticity in following a customer centric approach and consistent promise-keeping. Marketing leadership can play the role of unifier between marketing leadership and key internal stakeholders more effectively, in the context of a broader role. The nature of the misalignment between branding and brand management on the part of key internal stakeholders can be explored, as well as how gaps can be addressed by greater efforts from marketing leadership.
- 2) Explore best approaches to ensure dissemination of critical strategic marketing information to key internal stakeholders, for example, the requirements for internal content distribution platforms that marketing leadership can use (such as leadership conferences, weekly bank-wide broadcast services and roadshows) or to share market research and key insights and establish the optimal frequency, content and sources of such content to ensure marketing leadership and key internal

stakeholders are aligned on the road to becoming more customer centric as argued in the findings under emerging theme one.

Emerging theme two: Customer centricity – intent and conditions for successful implementation

- 1) In terms of the conditions for the successful implementation of customer centricity and the related findings in Section 6.1.4.1, request priority ranking of conditions and explore different conditions for different divisions, organisations or sectors and examine detail on building customer centric organisational structures and operating models.
- 2) Identify which strategic and tactical learnings from the singular focus required by the Covid-19 pandemic could continue to serve stakeholders in terms of alignment and increased customer centricity and to ensure they are not lost as the world adjusts to a post-pandemic context.

Emerging theme three: Bridging gaps

- 1) Establish if there is a shared understanding of the main phenomena (marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity) to ensure optimised discussion and debates in the retail bank.
- 2) Examine the success of marketing leadership's longer-term contributions versus short term promotional activities in organisations where marketing leadership's role and scope are broader compared to organisations with a narrower role and scope.
- 3) Understand the reason marketing is often reduced to operational activities, rather than unlocking the true power of marketing leadership, such as directing alignment of key internal stakeholders to customer centricity.
- 4) Explore in more detail what characteristics and behaviour are associated with leadership maturity in the context of alignment to customer centricity, including the most common reasons for the mismatch between words and actions. Why are promises not kept or expectations not delivered against? Explore what more measurable or tangible evidence of true organisation-wide customer centric behaviour would be.
- 5) In terms of customer centric organisational behaviour, regularly measure whether organisational behaviour reflects customer centric behaviour and explore shifts in

the degree or actual nature of the behaviour as universal trends shift consumer demands and consciousness over time, and recently more dynamically.

- 6) Recommendations from analysis of the second (post-Covid-19) round of interviews include the need to understand what leadership characteristics inform perceptions of customer centricity and manage them for improved outcomes.
- 7) Explore the ideal mix between physical and virtual/digital engagements to optimise alignment between head office and frontlines. Explore the nature of two-way engagements for the head office and frontlines to feel heard, valued and understood and for optimal flow of information and insights. Explore frontline needs for alignment engagements and the feedback and insights that can be expected from two-way interactions, to provide head office with valuable inputs for consideration in value proposition and marketing output design.
- 8) Explore marketing leadership levels of self-awareness when portraying responsible leadership behaviour in situations with participants with potentially conflicting interests. To accelerate silo-busting and linking the different thought worlds, explore perceived gaps in marketing leadership's responsible leadership armoury and investigate expected behaviours to portray responsible leadership, based on the current responses provided. Research the potential for marketing leadership improvements in perceived leadership responsibility based on training and other interventions to explore the impact. Explore changes in perceived leadership responsibility according to key internal stakeholders following marketing leadership focussed interventions to improve skills.
- 9) Consider how marketing leadership and key internal stakeholders can learn from the pandemic and apply learnings in future to better respond to future crises whether economic, health, military, political or other challenges.

Emerging theme four - achieving balance and setting boundaries

- 1) Future research could potentially focus on the correlation and/or causality between employees' ability to align to evolving customer centricity, when they are at different levels of overall wellness, which could be calculated from a range of inputs related to unavoidable, manageable and avoidable stressors.
- 2) In a sustained crisis, careful and considered experimentation is suggested, rather than research gauging appetite for big and bold changes. Explore the core leadership

competencies that will help organisations navigate the new reality, with employee wellness front of mind as a pre-condition to customer centricity.

Emerging theme five – interaction and interdependence between main phenomena

- 1) A quantitative study could be considered to better understand and measure the effect of shifts or evolutions in each phenomenon (marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity) on the others, for example, to what degree does a loss in marketing leadership influence negatively affect key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity?
- 2) How could the new ways of work be optimised to ensure meaningful, innovative, collaborative interactions and engagements irrespective of physical proximity, but measured also in virtual “connectedness” and harmony that transcends the physical realm?

