

The Future for Frontline Retail Employees

EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF EMPLOYEE-DRIVEN INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

By Janine Stowe and Rhea Nambiar



Submitted to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Design in Strategic Foresight & Innovation, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2023.

Copyright

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#).

You are free to:

Share: Copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format.

Adapt: Remix, transform, and build upon the material. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.

Under the following terms:

Attribution: You must give [appropriate credit](#), provide a link to the license, and [indicate if changes were made](#). You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

Non-Commercial: You may not use the material for [commercial purposes](#).

Share Alike: If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the [same license](#) as the original.

No additional restrictions: You may not apply legal terms or [technological measures](#) that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

Notices:

You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where your use is permitted by an applicable [exception or limitation](#).

No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as [publicity, privacy, or moral rights](#) may limit how you use the material.

We hope this work
inspires others.
Please use and
share with these
conditions in mind.





Abstract

This report explores the future for frontline employees in the retail sector, looking at how current trends specifically in technology integration may affect their role and how their opportunity for employee-driven innovation might be helped or hindered. Through a literature review and semi-structured interviews, the research team developed a deeper understanding of the challenges facing frontline employees. A stakeholder analysis, influence map, and casual layered analysis provided system clarity. Through conducting a horizon scan, technology implementation was identified as a key driver of change. Existing and emerging trends added context. A 2x2 matrix and Dator's Four Futures were then applied to create four unique possible futures focusing on the intersection of EDI, technology, and the role of frontline retail employees. These futures along with the insights developed through the secondary and primary research, inform recommendations to guide further exploration. We hope this work spurs conversations within the retail sector around how to better involve frontline employees as co-creators with unique perspectives and innovative ideas.

Keywords:

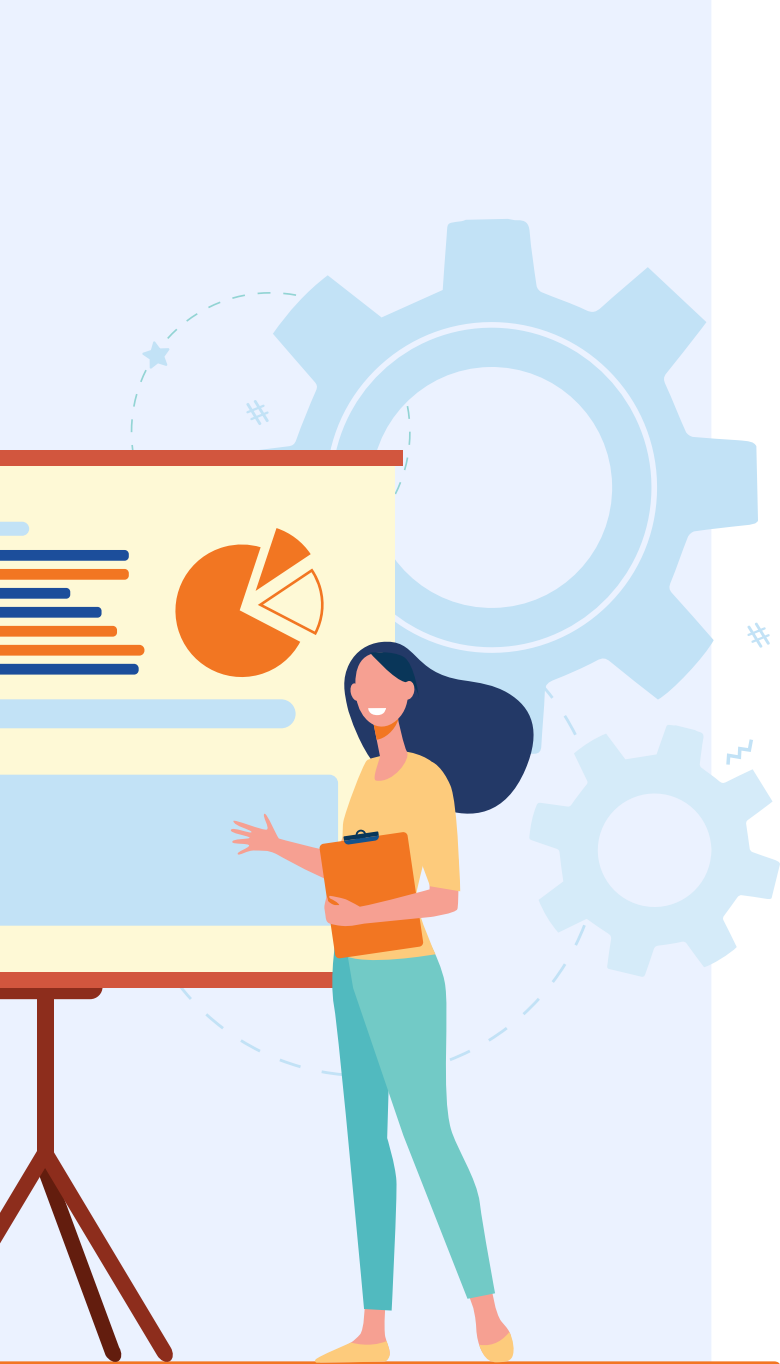
employee-driven innovation, technology, automation, retail, frontline employees, frontline workers, futures

