

Teaching Materials on Overcoming Challenges and Strengthening Excellence in Customer Service: A Brazilian Business Case

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Abstract

This article examines how exceptional customer service can distinguish a company from its competitors. It could include case studies of businesses that have thrived due to their commitment to customer service excellence and discuss strategies companies can implement to enhance their customer service practices. This teaching material explores the various obstacles businesses face in maintaining high customer service standards, emphasizing the importance of training and development in providing outstanding customer service. It outlines and discusses the measurable outcomes of practical training and suggests best practices for developing training materials tailored to enhance customer service skills in staff members.

Keywords: *Customer service excellence, Brazil, Conflict Management, Multi-party role-play simulation.*

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Introduction

This teaching case debates the implementation of a plan to improve customer service in the *Bom Negócio* grocery store chain. It aims to restore the company's success after two years of significant hardship. It is intended to be used as a role-play simulation to demonstrate the following: internal conflicts, bitterness among old and new workers, interior versus capital store competition, lack of cooperation, poor communication, misunderstandings, and unclear objectives.

Bom Negócio is a chain of supermarkets with 20 stores in Brazil. The year 2022 proved to be quite challenging for the company. Amidst fierce competition from chains ABC and XYZ, in addition to the damage brought by the pandemic, *Bom Negócio* had to shut down two stores. In this scenario, its founder gathered everyone to discuss new strategies. Improvement in customer service was considered the way back to success. The initiative was championed by João Quintela, Strategic Human Resources Manager, through the composition of a collaborative task force. Yet, internal fights and lack of collaboration were immediately jeopardizing project success. This case describes how *Bom Negócio* overcame these challenges, promoting unity and respect, and greatly improving customer service and increasing sales.

Materials and Methods

This research adopted a single-method approach: qualitative research. The explanatory descriptive case study brought out the actual condition and sought to obtain comprehensive information. The

unit of analysis is the *Bom Negócio* retail network (Yin, 1988). This research utilized the Four-Type negotiation matrix given by Dias (2020). This negotiation can be labeled as a Type IV negotiation, as Figure 1 depicts below:



Figure 1. The Four-Type Negotiation Matrix

Source: Dias, 2020. Reprinted under permission.

The Four-Type negotiation matrix provides a detailed framework for negotiations classification based on rich scholarly research in the area Dias, 2020; Raiffa, 1982; Fisher et al., 1981; Sebenius, 1992; Ury, 2015; Susskind & Field, 1996; Salacuse, 2008; Rinehart & Page, 1992; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986. Below is the description of the methods followed along with an analysis of the limitations inherent in the chosen conditions.

Overcoming Challenges and Strengthening Excellence in Customer Service: Case Summary

Bom Negócio is the Brazilian supermarket chain with 20 stores. In 2022, due to intense competition, as well as the impact of the pandemic, *Bom Negócio* took hard hits. Two store closings later, the founder summoned the team for a rebranding meeting. To recover lost glory, improving customer service was singled out as crucial. João Quintela, Human Resources Manager, assumed this position to strengthen customer service.

He began his administration by mapping potential problems and trying to steer clear of disputes that might hurt the performance of employees. He created a joint working group, bringing customer service closer to the other sectors. Ricardo Araújo and Fernanda Cerqueira were the ones responsible for the program. Conflicts arose amongst the members of this task force, particularly amongst Francisco Pontes, an old officer who felt unfairly passed over for promotion.

In turn, the latent competition between the interior stores and the capital-each resenting the others made the employees angry. The fact that they did not collaborate and communicate well exacerbated matters. Quintela intervened, reconstructing the task force with Torres and Machado as co-leaders; in this guise, the two developed a plan to improve customer service in all stores. Six



months later, *Bom Negócio* recorded a significant improvement in customer service and an increase in sales. Francisco Pontes was promoted to general manager, and Fernanda and Ricardo learned to value collaboration. The company has learned that unity and respect are crucial to success. Clear and objective communication is essential to avoid misunderstandings. Effective leadership is crucial for resolving conflict and fostering collaboration.

