

**STATISTICAL ANALYSIS THROUGH CUSTOMER RELATIONS
IN IRONMONGERY BUSINESS**

Fazıl Güler* , Erdoğan Taşkın**

ABSTRACT

The first purpose of this study is to underline the importance of the responsibilities of the employees for quality customer relations with regard to the ironmongery aspect of the industrial and commercial life. The second purpose of this study is to discover the understanding of the employees towards their own customer relations exhibited during the performance of sale and to reveal the determinant factors that may affect the probability and success of the ironmongery business. Ironmongery business have been focusing on the priorities such as range of goods, supply of materials, and working with low inventories and reducing the transportation costs in consideration to the current economic and market conditions. In this study, we aim to discover the views, opinions and remarks of sale representatives, employees and business owners working at each point of contact with the customers in as "the most reliable" manner as possible in order to reveal the understanding related to customer relations in the ironmongery industry.

Keywords: *Customer Relations, Customer Expectations, Marketing Concept, Marketing Research.*

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INTRODUCTION: CUSTOMER ORIENTED BUSINESS CONCEPT

Ironmongery is the art of creating artistic products such as door handles, knobs, hooks, locks, window, door hinges and many other related products. This profession has been around for centuries, and blacksmiths were the people mostly involved in this trade. Ironmongery has been around

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since the medieval ages, going back to 1200 BC, where people started exploring the use of metal in their daily life. Now too, in the 21st century, ironmongery has not lost its importance and is still in rigorous use (Coleman, 2010).

Ironmongery employees, manufacturers and traders have been trading with the customers coming from each segment of economy either corporate or individual manner.

The mentality, opinions and remarks of the employees are very important who will welcome, sell and serve to the customers at the sale point in regard to providing quality customer services at the ironmongery businesses.

As in other customer-oriented businesses, all the works, actions or operations carried out in the ironmongery businesses must be considered as "customer oriented".

Today, the duty of providing quality services to the customers is so important that it must not be left to the employees only. The businesses must implement the systems, processes and methods to ensure the quality customer services. The issues of service quality are still developing (Martin, 1993, 1; Stamatis, 1996, 23).

In addition, the business demands a strategic approach to customer service. The customer is the person who pays for goods or services that the businessmen provide (Goodman, 2009, 8; Bacal, 2005, 6).

At the ironmongery businesses, the services provided and products sold must meet the expectations of the customers (Grimsby Telegraph, 2008, 16).

It is not realistic to assume that all the customers have different expectations in every case. The needs, requirements and expectations of the customers are mainly identical to each other (Levitt, 1993, 44-45).

Every customer expects to be served appropriately at the point of sale. Customers pay attention on the condition that the price and cost of the product purchased should be highly cost effective.

Customers will request special discounts for him/her. Customers will desire that a product purchased is something that is not discarded after a single use, but something that is durable, sound and long-lifetime, briefly, that is better quality.

Customers expect the seller to solve any problem that may arise. Customers expect his/her job to be appreciated by the seller. It is always important to thank, demonstrate positive attitude to the customer and recognize the value of customers.

It is not realistic to have an assumption to meet all expectations of the customers along with the needs and requirements of the customer.

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Different customers may have different expectations. Under the light of this reality, much more efforts must be made to study on and discover different customer expectations and act according to these expectations (Harris, 1996, 5, 16; Solomon, 2011, 393).

In recent years, the end-users, consumers and clients pay attention on whether the products that they want to purchase have TSE and ISO 9000 Certificates. The sales of products meeting the standards have a rising trend.

TSE (Turkish Standards Institution) fulfills its duty *"to conduct any kind of study and issue the related certificates in accordance with the standards and to encourage the quality production"* which has been vested to it under the Foundation Law No. 132. Furthermore, TSE also focuses on quality besides standardization while gaining a special reputation in our country in the recent years with performance of their studies in this field.

Within the scope of current economic and technological advances and process of harmonization with the European Union, TSE offers various services such as TS-EN-ISO 9000 Quality System Standards that have become the international standards attracting the utmost interest and field of application since 1987 (the publication date) with respect to Quality Management System.