6.1.10 Recommendations for future research – methodology

Specific to the research methodology, recommendations for future research include suggestions to increase the trustworthiness of data, as well as suggestions for more efficient data collection.

For increased trustworthiness of the findings and a broader application of the research, the framework may include quantitative methods and research from different leadership perspectives, for example the perspective of the CEO, CIO or CFO leadership role in directing alignment to an evolving or dynamic concept, such as customer centricity. In terms of sampling, more internal stakeholders, head-office and regional representatives, internal and external stakeholders, head office and regional representatives could be included to present the views from the different leadership perspectives. Regarding geographical reach, the study could include national representation of the bank and its African subsidiaries could also be included. From the literature review, it was clear that there is an abundance of research conducted and reported in the northern hemisphere, but the southern hemisphere and specifically the African continent could further explore the gaps in research and knowledge regarding the similarities or differences in findings from its northern hemisphere counterparts' work. In terms of the financial services industry, more banks or banks and other financial

service providers could be included. Beyond the financial services industry, other service companies and retail companies could utilise the research and framework.

6.1.11 DaVinci TIPS™ Managerial Framework

A work-based challenge was identified which formed the basis for the case study. The challenge involved the relatively narrow role of marketing leadership in a major retail bank, resulting in missed opportunities including using marketing leadership's skills, knowledge and experience in directing their key internal stakeholders' alignment to evolving customer centricity. Banking in South Africa operates in the knowledge economy or creative economy, rather than the industrial economy, so knowledge distribution happens through professional networked communities, rather than business school experts as generalists or specialists. The researcher's qualitative study in the selected retail bank allowed for gaining of a deep understanding of the day-to-day lived realities of the participants in their natural settings. In-depth individual interviews were conducted to obtain participants' personal perspectives on the main phenomena being studied. They were also asked to consider how their role dynamically interacts within the interdependent ecosystem of the case study retail bank. This dynamic interaction and interdependence also impact the bank's customers and given the bank's significant market share, it will impact society at large. The DaVinci TIPS™ Managerial Framework is depicted in Figure 6.2 below.