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we are incredibly grateful to our primary advisor, Dr. Michele Mastroeni, for his invaluable guidance, continuous support, and patience. We would also like to thank Ms. Nicole Norris for her insightful input. Finally, we would like to thank those we interviewed for this research. Their willingness to share their unique experiences and perspectives on their role and the sector provided us with valuable frontline knowledge that is the focus of this research. We would also like to acknowledge the ancestral territories on which we live, work, and create. Tkaranto is the Mohawk name for the land where the City of Toronto sits. This land has been the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, the Huron-Wendat, the Haudenosaunee, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. It has been and continues to be a home to, a gathering place for, and a traveling route for many people, whether First Nation, Indigenous, or Métis.

Contents

List of Figures	5
Statement of Contribution	6
Section 1: Introduction	7
Focusing on Frontline Retail Employees: INTENT	8
Defining the Boundaries: CONTEXT	10
Speaking to Stakeholders: AUDIENCE	10
Section 2: Methodology	11
Research Approach: SUMMARY	12
Beyond The Literature: UNDERSTANDING THE SYSTEM	12
Exploring Perspectives: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS	13
Gaining a Deeper Understanding: SYSTEMS MAPPING & CAUSAL LAYERED ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY	13
Envisioning the Future: HORIZON SCANNING & SCENARIO BUILDING	15
Section 3: The Problem Space	16
Understanding EDI:	17
▪ DEFINING EDI IN RETAIL	
▪ BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING EDI IN RETAIL	
▪ CRITERIA FOR SUCCESSFUL EDI IN RETAIL	
Understanding Technology:	22
▪ DEFINING TECHNOLOGY IN RETAIL	
▪ BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING TECHNOLOGY IN RETAIL	
▪ CRITERIA FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTING TECHNOLOGY IN RETAIL	
Section 4: Insights & Analysis	25
Making Sense of What We Heard: INTERVIEW ANALYSIS	26
Making Sense of the Sector: SYSTEM MAPPING & CAUSAL LAYERED ANALYSIS	31
Section 5: Future Landscape	36
The Future of the Retail Sector: HORIZON SCAN	37
The Future Role of Frontline Employees: FORESIGHT SCENARIOS	48
Section 6: Discussion	59
Reflections	60
Recommendations	61
Section 7: Conclusion	62
Section 8: References	64
Section 9: Appendices	72



List of Figures

Figure 1. EDI and Technological System	24
Figure 2: Aactors Map	31
Figure 3: Influence Map	32
Figure 4: Causal Loop	33
Figure 5: Current CLA	34
Figure 6: Emerging CLA	35
Figure 7: 2x2 Legend	48
Figure 8: 2x2 Matrix	49

Statement of Contributions

We, Janine Stowe and Rhea Nambiar, co-authors of this research project, declare the collaborative nature of this research and acknowledge equal contributions to this project. Collaborative efforts were involved in conceptualizing and defining the research, conducting the literature review, interviewing retail employees, researching future trends, developing scenarios, formulating strategies, synthesizing findings, and writing this report.