However, selling standard products is not sufficient alone. In addition, satisfaction of all employees is very important for establishing faith in the enterprise. The cost of losing one valued employee, due to dissatisfaction with some aspect of the job, is a high, or even higher, than the loss of a valued and dissatisfied customer (Murphy et al., 2006, 180-181).

Everyone working in a business must behave kindly and benevolently to each other at all the times. The employees must be adhered to their business. The faith must be demonstrated with actions, but not words. Confidence in the quality service and faith of employees in the business will create the customer value.

The quality employees that appreciate the customer must be rewarded and their wages must be increased. It is not adequate to change the titles of the employees with better behaviors to the customer. The wages of the persons that are successful in the customer relations must be changed and increased (Goodman, 2000, 151).

First of all, it must be considered to improve the customer relationships. In broad-spectrum, we can declare that the practical units initially away from the idea of customer oriented working are in the businesses (Kumar & Reinartz, 2006, 4-5; O'Malley & Tynan, 2003, 36-37).

Especially in larger businesses, the customer oriented working concepts of the quality control, marketing, sale managements and customer services units are very dissimilar from each other just like a "discipline".

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Distinction between the units in customer oriented running makes it complicated to use the information to be gathered from the customers for their fulfillment. For that reason, society of works and individuals must be established according to the customers' ironmongery businesses in customer-oriented businesses.

It is the factor it calls accuracy. Accuracy concerns the truthfulness, completeness, and validity of the information that the rep delivers to customers (Goodman, 2000, 36).

Pricing, distribution, personal selling, advertisement, inventory and other marketing activities in relation to all products of an ironmongery business must firstly be applied with respect to the customers.

However, it is not adequate to apply 4P in English upper cases, which represent Price, Product, Promotion (advertisement, public relations and personal sale) and Place (distribution channels, merchandising, and inventory) in order to exist on the market within the current businesses.

Many other internal and external factors such as place of foundation, trademark positioning, using the market opportunities, customer perceptions and being patient are also involved in the marketing activities and all these factors affect the success of a business (Kotler & Armstrong, 2004, 58-63; Gitomer, 2005, 64-81).

It takes years to learn customer services within the master, charge-hand and apprentice relations traditionally. In current enterprises, experience servants are needed for increasing number of points of sale, increasing number of customers and constantly changing personnel.

The current employees must learn the changing products, new technologies and new systems. Both new and existing personnel must have training on customer relations at all times.

Majority of the entrepreneurs must not act reluctantly in transferring their own business knowledge and experiences in quality customer relations to the forefront staff particularly.

Constant training on customer relations has unlimited advantages for the businesses and employees. The persons working at the sale department should fully know the features and benefits of all products and must explain to the customers when necessary.

In order to achieve it, total product knowledge and training on sale are also required besides the training on customer relations (Stauss & Seidel, 2004, 240-242).

Kind and benevolent attitude must be demonstrated to the external customers coming in to business at all times. The kind, presentable persons must be chosen while selecting the employees that will contact with the customers at the first stage in particular. Knowledge, skill and experience are important criteria for recruitment.

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However, everyone can be specialized in customer relations with a sufficient degree of on-job training.

Therefore, it is required to select the loyal persons that can create common sensations with the customers at job and that the customers can like in case of service for the customers in particular (Reichheld, 1996, 8-9).

If the appropriate persons are recruited, the customers will break their binds with this business and the problems will arise and the incomes will decrease.

As in all retail sellers, the ironmongers must carefully handle and evaluate the objections and complaints of the customers and must implement the organizational arrangements in order to improve the customer services immediately when necessary (Anton, 1996, 133-134; Barlow & Moller, 2008, 54-56).

Many of the customers may raise objections during the purchase or may complain about the product purchased. It must be cultured in detail how to handle the objections and complaints during the course of practices with customer relations.

The solutions must be wisdom without disturbing the customer and making this objection/complaint a matter of life or death. Smart companies make it easy to complain, and then use the complaints to address the causes behind the customers (Whiteley, 1991, 50-51).