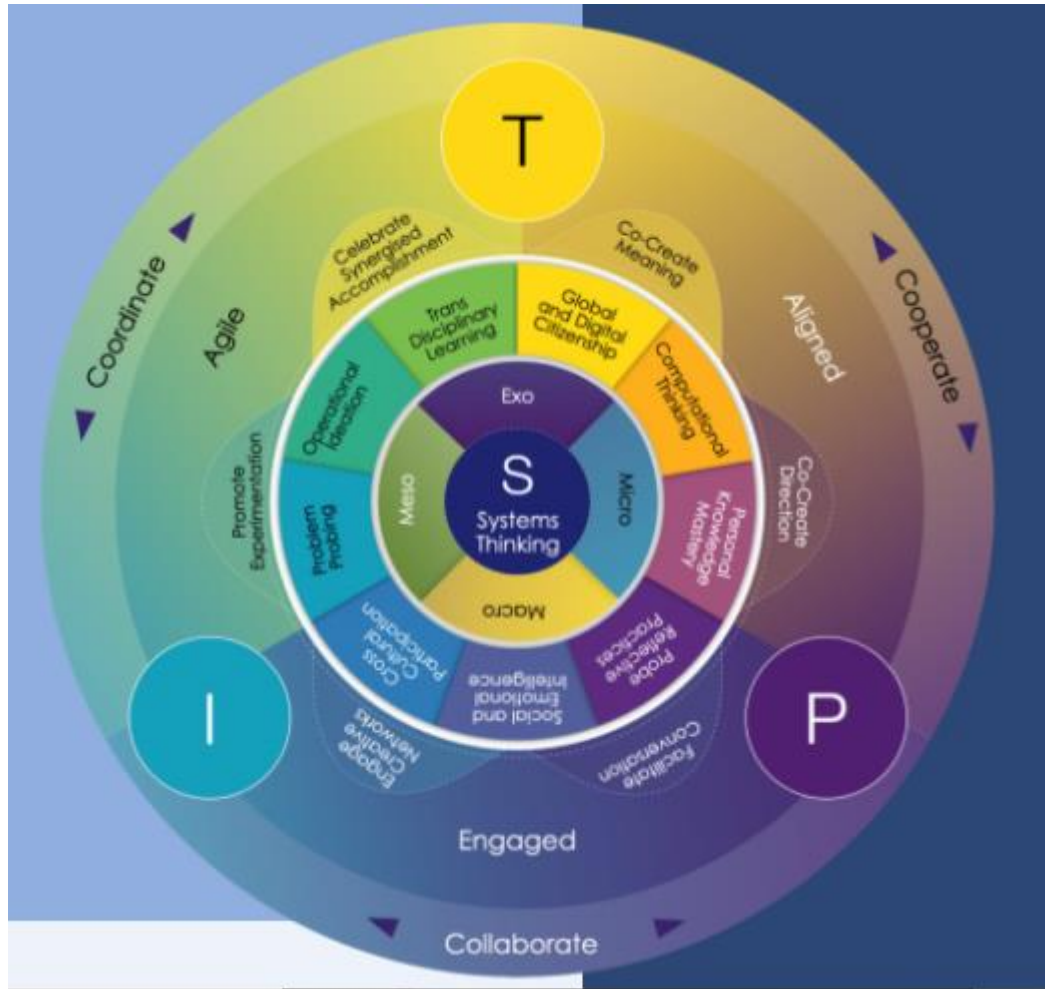


Figure 6.2 The DaVinci TIPS™ Managerial Framework

Approaching the lenses of the TIPS™ Managerial Framework from the centre, working through each lens towards the outer lens, in terms of the sub-systems that impact reality, the case study exists in the context of the southern hemisphere which has a more humane interpretation and reality (Lessem & Schieffer 2014).

In terms of representation of elements in the third circle from the centre in the case study, high-level notes include the reality of global citizenship as was most recently experienced through the Covid-19 pandemic that knew no borders and digital citizenship (including platform and ecosystem thinking) that was accelerated by the same pandemic. Computational thinking including estimation of return on investment, benefit and scaling projections, personal knowledge mastery through life-long learning, probe reflective practices encouraged through case studies and other forms of research,

social and emotional intelligence, including the need for maturity and responsible leadership. Cross-cultural participation includes consideration of local and global trends, in South Africa, sub-Saharan/African continent, southern hemisphere and globally. Problem probing was done through exploring participants' lived realities. Operational ideation was delivered through the proposed conceptual framework, recommendations to leadership implications. Trans-disciplinary learning was achieved by exploring the perspectives of marketing leadership as well as their key internal stakeholders who range from CEOs to CFOs and Product Heads.

Management of Technology, Innovation, People and Systems:

The management of technology, innovation, people and systems thinking as represented in the DaVinci TIPS™ Managerial Framework are all reflected in the case study's emerging themes and related key findings. Key findings were based on five emerging themes identified, including:

- 1) Emerging theme one: modernising the role of marketing leadership, which has elements of management of innovation and people incorporated.
- 2) Emerging theme two: customer centric intent and conditions for successful implementation, which has elements of management of innovation and people incorporated.
- 3) Emerging theme three: bridging gaps, which has elements of management of technology and people incorporated.
- 4) Emerging theme four (Round Two only): achieving balance and setting boundaries, which has elements of management of technology, innovation and people incorporated.
- 5) Emerging theme five (Round Two only): dynamic interaction and interdependence between main phenomena, which has elements of management of people and systems thinking.

The wings in the second last outer circle of the framework are also addressed in the case study. At a high-level, examples include:

- 1) Co-create meaning – shared understanding, shared value/s.
- 2) Co-create direction – evolving customer centricity.
- 3) Facilitate conversation, which will aid in bridging gaps and silo busting.

- 4) Engage creative networks by way of marketing leadership and key internal stakeholder collaboration and ultimately cooperation.
- 5) Promote experimentation, as proposed in terms of broadening role of marketing leadership as depicted by the case study's conceptual framework.
- 6) Celebrate synergised accomplishment – marketing leadership directing key internal stakeholders' alignment to evolving customer centricity and the associated potential benefits.

Agile, aligned and engage employers and employees:

Alignment between marketing leadership and their key internal stakeholders, as it related to evolving customer centricity was the key focus of this case study, although agility and engagement were also noted and discussed.

Workplace reality - Coordination, collaboration, cooperation, or combination:

The bank's current reality is a combination of the three realities as there is still some coordination (deadline driven) observable, moving to collaboration and some areas arrived at a cooperative (self-directed choice to engage, abundance of knowledge, skills and potential) workplace reality.

Table 6.1 below provides examples of key findings of the case study in summary to show the links to the TIPS™ managerial framework, which covers all aspects including the management of technology, innovation, people and systems thinking.