Section 1:

Introduction

In this section

Focusing on Frontline Retail Employees: INTENT

Defining the Boundaries: CONTEXT

Speaking to Stakeholders: AUDIENCE

Section 1: Introduction

Focusing on Frontline Retail Employees

INTENT

Our research begins with the core belief that all employees in an organization have creative problem-solving skills that are important for innovation. Narrowing in on a sector that employs roughly 2.26 million people in Canada (Statista, 2023), retail is defined as the sale of commodities or goods in small quantities to ultimate consumers (Merriam-Webster.com, 2023). Retail includes everything from big-box stores to e-commerce platforms, but for this report, we are most interested in customer-facing frontline retail employees working in large retailers. As the boots on the ground, frontline retail employees have unique perspectives and can offer key insights. It's been noted in previous work in employee-driven innovation (EDI) that organizations often rely on costly external resources and consultants while overlooking current employees in the process of innovation. Yet, employees are actively innovating in small and individual ways on an ongoing basis. Incorporating EDI processes holds huge potential for organizations to use internal resources and build on existing core capabilities, but it requires cooperation between employees and management (Aasen et al., 2012).



Section 1: Introduction

In our initial research, we primarily focused on EDI. Our background readings made it apparent that certain requirements must be met for successful EDI, but current trends impacting the retail sector don't always support EDI. However societal shifts are occurring, and the role of the retail worker is evolving. Over the past two years, retail brands have increasingly turned to store staff to meet changing consumer demands. For many employers, finding and retaining retail talent has been challenging. According to the Labor Force Survey (Statistics Canada, 2022), employment in wholesale and retail fell to -4.4 per cent with losses concentrated in Ontario and Alberta. Also, the retail industry experienced the biggest year-on-year drop in employment with 45,000 job losses (-11.7 per cent). The pandemic spurred on the need to quickly replace employees with automation. Now that the world has opened back up, the rapid deployment of technology shows no signs of slowing down. Partially in response to the labour shortage, but also to keep up with competition, major retailers are making technology integration a top priority. Yet, they may be overlooking store employees who burdened by staff shortages, supply chain issues, and problems with rapidly technology implementation are facing high levels of burnout.

To further understand this problem space, we posed the research question: How might current trends affect the future roles of frontline employees in the retail sector, within Canada, and how might their opportunity for employee-driven innovation be helped or hindered.

Diving further into current and emerging trends in the sector, it was clear that technology integration was a major driver of change impacting the sector and the role of frontline employees. Although technology integration is nothing new in retail, today we are experiencing a rapid deployment of advanced technology that is disrupting how we do business—for better or worse. Technology is changing the shopping experience and the role retail employees play. As the retail sector increasingly relies on technology and automation, we wondered how this might affect the role of employees and their opportunity to engage in innovation.

Through our research, we aim to build a better understanding of how frontline retail employees are affected by the changing retail landscape and how this might impact EDI. We hope this work will inspire ways to integrate technology and automation with more focus and empathy and in a way that includes the frontline retail employee as collaborators helping to co-create robust future retail experiences.

Defining the Boundaries

CONTEXT

Our research focuses on frontline retail employees. In the context of our study this includes roles such as cashiers, clerks, sales associates, order fulfillment agents, and shift supervisors working in large-scale brick-and-mortar retail stores, supermarkets, department stores, and major clothing retailers. While the trends in the report are derived from North American sources, we speak from a Canadian perspective. Interviews were conducted with employees who are currently working in or have worked in the retail sector in Ontario within the last three years. The scenarios presented in Section 5 envision possible futures ten years from now in the year 2033.