The business must keep its promises to the customers. The employees must not promise to the customers on the matters that they will not be able to keep alone. The one of the vital commandments of customer service is under promise but over deliver (Sewell and Brown, 1990, 17-19).

All employees must have goodwill against both each other and customers. Especially, the truth must be told to the customer in all matters (Newby, 1991, 34-35).

The businesses are the organizations obliged to render services to the customers by selling in a rapidly changing, complicated and external environment.

These organizations may be required to understand the new approaches on providing service and monitor the new developments in customer relations and technology, and implement them immediately in order to be able to sustain their successes (Shapiro, 1993: 127-155).

DATA AND METHOD OF STUDY

The survey form prepared was applied to the respondents with face-to-face interview method.

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The students spending their summer holidays in their hometowns were required to practice the survey on the businesses to be determined randomly.

Naturally, it should be recognized that determination of businesses according to the respective criteria set by the surveyors would create problems in relation to statistical sampling.

However, the problems in accessing to the address and company details of the businesses operating in this sector and lack of budget for the study as explained hereinabove made it compulsory to tolerate these restrictions.

The data collected after the site survey was evaluated by SPSS. Analyses were made on frequency basis and by means of the cross-tables in evaluation of the data.

In cross analyses, the results of the tables found significant statistically as a result of the included χ^2 Test.

FINDINGS OF STUDY

Majority of the ironmongers responding to the survey indicated their positions as sale representatives (40.9 %). The percentage of those that own an ironmongery company or ironmongery shop is also high (31.8 %).

The fact that the percentage of those working as the Managing Director and those working at the marketing department is 9.1 % and that the percentage of partners of company and those working at the purchasing department is at such a small percentage as 4.5 % indicate that majority of the respondents is the entrepreneur himself/herself and the sale representative.

This means that the activities other than the sale activities (e.g. marketing and purchase activities particularly) are carried out personally by the business owner.

It is observed that the age of majority of the respondents is in the range of 27-35. This majority of 39.1% is followed by the age group 22-26, which represents 30.4% and 26.1% represents the age group 36-49.

Upon review of the educational level on that, the graduates of university and higher education have responded to this survey with such a higher percentage as 69.6%. In view of the fact that the percentage of graduates of high school is 21.7% and that of the graduates of primary school is 8.7%, we can state that the percentage of educational level of the ironmongery employees and especially the business owners is over the overall average for society.

When the total number of employees at workplace is reviewed, we can state that three employees are working at majority of the ironmongers

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representing 31.8% and that 5 employees are working at the ironmongers representing 18.2%. It appears very clearly from the study that the ironmongers consist of small shops where 3 or 5 people work.

Almost everyone working at the workplace is in direct contact with the customers. All employees including the business owner actually deal with the customers in majority of the ironmongers, is a good reflection of the example for customer-oriented administration.

It was asked whether there is a storehouse and warehouse at the workplaces surveyed. The percentage of ironmongers less than 100 square meters and the ironmongers in the range of 250-500 m is 26.1%.

The workplaces with the area of 100-250 square meters represent a higher percentage of 34.8%. However, the ironmongers with storehouses and warehouses with the area of 500-1000 square meters have remained at a much lower percentage of 13%.

Besides the storehouse and warehouse, one of the issues that are important to promote the sales of ironmonger shops is the size of the store where the goods are exhibited.

Size of workplace in square meter allows exhibition of all products sold. Arrangement of the products in a manner that will attract the attention of customers will affect the immediate decision of purchasing a will enable the customer to purchase them.

The fact that the number of workplaces that are less than 100 square meters is at almost half with 47.8%. This indicates that many products and materials are not fully arranged and exhibited in such small ironmongers.

The products requested by any customer coming to such a ironmonger with a list at hand are picked form the shelf or storehouse.

On the other hand, it will not be possible for the customer to see other products and purchase other materials not provided in the list.

All the works carried out by the ironmongers are considered customer oriented or not. Study emphasizes with every outstanding percentages that the ironmongers have a very long path to cover in order to be able to a customer-oriented business. It is expressed with such a high percentage as 56.5% that not all the works carried out by ironmongers are considered as customer oriented.