Table 6.1 Examples of Key Findings (in summary) and their links to the DaVinci TIPS™ Managerial Framework

Key Finding:	<p>Firstly, a shared understanding of the main phenomena is important to ensure discussions and debates are productive and stakeholders do not talk past each other. Secondly, the strategic and operational divides between the head office and the customer facing frontlines are gaps to be bridged, where technology can play a significant role. Lastly, to link different thought worlds, marketing leadership needs to gain the full trust and respect of their key internal stakeholders.</p> <p>TIPS™ framework link: Management of Technology and People</p>
Key Finding:	<p>Customer centricity is an evolving phenomenon and while interest in the phenomenon has increased significantly in the past decade in general and over the last five years in the case bank, countries and continents in the Southern Hemisphere, including South Africa, have not been optimally involved in articulating the evolution from their perspective, providing an opportunity to actively and meaningfully contribute to discussions and debates and to challenge the current seemingly lacklustre approach to</p>

	<p>the discourse, in general, albeit gaining prominence and momentum in the retail bank being studied, where ring-fenced pockets of hyper-focus on specific segments and their unique needs is paying dividends in terms of financial, market share leadership, market conduct and client affinity measures.</p> <p>TIPSTM framework link: Management of Innovation</p>
Key Finding:	<p>Marketing leadership currently has a unique opportunity to broaden its role and confidently reimagine its standing as an equal business partner to other disciplines and to improve their contribution to the bank based on the unique skills, talents and experience they bring to the organisational ecosystem, with a key focus on the needs and wants of the retail bank's customers.</p> <p>TIPSTM framework link: Management of People</p>
Key Finding:	<p>Key internal stakeholders, including CEOs and CFOs, are keen for the bank's marketing leadership to take on a broader role, but they also need to recognise the interdependence in achieving the organisational objectives that marketing leadership is leading. Focus on silo-busting (between business units and departments in the retail bank), learning to connect across thought worlds (of different disciplines represented in the bank), coordination, collaboration, cooperation and increased engagement will help achieve harmony.</p> <p>TIPSTM framework link: Management of People and Systems Thinking</p>
Key Finding:	<p>A basic understanding of the interdependence and interplay in the retail bank between marketing leadership and their key internal stakeholders, to direct key internal stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity, can be based on a simple framework for intentional collaboration towards a shared vision.</p> <p>TIPSTM framework link: Systems Thinking</p>
Key Finding:	<p>Key Finding linked to primary objective:</p> <p>Marketing leadership in the case study retail bank could direct their key internal stakeholders' alignment with evolving customer centricity, as depicted in the newly proposed integrated conceptual framework. Apart from the extant conditions to the successful implementation of customer centricity, a new condition resulted from aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, which involved the wellness of the bank's employees (marketing leadership and key internal stakeholders) as a pre-condition to their ability to successfully implement customer centricity.</p> <p>TIPSTM framework link: All four aspects of the TIPSTM managerial framework represented.</p>

6.1.12 Return on Investment (ROI)

The potential return on investment associated with the case study encompasses the financial impact including better cost control and human development impact, in this case including the broadening of the role of marketing leadership, innovation output for example through providing more innovative customer value propositions (CVPs), technology alignment based on accelerated digitisation trends, and alignment with company strategy, in this case, becoming more customer centric. In Section 1.2.3 in Chapter One it is noted that there are many opportunities for customer centric organisations. According to a report on banking in the new decade by EY (2020:14),

outperformers are customer centric. Many outperforming banks identify a clear customer segment and plan their entire strategy around understanding and meeting the needs of these target customers. Almost every significant decision is geared to this goal, from developing and marketing products, allocating investments in capital and ensuring that all management behaviour is driven by a focus on the customer. Outperformers focus on developing high quality, hyper-relevant services and experiences (CVPs) for target customers, rather than pushing products through traditional sales and markets. They continuously explore and create new offerings that better meet the needs of customers, regularly assessing service quality to ensure exceptional client experiences and to drive retention. Banks need to consider how they can remain relevant as customer preferences change. Customer centric banks outperform their peers (EY, 2020:23). Three areas of focus can help deliver the outstanding experiences that consumers expect. FinTechs and BigTechs have raised the bar for customer service, but high-performing incumbents (such as the case study bank) are maximising two competitive advantages, namely deep customer insights and the ability to use their size to lower costs (EY 2020:23). As referenced in Section 2.4.1 in Chapter Two, the highest performing global banks focus on resilience, committing to cost reduction, and putting the customer at the heart of the operation (EY, 2020:12). Outperformers thus build resilience (EY, 2020:13), outperformers control costs (EY, 2020:14) and outperformers are customer-centric (EY, 2020:14). Apart from the academic and professional contributions of the study as described in Section 1.6 of Chapter One, the benefit of adopting and applying the findings of the case study in the case retail bank will far outweigh any additional direct cost, given the financial, strategic and societal benefits that will flow from a more customer centric organisation with significant local, regional and international reach. The specific benefits to the case study bank included increasing the market leadership gap, increased share of wallet from existing clients, scaling of operations with cost saving benefits, even better customer satisfaction scores, higher revenue generation and increased profit as well as a faster shareholder value creation. Additional benefits of having responsible leaders as mediators between the lifeworld and economic systems, as described in Table 3.2 in Chapter Three, includes a contribution to society in the societal sphere, a contribution to the process of (re)producing a shared foundation of norms and values in the Lifeworld and a contribution to organisational efficiency in the Economic System. The practical