Speaking to Stakeholders

AUDIENCE

As we embark on our inquiry, many stakeholders emerge that can benefit from this study. Beyond being a resource to better understand how frontline retail roles are changing, we hope this study may also uncover ways to sincerely foster meaningful relationships between large-scale organizations and their most grassroots-level employees. Through the foresight work presented, we aim to inspire all readers to question and consider ways we can collectively reach a preferred future.

While this report may be enjoyed by all, we believe the following groups of people will benefit most from our research:

- C-suite professionals, owners, boards, and district-level managers
- Internal and external service and product designers
- People and culture professionals
- Internal and external research and development teams

While not a key audience of this report, we hope this research will support frontline employees. There is potential for our work to foster new paths within the workplace to elevate underheard voices and bring diverse perspectives to the forefront of innovation. Providing better mechanisms for operational-level employee-driven innovation may offer an opportunity for non-traditionally trained folks to be part of the innovation conversation, enriching not only the company but also the communities in which they exist.

Section 2:

Methodology

In this section

Research Approach: SUMMARY

Establishing the Background: LITERATURE REVIEW

Exploring Perspectives: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

**Gaining a Deeper Understanding: SYSTEMS MAPPING
AND CAUSAL LAYERED ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY**

**Envisioning the Future: HORIZON SCANNING
AND SCENARIO BUILDING**

Section 2: Methodology

Research Approach

SUMMARY

Our research approach was loosely guided by the seven-step design journey roadmap (Jones & Val Ael, 2021)—first framing, listening to and understanding the system, then envisioning futures to help explore the possibility space, and lastly offering insights to inform change. To understand the background context and the problem space we conducted a literature review. We then heard directly from people working in the retail sector through a series of semi-structured interviews. Systems mapping including an actors map, influence map, and causal layered analysis aided in sense-making. A horizon scan added to a broader understanding of the trends affecting the sector. A 2x2 foresight method was applied with Dator’s Four Futures overlaid to craft possible future scenarios.

Establishing the Background

LITERATURE REVIEW

A deep understanding of the problem space was developed through a literature review initially focused on employee-driven innovation and later expanded to include technology integration in retail. With ample secondary research available on both topics, we synthesized the knowledge gained in the literature review to provide context and explain key concepts in Section 3 of this report. The readings provided an understanding of the adoption of technology and socio-technical aspects of employee engagement in retail innovation. It also informed the criteria for successfully implementing EDI and integrating technology in retail. We later referred to these criteria to consider the possible implications in future scenarios.



Exploring Perspectives

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

To aid in our understanding of current retail roles, we conducted primary research through six interviews with a cross-section of employees working for different companies and at various levels. Our interviewees ranged in age from early 20s to 55+ and hailed from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Some interviewees were long-term full-time employees in the retail sector while others worked part-time or were new to the sector. While a couple of interviewees had moved on to pursue other careers in different sectors, all had worked in retail within the last three years. The interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams or over the phone in a semi-structured format, where interviewees were asked to answer pre-provided questions and narrate firsthand experiences related to their role. Participants were interviewed as individuals working in the retail sector, and not as representatives of a specific company.

The interview questions were designed to uncover:

- **Current EDI practices occurring in retail stores**
- **Perceived effectiveness and adoption of technology and automation in retail stores and its reception among employees and customers**
- **How current employees envision the future of retail and employee roles**

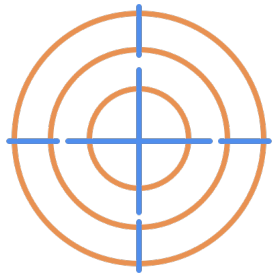
Note: Interview questions were edited slightly to align with the role of the interviewee. Refer to Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions for an example. Our primary research was approved by the Research Ethics Board.