Consideration of all the works carried out by the ironmongers towards the customers at such a percentage as 39.1% partially reveals the requirement much more aware of being customer oriented.

The facts that such percentages are negative give new opportunities to especially the suppliers and manufacturers in competition. The manufacturers of ironmongery materials and ironmongery products, suppliers and wholesale importers must hold serious training programs for the

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ironmongers in the field of customer services and organize marketing campaigns.

The fact that not all the works carried out by the ironmongers are considered towards the customer explains why the customer services rendered and the products sold do not meet the needs and expectations of customers.

Such a low percentage of 56.5% tells to each product and us that the customer services are rendered partially is obtainable in the shop incompletely.

For example, when a customer comes into an ironmonger, s/he will not be able to find some products needed and receive partial service. It will be inevitable that the businesses that can meet the needs of the customers partially reach their commercial purposes partially.

It may be very difficult to continue to exist as a workplace by achieving the partial sales target in a business environment where the competition is at such intense level.

The fact that TSE marking and TSE assurance for the products sold by the ironmonger and that the quality products having ISO 9000 and similar quality certificate will not increase the sales as expressed with such a percentage as 52.2 % that is almost half. It brings several questions into mind.

Firstly, the customers or end consumers coming into the ironmongery shop may purchase by asking brands or products directly instead of TSE or ISO 9000 Certificate.

Secondly, the ironmongers may not seek the qualifications of TSE or ISO 9000 Certificate directly while purchasing from the suppliers since the customers do not specifically ask from them.

It may be required to determine the products that have TSE or ISO 9000 Certificate within the inventory of ironmongers and look at the sales cycle rate of such products.

It is pointed that the ironmongers do not take it as a priority to enhance the customer relations at such a high percentage as 91.3 %.

However, the modern marketing concept of the present time is relied upon the customer relations and urges that all business activities have the concept of enhancing the customer relations.

Study reveals that the ironmongery employees are not satisfied with their jobs at such a percentage as 69.6%.

It is not known to what extend the customers will be satisfied in an organizational atmosphere where the employees are not satisfied with their jobs. It is a condition that the employees are satisfied at the same level with customer satisfaction to ensure that the customer comes again.

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As expressed with the percentages provided in research, it is stated with such a percentage as 52.2% that the organization of works carried out at the ironmongery businesses and the persons that work are not made according to the customers.

It is told by 38.1% in study that the organization of works and persons in the business is partially made according to the customers.

Such a low percentage as 8.7 % asserts that organization of works carried out and the persons working is made according to the customers.

Since this percentage is very low, the entrepreneurs or the business owners must think much more about making organizations of works carried out and the persons working according to the customers.

Pricing, distribution, sales, advertisement, introduction of all products served to the customer and other marketing activities must firstly be applied according to customers in respect of marketing concept.

The percentage of those that say that pricing, sales promotion, distribution, advertisement, introduction of all products in our business and other marketing activities are applied according to the customers is only 17.4 %.

In respect of marketing concept, 39.1 % partially agrees while 43.5 % does not agree at all. These percentages clearly emphasize that the ironmongers must make efforts in respect of marketing concept.

43.5% says that constantly receive training on customer relations in study. In percentage, 30.4% tells that they partially receive training on customer relations. No matter whether the employees participate in on-job training, it is not possible to participate in training partially.

In this regard, this question is not possibly understood. On the other hand, it is required to study more on how the persons that say that they have participated in the training on customer relations at a very high percentage have reached the negative answers provided.

The kind and benevolent attitude is not demonstrated to the external customers at all times with such a high percentage as 95.7%. Since the percentage of those that say that kind and benevolent attitude is not partially demonstrated to the external customers to come to such ironmongers again.

Research shows that no one working in such ironmongers can be kind and benevolent to each other at all times such a high percentage as 77.3%. The percentage of 18.2%, which relates to partial agreement, indicated that everyone working is sometimes kind and benevolent to each other.

The fact that the percentage of those that say that everyone working is kind and benevolent to each other at all times tells that the main problem is internal with regard to ensuring quality customer relations.

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It will affect the customer relations positively when everyone is kind and benevolent to each other at all times.