contributions impacting practitioners include a single embedded case study in a retail bank in South Africa, a conceptual framework to demonstrate optimised intelligent interplay between the main phenomena, management implications and practical recommendations to leadership based on key findings in emerging themes identified through a rigorous coding and data analysis process. Specific transdisciplinary application in the context of the realities in the southern hemisphere, including the African continent and South Africa in particular, were also considered.

6.1.13 Limitations of the study

The limitations of the study are detailed below:

- 1) To allow for sharp focus and collection of rich data, which is labour intensive and time consuming, the study was limited to participants in a single organisation, against the background that its business spans the whole of South Africa with an extended footprint on the rest of the African continent.
- 2) To ensure the researcher optimally navigated all aspects of the study, the researcher focused only on marketing leadership and its key internal stakeholders' perspectives, not the full set of stakeholders, although focussing on the stakeholders with the most impact and interaction could have a 'halo' effect on remaining stakeholder dynamics.

6.1.14 Conclusion

This research study proposed amendments to earlier efforts made to develop a shared understanding of the main phenomena of the study. An attempt was made at arguing the merits of broadening the role of marketing leadership, based on literature and empirical evidence. The opportunity to engage marketing leadership's key internal stakeholders in a powerful partnership to direct alignment to an organisation's evolving customer centricity was examined and evaluated and form a critical part of the researcher's contribution to the extant body of knowledge.

The study was designed, conducted and concluded over a five-year period, with data collection taking place in two phases, four years apart, with some of the same participants, thereby offering a pre- and post-Covid-19 account of the shift in

perceptions, pre- and post-pandemic. Comprehensive themes emerged from the thematic analysis of data collected as part of the primary research study. These themes provide rich insights into many opportunities, challenges, implications and recommendation for consideration, discussion and debate by bank leadership and management.

The management of technology, innovation, people and systems thinking as represented in the DaVinci TIPS™ Managerial Leadership Framework are all reflected in the case study's emerging themes and related key findings. The wings in the second last outer circle of the framework are also addressed in the case study.

- **Agile, aligned and engage employers and employees** - Alignment between marketing leadership and their key internal stakeholders, as it related to evolving customer centricity was the key focus of this case study, although agility and engagement were also noted and discussed.
- **Workplace reality - Coordination, collaboration, cooperation, or combination** - The bank's current reality is a combination of the three realities as there is still some coordination (deadline driven) observable, moving to collaboration and some areas arrived at a cooperative (self-directed choice to engage, abundance of knowledge, skills and potential) workplace reality.

A table in Section 6.1.11 provides examples of key findings of the case study in summary to show the links to the DaVinci TIPS™ Managerial Leadership Framework, covering all aspects including the management of technology, innovation, people and systems thinking. Two examples of Key Findings (in summary) and their links to the DaVinci TIPS™ Managerial Leadership Framework are the following:

- **DaVinci TIPS™ Managerial Leadership Framework link:** Management of Technology: The strategic and operational divides between the head office and the customer facing frontlines are gaps to be bridged, where technology can play a significant role.
- **DaVinci TIPS™ Managerial Leadership Framework link:** Systems Thinking: A basic understanding of the interdependence and interplay in the retail bank between marketing leadership and their key internal stakeholders, to direct key internal

stakeholder alignment to evolving customer centricity, can be based on a simple framework for intentional collaboration towards a shared vision.