Discussion

Bom Negócio' experience demonstrates the importance of a collaborative and customer-centric approach. The company overcame internal and external challenges, improving its competitiveness and financial success. Improving customer service was vital to restoring customer trust and increasing sales. *Bom Negócio* exemplifies how effective leadership and collaboration can lead to success in a competitive market. After Quintela's intervention, the task force was restructured, and Torres and Machado became co-leaders. Together, they developed a plan to improve customer service in all stores. Six months later, *Bom Negócio* significantly improved customer service and increased sales. The company continues to grow and improve, with a team committed to providing excellence in customer service. *Bom Negócio*' experience serves as a model for other businesses looking to improve their competitiveness and financial success. The key to success lies in collaboration, respect, and effective communication.

Implications and Research Limitations

BN involved internal conflicts, lack of collaboration, and ineffective communication. Francisco Pontes, a veteran employee, felt it unfair not to be promoted—the veiled competition between stores in the interior and the capital generated resentment. This case presents the following lessons learned: unity and respect are fundamental to success. Clear and objective communication is essential to avoid misunderstandings. Effective leadership is crucial for resolving conflict and promoting collaboration.

The following points are emphasized as recommendations: (a) Establish clear and shared objectives. (b) Promote collaboration and respect among task force members. (c) Conduct training to improve communication and teamwork skills, and finally, (d) Monitor progress and provide regular feedback.

This instructional content has applications and implications across several domains and subfields of study, not limited to (i) retail business (Dias, M., et al., 2015; Dias, M. et al., 2015, 2014); (ii) retail business negotiation (Paradela; Dias, M.; Assis; Oliveira, J.; Fonseca, R. 2019; Dias, M., Teles, and Duzert, 2018; Dias, M. and Duzert, 2018); (iii) family business succession (Dias, M., & Davila, 2018); (iv) OEM industry (Dias, M., Navarro, & Valle, 2013; Dias, M., et al., 2014; Dias, M., et al., 2013); (v) buyer-seller negotiations (Dias, M., 2012; Dias & Navarro, 2018; Dias, M. & Falconi, 2018; Dias, M., 2018; Dias, M. & Teles, 2018); (vi) governmental business relations (Dias, M. & Navarro, 2017); (vii) generational conflicts (Aylmer & Dias, M., 2018); (viii) Business negotiations (Dias & Duzert, 2017; Dias, M., & Navarro, 2018; Dias, M., 2016); (ix) debt collection negotiations (Dias, M., 2019, 2019b; Dias, M. & Lopes, 2019; Dias & Lopes, 2020a); (x) Teaching Materials (Dias, M. & Navarro, 2018; Dias, M. 2019; 2019a; Dias, M. et al., 2020; Dias, M. & Duzert, 2017, 2019; Dias, M. & Lopes 2019; Dias, M., Ribeiro & Lopes, 2019; Dias, & Teles, 2018).

Finally, this article is limited to the case study on conflict management in retail business in a Brazilian supermarket network. Other countries, business segments, and types of business are not part of this research and should be appreciated in future studies. The case is also limited to a Type



IV negotiation (Dias, 2020). Other types of negotiation are not part of the present studies and should be investigated separately.

Future Research

Future researchers are invited to follow the next suggestions for future research: (a) longitudinal analysis; run a longitudinal analysis of Bom Negócio's results with the new customer service strategy. (b) comparison with other companies; conduct a comparative study between Bom Negócio and other retail sector companies to understand how effective the customer service strategy has been so far in different contexts. (c) Impact on organizational culture: Investigate how the change in customer service strategy affected Bom Negócios' organizational culture and the way it influenced the behavior of its employees. (d) Financial impact assessment: Do an elaborate study on the financial impact of the new customer service strategy at Bom Negócios, including cost and benefit analysis. (e) Generalization for other industries: Assess whether the customer service strategy already applied by Bom Negócio may also be applied for other sectors, whether services or manufacturing. (f) Technology and innovation: Assess the extent to which technology can further improve Bom Negócio customer service and other companies within the industry. (g) Developing leaders: A study on how Bom Negócios' experience can be used to develop leaders who will then effect effective change in other organizations. (h) Multiple Case Analysis: Undertake a multiple-case study to contrast and compare the Bom Negócios' experience with those businesses undergoing similar challenges. (i) international case study: Carry out an international case study by comparing Bom Negócios' experience with companies from different countries and cultures.