The process of receiving and evaluating the objections and complaints of the customers and making required corrections is not performed at such a high percentage as 90.9%.

Sales cannot be made to the customers, whose objections are not responded, and the customers whose complaints are not responded will not come to that business again, and firstly loss of customers and then the loss of profits and loss of works will occur.

The persons working for sale do not fully know the features and benefits of all products and do not explain to the customers when necessary.

Therefore, the distributors and suppliers that supply goods to the ironmongers must cooperate with the industrialists that manufacture such goods and commence an on-job training mobilization with regard to the product knowledge.

Study does not explain the reasons of such a low percentage as 8.7 % as expressed by the ironmongers in monitoring and immediately applying the new developments in customer relations and technology.

It is inevitable that the companies that do not monitor the new developments are under the threats of globalization, competition and big chain stores.

It is inevitable those banks, municipalities, various authorities and organizations are dealing with the problems of ironmongers and that the ironmongers are struggling with the changes on the market.

Does the percentage of 65.2 % mean that not all employees at the businesses have goodwill and that they do not always tell the truth to the customers?

Trust is the basis for commerce. It is not possible for a business to exist in an environment where there is a merchant that is not trusted, and shop assistants that do not have goodwill and where the customers are not treated honestly.

Finding the right kind of shop assistants to work in retail ironmongery is importance. The buyers today are much smarter than many sellers give them credit for (Black, 2004, 190; Bosworth, 1995, 150).

CROSS TABLE ANALYSES OF STUDY

Based on data survey conducted, cross table analyses have also been used in addition to the findings on frequency basis. Contingency tables allowing mutual analysis of the questions laid down in the survey form have been formed and the conclusions reached from the contingency tables that have been found significant after applying the χ^2 test are listed in the

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following items. Since the number of conclusions reached is too many, it has not been deemed necessary to write the statistical hypotheses separately.

Significant relations have been found out between the following statistically;

1. Considering all works towards the customers vs. meeting the needs of customers in the services rendered and products sold;
2. Considering all works towards the customers and the works vs. persons in the business being organized according to the customers;
3. Not considering all works towards the customers vs. everyone working at the workplace being kind and benevolent to each other;
4. Considering all works towards the customers vs. age of the person interviewed;
5. Services and products sold meeting the needs and expectations of customers vs. all employees of the business having goodwill and always telling the truth to the customers;
6. The services and products sold meeting the needs and expectations of customers vs. age of the person interviewed;
7. The products sold having TSE and ISO 9000 Certificate increasing the sales vs. constantly receiving training on customer relations;
8. The idea that the products sold having TSE and ISO 9000 Certificate increases the sales vs. everyone working being kind and benevolent to each other at all times;
9. The idea that the products sold having TSE and ISO 9000 Certificate increases the sales vs. receiving and evaluating the objections and complaints of the customers and making the required arrangements;
10. The idea that the products sold having TSE and ISO 9000 Certificate increases the sales vs. net size of the storehouse and warehouse of the workplace;
11. The idea that the products sold having TSE and ISO 9000 Certificate increases the sales vs. the age of the person interweaved;
12. Taking it as a priority to think about enhancing the customer relations vs. the idea that it is important to satisfy all employees;
13. Taking it as a priority to think about enhancing the customer relations vs. being kind and benevolent to the external customers at all times;
14. Taking it as a priority to think about enhancing the customer relations vs. receiving and evaluating the objections and complaints from the customers and making the required arrangements immediately;
15. Taking it as a priority to think about enhancing the customer relations vs. the business monitoring and immediately the new developments in customer relations and technology;
16. Taking it as a priority to think about enhancing the customer relations vs. our business keeping its promise to the customers;