The proposed conceptual framework provides an intentionally simplistic way of thinking of the dynamic interactions and interdependence between the main phenomena, marketing leadership, key internal stakeholder alignment and customer centricity, in the context of a larger organisational eco-system. A framework, visually portraying the dynamic interaction and interdependence between the main phenomena (marketing leadership, key internal stakeholders and customer centricity) has been presented. A conceptual understanding of how marketing leadership could therefore direct their key internal stakeholders' alignment to evolving customer centricity, in the form of a new conceptual framework has been proposed, thereby achieving the primary research objective and concluding the study. The study found that marketing leadership must have a clear vision for customer centricity and be able to articulate it to the rest of the organisation's key internal stakeholders, to ensure they are all aligned on the vision for customer centricity and their roles in achieving the vision. It is important for marketing leadership to measure the impact of customer centricity initiatives so that the organisation can see what is working and what is not. The study concludes that by broadening the role of marketing leadership to include the direction of key internal stakeholders' alignment to evolving customer centricity, marketing leadership can play a critical role in improving overall customer centricity

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8. ANNEXURES

Annexure A – Ethical Declaration - Round 1:

RE: Ethical Clearance Form submission - Ilse Smuts - LEO 14 - PhD - [External Email]



Tumi Pitsie <tumi@davinci.ac.za>

To: Ilse Smuts, Ilse
Cc: Dr Andy Brough

You replied to this message on 2022/01/31 22:10.

Reply Reply All Forward

Wed 2020/05/13 11:48



Dear Ilse,

You meet all the ethic requirements.

Kind Regards,

TUMI PITSIE
PROGRAM CONVENER

Tel: 011 579 4425
Email: tumi@davinci.ac.za
Web: www.davinci.ac.za

The Da Vinci Institute would like to advise that we have a new telephone system and all calls are recorded for quality and training purposes.

Annexure B – Ethical Declaration - Round 2:

The Da Vinci Institute for
Technology Management (Pty) Ltd
PO Box 185, Modderfontein,
1645, South Africa
Tel + 27 11 608 1331
Fax +27 11 608 1580
www.davinci.ac.za



Reference: 01429
Date: 22 November 2022

Ethical Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the Doctorate Research of the student named below has received ethical clearance from The Da Vinci Institute Ethics Committee. The student and supervisor will be expected to continue to uphold the Da Vinci Institute's Research Ethics Policy as indicated during the application.

Proposed Title: The role of marketing leadership in the direction of key internal stakeholder alignment to customer centricity in a South African retail bank.

Student Name: Ise Smuts

Student Number: 6180

Supervisor: Prof HB Klopper

Co-Supervisor: Dr Andrew Brough

Period: Ethics approval is granted from 2022/11/22 to 2023/06/01

Chairperson: Research & Ethics Committee

Prof HB Klopper
Executive Dean: Research and Institutional Partnerships

Directors: B Anderson, N Hadebe, F Landman (Chairperson), R Steenberg

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Annexure C – Interview guide - Round One

Match participants' understanding of main phenomena
When you think of Marketing Leadership, what comes to mind in terms of your understanding?
When you think of Key Internal Stakeholder Alignment, what comes to mind in terms of your understanding?
When you think of Customer Centricity, what comes to mind in terms of your understanding?
From Literature: Lamberti (2013: 589) points out gaps in current knowledge including a lack of understanding conditions for successful implementation of customer-centricity, as well as calls for a more balanced approach in choosing strategic orientations to the market. What would you say are the conditions for the successful implementation of customer centricity in the bank?
From Literature: Coetzee (2014:999) How does the bank ensure alignment in a customer centric market orientation between its head office and regional customer-facing operations?
Who do you believe are the key internal stakeholders to the marketing leadership function?
From Literature: Kesler & Kates (2017:10) state that alignment is required on core principles, not broad-brush generalities, to empower teams to drive change quickly. Around which core principles do you believe key internal stakeholders should be aligned, when it comes to evolving customer centric.
Leadership: How would you describe the role and scope of marketing leadership today?
From Literature: Pless & Maak (2011:6). Responsible leadership. Adapted. How would you describe the role of marketing leadership in aligning their key internal stakeholders to evolving customer centricity?
How can marketing leaders lead responsibly across various potentially conflicting needs and interests when it comes to alignment to evolving customer centricity?