Conclusion

A study on how Bom Negócios' experience can be used to develop leaders who will then effect effective change in other organizations. (h) Multiple Case Analysis: Undertake a multiple-case study to contrast and compare the Bom Negócios' experience with those businesses undergoing similar challenges. (i) international case study: Carry out an international case study by comparing Bom Negócios' experience with companies from different countries and cultures.

Conflict of interests

No conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Teaching Materials and Teaching Notes

Introduction

Bom Negócio (BN) is a Brazilian supermarket chain with 20 stores, ten located in the state's interior and 10 in the capital. Its corporate headquarters is in the largest store in the city center. BN faces direct competition from two major chains, ABC and XYZ.

Challenges and Changes

However, until the mid-2010s, the company enjoyed a period of growth due to the increase in customers' purchasing power and favorable demographic changes. However, in 2022, BN faced significant challenges in maintaining its profitability. Intense competition with the ABC and XYZ chains, combined with the impact of the pandemic, led to the closure of two stores, one in the countryside and the other in the capital.

New Strategy

In 2024, the founder of BN called a meeting with the general board to discuss new strategies and solutions. After analysis, the group concluded that improving customer service was the key to restoring the company's success. In this context, João Quintela, with 20 years of experience in the company, assumed the position of Strategic Manager of Human Resources. Quintela began his management by mapping potential problems and seeking to avoid conflicts that could compromise the performance of employees.

Formation of the Task Force

Quintela met with customer relationship managers Ricardo Araújo and Fernanda Cerqueira to discuss a systematic strategy to improve customer service based on the idea that the customer is the company's central objective. Ricardo was responsible for the stores in the countryside, while Fernanda took care of the stores in the capital. Both agreed that improving customer service was essential to regaining the group's competitiveness and financial success.

Quintela then assigned Ricardo and Fernanda to form a collaborative task force, integrating customer service with other sectors. Each member would select their trusted members, a maximum of four collaborators. The meeting was scheduled for four weeks later, allowing time for selection and preparation.

Conflicts and Resentments

With more than 20 years at *Bom Negócio*, Francisco Pontes feels wronged for not being promoted to general manager or director. Rumors point out that Ricardo bringing trusted executives, such as Fernanda, to the headquarters influenced the deprecation of his promotion, generating great resentment. In addition, Francisco notes that veteran employees consider the stores in the interior, under his command, inferior to those in the capitals due to the poor quality of customer service, according to what he was able to ascertain. This issue creates a feeling of inferiority among your employees, who are seen as less competent. A climate of resentment and veiled competition permeates the relations between the stores in the interior and the capitals.



Creation of the Task Forces

Francisco Pontes chose Suzana Torres, from marketing, to lead the task force due to her excellence in management and optimistic attitude. In addition to her, he summoned Maria Auxiliadora da Costa and José Henrique. Martins, who demonstrated commitment to the store's success by resolving customer complaints.

To avoid unsatisfactory results and stand out for a promotion to the headquarters, Fernanda selected her three best employees. They were known for their efficiency and assertiveness. Paulo Machado, a proactive purchasing agent, would lead the team, with João de Oliveira and Bernardo Silva, recognized for their efficiency in organizing and completing tasks. Figure 1, below, shows how the final organization of the groups was:

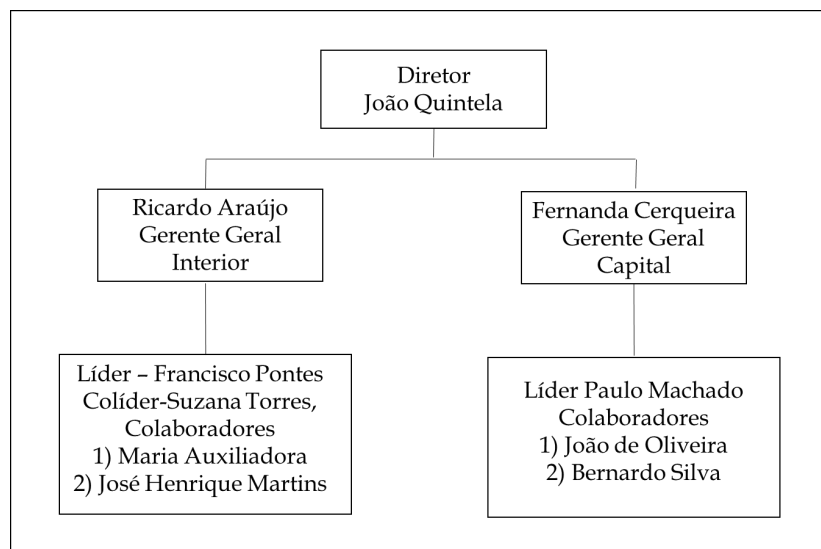


Figure 2. Organization of the Task Forces

The Task Forces in Action

Suzana Torres, leader of the task force, met with Maria Auxiliadora and José Henrique to discuss strategies. They came up with three approaches to collecting data on customer service. In the same week, Paulo Machado, leader of the other subgroup, summoned João and Bernardo. They hired a company to conduct 50 interviews with customers in the capital's stores. The following month, the six members reunited. Torres presented three approaches, but Machado and his subgroup ignored his suggestions and presented a market research study, including the stores in the interior, for better sampling.

Conflict and Intervention

Torres was surprised and questioned Machado about who suggested studying the stores under his supervision. Machado replied that the objective was to present recommendations to improve the unsatisfactory service of the stores. Torres was outraged and, along with his colleagues, left the meeting. After leaving the meeting, Torres, Maria Auxiliadora, and José Henrique decided to seek support from Francisco Pontes. They reported what happened and expressed their indignation with Machado and Fernanda's attitude. Feeling responsible for the situation, Francisco called a meeting with João Quintela, Strategic Manager of Human Resources. Quintela listened to the



complaints and, before intervening, called the council to deliberate on the matter. Get ready to recommend the best course of action to Quintela.

Teaching Notes

This case study presents a real challenge faced by the *Bom Negócio* (BN) supermarket chain, which seeks to improve customer service to regain its competitiveness. Students analyze conflict, communication, and leadership.

General Objectives

1. Analyze team dynamics and conflicts.
2. Understand the importance of effective communication.
3. Develop problem-solving skills.
4. Evaluate leadership strategies.

Methodology

1. Reading the case study.
2. Group discussion.
3. Scenario analysis.
4. Presentation of solutions.

Application Guide

Step 1: Analysis (10 minutes)

1. Divide students into groups of 4-5 students
2. Ask them to analyze the case, identifying:
 - Conflicts.
 - Communication failures.
 - Leadership challenges.

Step 2: Discussion (20 minutes)

1. Ask each group to present their analyses.
2. Encourage discussions about:
 - Causes of conflicts.
 - Impact of communication.
 - Leadership strategies.

Step 3: Solutions (20 minutes)

1. Ask the groups to propose solutions.
2. Encourage consideration of:
 - Improved communication.
 - Conflict management.
 - Leadership development.



Evaluation

1. Participation in discussions (20%).
2. Quality of analyses (30%).
3. Creativity of solutions (30%).
4. Presentation (20%).

Additional Resources

1. Articles on conflict management.
2. Videos on effective leadership.
3. Similar case studies.

References

1. Krueger, R. A. (2004). Quantitative and Qualitative Research.
2. Cervo, A. L., & Bervian, P. A. (2002). Research Methodology.

Duration

45 min to 1 hour.

Target audience

Students of administration, management, psychology and related fields.