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17. Taking it as a priority to think about enhancing the customer relations vs. all employees of the business having goodwill and always telling the truth;
18. Taking it as a priority to think about enhancing the customer relations vs. number of persons directly dealing with the customers at the workplace;
19. Satisfying all employees vs. receiving and evaluating the objections and complaints from the customer and making the required arrangements immediately;
20. Satisfying all employees vs. monitoring and immediately implementing the new developments in customer relations and technology;
21. Satisfying all employees vs. keeping promises to the customers;
22. Satisfying all employees vs. net size of the workplace in square meters;
23. Satisfying all employees vs. net size of storehouse and warehouse of the workplace in square meters;
24. Organizations of the work and persons at the business according to the customers vs. carrying out pricing, distribution, sales, advertisement, introduction of all products in the business and other making activities primarily according to the customers;
25. Organizations of the work and persons at the business according to the customers vs. constantly receiving training on customer relations;
26. Organizations of the work and persons at the business according to the customers vs. everyone working being kind and benevolent to each other at all times;
27. Organizations of the work and persons at the business according to the customers vs. the persons working for sale fully knowing the features and benefits of all products and explaining to the customers when necessary;
28. Organizations of the work and persons at the business according to the customers vs. purchase turnover;
29. Organizations of the work and persons at the business according to the customers vs. number of persons directly dealing with the customers at the workplace;
30. Carrying out pricing, distribution, sale, advertisement, introduction of all products in the business and other marketing activities primarily according to the customer vs. the business monitoring and immediately implementing the new developments in customer relations and technology;
31. Everyone working being kind and benevolent to each other at all times vs. receiving and evaluating the objections and complaints from the customers and making the required arrangements immediately;
32. Everyone working being kind and benevolent to each other at all times vs. everyone working for sale fully knowing the features and benefits of a products and explaining to the customers where necessary.

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33. Everyone working being kind and benevolent to each other at all times vs. net size of storehouse and warehouse of the workplace in m²;
34. Receiving and evaluating the objections and complaints from the customers and making the required arrangements immediately vs. the business monitoring and immediately implementing the new developments in customer relations and technology;
35. Receiving and evaluating the objections and complaints from the customers and making the required arrangements immediately vs. the business keeping promises to the customers;
36. Persons working for sale fully knowing the features and benefits of all products and explaining to the customers when necessary vs. purchase turnover;
37. Persons working for sale fully knowing the features and benefits of all products and explaining to the customers when necessary vs. storehouse and warehouse of the workplace in square meters;
38. The business monitoring and immediately implementing the new developments in customer relations and technology vs. the business keeping promises to the customers;
39. The business keeping promises to the customers vs. all employees of the business having goodwill and always telling the truth to the customer.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Ironmongery market have been heavily affected by the factors such as 1) entrance of multinational businesses into the market in the field of ironmongery in parallel to rapid changes in the business all over the world as well as in this country in the last two decades, 2) increase in the production and importation of the range of the products and materials in the field and 3) the financial difficulties that have been suffered.

No matter whether a customer visiting an ironmonger is a cooperative executive or a plain painter, his/her need is not only purchasing goods or materials.

The customer relations have now gone beyond the basic needs, requirements and expectations. The truth is that the majority of businesses rank their customer service higher than their customers rank them (Dijulius III, 2008, 5).

Customers have long memories of a shop's good or bad performance and these may strongly affect current and future business (Ford et al., 2007, 146).

In the field of ironmongery, intensification of the competition, growth in the manufacturing industry and increasing economic concerns necessitate

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better understanding of the customers and providing them more quality services. In today's business situation, satisfying customers is not enough (Hyken, 2009, 8).

Customer satisfaction oriented perspective is a condition in order to achieve the commercial goals in the modern business life. Customer relations and quality service concept constitute a significant and integral part of this modern mentality.

In the long run, repeat business depends upon customer satisfaction. A good customer service is an essential component in getting repeat business (Cooper, 2010, 209; Blacharski, 2006, 19; Evenson, 2007, 12-13).

Therefore, this study gives some hints to the ironmongery executives and entrepreneurs about training the newly recruited and inexperienced personnel at the same level with the qualified and experienced personnel considering the customer relations.

Because of the detailed data obtained from the survey conducted, cross table analyses have been used in addition to the frequency-based findings.

The conclusions reached in the study strongly underline that there are very important business management, human resources, marketing, personal sales, and total quality, and service and customer relations problems in the ironmongery sector.

This study gives the training programs for all customer-contact employees and the employees in the ironmongery sector are of special importance.

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