Annexure D – Interview guide – Round Two

Second round of primary data collection

Questions	Time allowance								
<p>General warm-up question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How was the bank affected by Covid-19? • How did the bank reset its agenda because of Covid-19? • How has Covid-19 affected megatrends globally? 	5 min								
<p>Customer centricity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During Covid and now, is the bank putting customers first? How? • Since Covid and beyond, does the bank have more or less of a customer centric culture? • Did customers/the market change over the past three years? How? • What role did the bank play in keeping the economy going by looking after customers during Covid-19? • How did bank customers from different income groups and businesses with different turn-over sizes get affected differently by Covid-19? • How did the bank respond to the omnichannel distribution challenge to help its customers during Covid-19 and now? • If you had to give me a definition for <i>perceived</i> customer centricity, what would you say it is, in essence? • What is your opinion of the following definition of <i>perceived</i> customer centricity – how would you change it? <p>Definition of <i>perceived</i> customer centricity</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td colspan="4">The degree to which a <u>customer perceives</u> a <u>firm</u> to put <u>customers’ interest</u> at the <u>centre</u> of all its actions.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Customer perception</td> <td>Firm unit of analysis</td> <td>Focus on customers’ interest</td> <td>Active prioritisation of customers</td> </tr> </table> <p>Source: Habel <i>et al.</i>, (2020:28) and Osakwe (2020:1).</p> <p>Recommendations to improve the definition?</p>	The degree to which a <u>customer perceives</u> a <u>firm</u> to put <u>customers’ interest</u> at the <u>centre</u> of all its actions.				Customer perception	Firm unit of analysis	Focus on customers’ interest	Active prioritisation of customers	15 min
The degree to which a <u>customer perceives</u> a <u>firm</u> to put <u>customers’ interest</u> at the <u>centre</u> of all its actions.									
Customer perception	Firm unit of analysis	Focus on customers’ interest	Active prioritisation of customers						
<p>Marketing Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compared to pre-Covid discussion, do you think marketing leadership’s role had expanded or contracted? Recommendations to improve role span. • Do you think marketing leadership holds more, or less credibility, impact, and influence than pre-Covid? Any recommendations to improve credibility, impact, and influence. 	15 min								

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During and post-Covid, compared to pre-Covid-19, how does marketing leadership embrace digital technology and platform thinking in their day-to day operations, as well as their longer-term planning? Recommendations to improve the above. • Compared to pre-Covid, how do you believe marketing leadership represent the voice of the customer in the organisation? Recommendations to improve the above. • What if any additional responsibilities did marketers take on because of Covid-19?) • Did marketing leadership take on more responsibility because of Covid-19? • Marketing leadership: How did the bank’s marketing leadership tackle the opportunities and challenges of digital marketing since the start of Covid, up to now? Recommendations to improve. • Did Covid-19 bring about a rethink of the marketing model? If so, is the new model more collaborative, cooperative, engaging, and agile? Recommendations to improve. • Do you believe communication patterns changed between marketing leadership and KIS, because of the Covid-19 pandemic? 	
<p>Key internal stakeholder alignment to customer centricity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since Covid and beyond, do you think there is less/more/same siloed thinking and behaviour? Please elaborate. Recommendations to improve the above. • Describe the different “thought worlds” as you see or experience it between marketing leadership and key internal stakeholder. • Do you think employees’ <i>perceived</i> customer centricity impact their rewards and incentives? If so, how? • Since Covid-19 and beyond, describe any shifts you’ve seen or experienced in the organisation’s collaboration, cooperation, coordination, agility alignment and engagement. Recommendations to improve the above? 	15 min
<p>Dynamic interaction and interdependence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do these three components (customer centricity, marketing leadership and key internal stakeholders) interact or impact each other? • What is the relationship or interdependence between them? • Do you think the dynamics or interaction between the components changed because of Covid-19? 	10 min

Annexure E – Letter of consent (1) to conduct interviews in case retail bank



8 April 2020

To whom it may concern.

VOLUNTARY, ANONYMOUS, INDIVIDUAL IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES.

I can confirm that Ilse Smuts **Bank name & unit** she followed the required procedures to allow her to proceed with the voluntary, anonymous, individual in-depth interviews involving a number of **Bank** CEOs, CFOs and Heads of Marketing and Product (or suitable representatives), as well as a number of **Bank** specialist respondents, as required for her single embedded case study, which forms part of the primary research requirements for the completion of the PhD qualification.

Regards,

Signature
Name
Title
Business unit

Annexure F – Letter of consent (2) to conduct interviews in case retail bank.



11 October 2022

To whom it may concern.