Gaining a Deeper Understanding

SYSTEMS MAPPING AND CAUSAL LAYERED ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

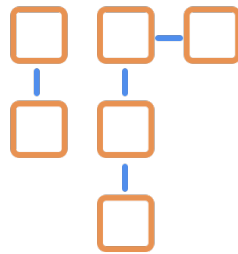
To further understand the relationships, influences, and barriers in the system we referenced our interview data and ethnographic observations, applying systems tools and methods to map and make sense of the ecosystem. An actors map fleshed out the knowledge and power of key actors operating at different levels in the sector. An influence map was constructed to identify the relationships between core challenges in the system. Conducting a causal layered analysis (CLA) uncovered the trends, underlying causes, and values contributing to a deep myth about retail employees. A second CLA helped map a more desirable reflection of their role in the sector. Each method is expanded on below.

Section 2: Methodology



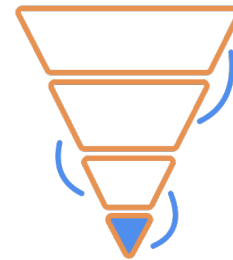
Actors Map

The actors' map is a useful instrument for recognizing and depicting the primary actors involved in a system, which can include organizations, individuals, and both human and non-human agents. It visually outlines their interrelated connections to the pertinent issues or end results within the system. To create the map, actors are placed in a simple 2x2 quadrant overlaid over concentric circles, each representing a level of the social system or organization. The objective is to place stakeholders on an x-axis of knowledge and a y-axis of power. This helps in mapping and identifying relationality within the formal structures, to uncover power relations influencing the system (Jones & Val Ael, 2021).



Influence Map

In identifying the leverage or root causes in a complex system, influence mapping is a useful and versatile technique. Different types of influence maps have specific strengths that can be applied to various problem mappings. The map is a roadmap of issues in a nodal network falling under the following levels of a problem: strategic outcomes, outcomes, activity outputs, influences, and deepest influences. The exercise can be done starting from the bottom and moving up, or vice-versa (Jones & Val Ael, 2021).



Causal Layered Analysis

A causal layered analysis (CLA) is a valuable tool for investigating a complex inquiry space, particularly in the realm of strategic foresight. It consists of four levels, ranging from the litany (surface-level events and trends) at the top to the deep myth (metaphors) at the bottom, with structures and systems (root causes) and worldview and values (paradigms) in between. By conducting research on trends, and the field, each level of analysis is informed, incorporating a range of knowledge levels (Jones & Val Ael, 2021).

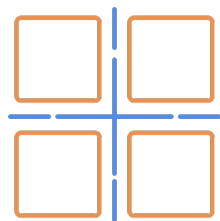
Section 2: Methodology

Envisioning the Future

HORIZON SCANNING AND SCENARIO BUILDING

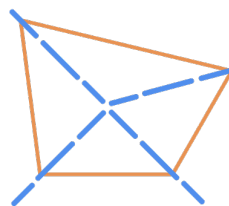
We did a horizon scan to gain a better sense of the larger ecosystem comprising the retail sector and to identify trends impacting the current and future roles of frontline retail employees. By sifting through various articles, reports, blogs, and websites we identified existing trends and pulled out signals to derive emerging trends. These trends combined with the knowledge gained in the literature review, interviews, and systems mapping formed the basis for our future scenarios.

Using a 2x2 foresight method and applying an axis of EDI implementation and technology integration, we developed four possible future scenarios for the year 2033. Each future scenario is envisioned through a description of key elements of that world in relation to the criteria for successful EDI and technology implementation. To further differentiate the four scenarios, we overlaid Dator's Four Futures. While the four categories described in Dator's method can push the scenarios to extremes, we chose to apply them within the limitations of what we felt was reasonable within the current climate of events and the ten-year timeframe specified. The two methods used are explained below.



2x2 Matrix

The 2x2 approach was formalized during the 1990s by the consulting firm Global Business Network (GBN). A matrix is created by placing two factors that influence the future of the issue on an intersecting axis of high impact and high uncertainty which cross to form four quadrants. The scenarios or narratives derived describe how things might be by a medium- to long-term time horizon, and explore how the world would change, should certain trends emerge, and events occur. This method generates up to four contrasted scenarios (Rhydderch, A. 2017).



Dator's Four Futures

Jim Dator, Professor Emeritus and Director of the Hawaii Futures Studies Research Center has formulated the four most likely futures based on his research (Babel, 2022). He clarifies, however, that the future cannot be precisely predicted and that it depends on our decisions and actions. To help envision unique scenarios of potential futures, Dator's Four Futures (Mattin, 2020) describe opposing situations of discipline, transformation, growth, and collapse.

Section 3:

The Problem Space

In this section

Understanding EDI:

- DEFINING EDI IN RETAIL
- BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING EDI IN RETAIL
- CRITERIA FOR SUCCESSFUL EDI IN RETAIL

Understanding Technology:

- DEFINING TECHNOLOGY IN RETAIL
- BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING TECHNOLOGY IN RETAIL
- CRITERIA FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTING TECHNOLOGY IN RETAIL

Section 3: The Problem Space

Understanding Employee-driven Innovation in the Retail Context

DEFINING EDI IN RETAIL

Employees are at the heart of any organization and have a unique and intimate view of the inner workings of an operation. The often hidden processes that each employee undertakes to ensure efficient outputs, error reductions, and streamlined systems are churning in the background daily. These processes occur as a result of an accumulation of tacit knowledge associated with lived experiences and individual abilities. This unique knowledge provides frontline employees with specific creative problem-solving skills that are important for innovation. In this context, we define innovation as the process of creating value by applying novel solutions to meaningful problems.

Employee-driven innovation (EDI) is then defined as a humanistic and social approach to innovation that leverages the expertise, experience, ideas, creativity, and skills of employees (Holmquist, et al., 2019).

It enables organizations to meaningfully innovate from within—stimulating employee intellect, creativity, initiative, and commitment, and retaining talent. Reynolds and Hristov (2009) point out that retailers do not necessarily think about their work from the innovation perspective. This is because innovation strategies, such as the adoption of automation often arise from the necessity as opposed to inculcating innovation as a practice from within the organization.



Section 3: The Problem Space

DEFINING EDI IN RETAIL (CONTINUED)

Sample Case Study: Southwest Airlines

While not retail-specific, a great case study of employee-driven innovation is Southwest Airlines. Famous for being the world's largest low-cost carrier, the airlines had a humble but determined beginning. The airlines initially provided short intrastate trips wholly within the state of Texas, gradually expanded to regional intercity and eventually to nationwide transits. Southwest's business model is distinct from other US airlines, using a rolling hub, point-to-point network, offering free checked baggage, and exclusively using Boeing 737 (Bailey, 2019). It's no secret how the airline company managed to fly customers in the shortest time, at the lowest cost, and not compromise on the travel experience or customer satisfaction. Their early competitors (such

as Continental Lite) tried to copy their business model but failed terribly due to poor execution attributed to their failure to mimic the mental models enlisted by Southwest. Having a strong organizational culture, Southwest employees are treated as family and provided the autonomy to think creatively in their roles. From the airport ground staff to the luggage belt loader, everyone is encouraged to give feedback to the company on how to make their jobs more efficient. The changes introduced by the employees have created the fastest turnaround time for flights, making it possible to fly 4000 trips daily. This proved when given appropriate time, agency, and opportunity, employees can innovate rapidly with few resources.



When searching for literature specific to EDI in the retail sector we found the results somewhat scarce. Available literature often looks at small- to medium-sized retail stores and the barriers they face in implementing EDI. We noted a gap in specifically documenting and understanding EDI in large retail stores. While this study concentrated on EDI efforts in larger retailers, a background understanding can still be garnered from the existing body of knowledge of small- to medium-sized retailers as overlaps in processes and challenges exist.