APPROVAL TO PROCEED WITH IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

I can confirm that Ilse Smuts [Bank name & unit] Ilse had the authorisation required to proceed with the second round of individual in-depth interviews involving a number of [Bank] marketing leaders and key internal stakeholders (or suitable representatives), as well as a number of other [Bank] specialist respondents, as required for her case study, which forms part of the primary research data collection requirements for the completion of the Da Vinci Institute's Doctorate in Management of Technology and Innovation qualification.

Regards,

Signature
Name
Title
Business unit

Annexure G - Confirmation of language editing

Laureen Bertin & Associates
Documentation and Organisational Support
P O Box 87470 HOUGHTON 2041
Telephone 082 685 4043 / 011 485 1203
laureen@lbassociates.co.za/laureenbertin@absamail.co.za

12 September 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I confirm that I have edited the document below:

Thesis Title: Exploring the role of marketing leadership in directing key internal stakeholder alignment with evolving customer centricity: The case of a South African retail bank
Student Name: Ilse Smuts
Student Number: 6180
Supervisor: Professor HB Klopper
Co-Supervisor: Dr A Brough
Qualification: DTMI

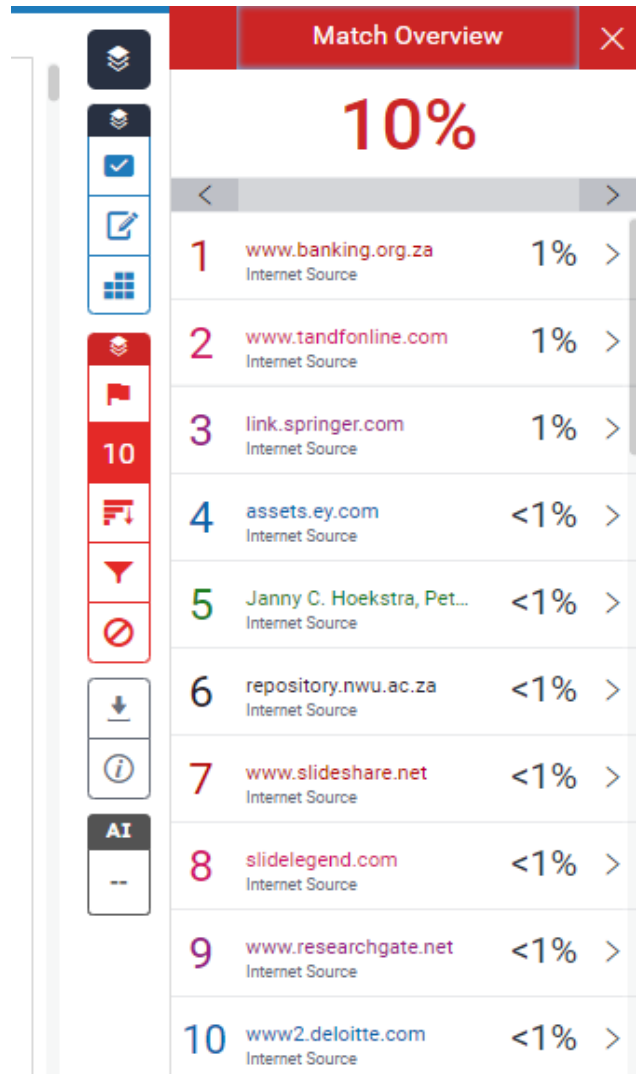
In accordance with the generally accepted principles of academic editing.

Please contact the writer should further information be required.

Kind regards

LAUREEN BERTIN

Annexure H – Turnitin score



The screenshot displays the Turnitin Match Overview interface. At the top, a red header bar contains the text "Match Overview" and a close button (X). Below the header, the similarity score "10%" is prominently displayed in large red font. A horizontal scrollbar is visible below the score. The main content area is a list of 10 sources, each with a numbered rank, the source URL, the source type, and the similarity percentage. The sources are as follows:

Rank	Source	Source Type	Similarity
1	www.banking.org.za	Internet Source	1%
2	www.tandfonline.com	Internet Source	1%
3	link.springer.com	Internet Source	1%
4	assets.ey.com	Internet Source	<1%
5	Janny C. Hoekstra, Pet...	Internet Source	<1%
6	repository.nwu.ac.za	Internet Source	<1%
7	www.slideshare.net	Internet Source	<1%
8	slidelegend.com	Internet Source	<1%
9	www.researchgate.net	Internet Source	<1%
10	www2.deloitte.com	Internet Source	<1%

On the left side of the interface, there is a vertical toolbar with various icons for navigation and document management. The current score "10" is highlighted in a red box within this toolbar. At the bottom of the toolbar, there is a section labeled "AI" with a minus sign icon.