Section 3: The Problem Space

BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING EDI IN RETAIL

Through observing small-sized retail stores Hiltunen and Laitinen (2021) came to the following conclusions regarding the factors impacting employee-driven innovation:

1. Innovation is on demand. Processes of innovation are only introduced when felt necessary. There are no permanent structures built for innovation and creativity, rather they arise when there is a need for improvements or new ideas.
2. Although EDI can be a natural component of everyday work on the job, it does not necessarily occur by itself without any support from the company. Employees are not aware of how they incorporate innovation in everyday life, nor are they made aware by the company, which can limit their contribution.
3. Lack of motivation and reward systems make it hard to innovate in daily work activities. Without appropriate rewards—for example, acknowledgement for a job done well— intrinsic motivation can be negatively affected, thereby decreasing the desire for innovation.
4. The hectic nature of work affects the time employees have to innovate. Overburdened employees may deprioritize innovation.
5. Employees believe they have no ability to impact certain issues. They may view certain problems as unavoidable and fail to consider different approaches or develop new ideas to tackle tasks, even if they believe innovation is significant at an unconscious level.
6. Limited openness to sharing ideas or withholding information can affect an employee's sense of belonging. Taking small measures to encourage open communication can lead to employees becoming more emotionally invested and encourage more active involvement.
7. A feeling of inequality among employees can lead to a deteriorating work atmosphere which in turn, causes the employees to become more withdrawn and communicate less.

In the evolving retail environment, barriers in addition to those listed above are low learning and development, no sense of purpose, poor team building, and deprioritized mental wellness (Guusto, 2022).

Section 3: The Problem Space

Criteria for Successful EDI in Retail

As in many other industries, innovation has become a crucial part of an organization's success in the retail sector (Hiltunen, 2021). As observed by Pantano (2019), innovation in retail tends to be more focused on technology. Although EDI does not need to be supported by technology, gaps persist in the EDI process in retail due to the cost and time for its setup (Hiltunen & Laitinen, 2021). Retailers try to overcome these challenges by empowering their frontline employees with tools that automate repetitive and manual tasks through technology (Beloof, 2022). However, this is not always helpful. In the zeitgeist of labour shortage and rapid technological deployment, employees are increasingly burdened to keep up with new technology, changing workloads, and additional duties. While the vision for technology integration may be to free up employees for other less menial initiatives such as EDI, in practice this often isn't the case.

The literature on EDI covers a vast array of human psychology and management studies. As the workforce and workplaces shift, the employees' need for job satisfaction, engagement, and growth is also evolving. However, there are common practices and characteristics that can serve as a guide for fostering employee-driven innovation. Smith, Ulhøi, and Kesting (2012) identify four requirements for EDI as autonomy, leader support, collaboration, and organizational norms, combined with additional resources we have expanded on each below:

- Autonomy in crafting one's own measurable goals and showcasing social identity triggers creativity and introduces new possible opportunities. Empowering employees to express their agency and exempting them from daily chores to implement ideas is a keystone to building capacity for innovation (Nijhof et. al., 2002).
- Leader support is a key driver to promote or inhibit innovation management (Kesting et. al., 2016). It is crucial for employees to feel safe to ideate, question existing practices, and offer opinions that may differ from management. Motivation, implementation, and allocation of necessary resources are also key.
- Collaboration means working together and sharing information and knowledge. Interaction with groups and sharing ideas with colleagues are important for creativity because they stimulate employees to make associations and facilitate innovative learning.
- Organizational norms for exploration refer to the managerial attitude toward change and the internal environment for innovation. Most important are trust, open-mindedness, work task flexibility, and a learning climate. These will have a significant impact on employee creativity and innovative behaviour.

Section 3: The Problem Space

Criteria for Successful EDI in Retail (continued)

It seems intuitive to involve employees as a key resource in innovation, however, governing employee-driven innovation can be tricky, making it difficult to realize the hidden potential in a supportive way (Kesting & Ulhøi, 2010). Reflecting on the barriers and supports of implementing EDI in retail, we have derived a framework of criteria to help assess the effects of changes in the retail sector on the employee's ability to actively innovate. The framework offers a set of questions retailers may ask to ensure they are engaging frontline employees for innovative work.

1. Autonomy

- Does the employee have a sense of purpose?
- Does the employee feel the agency to change the situation?

2. Leader Support

- Does the company have processes to encourage creative thinking?
- Are the appropriate resources and supports in place?
- Is there motivation and adequate rewards?
- Are there open channels for communication?

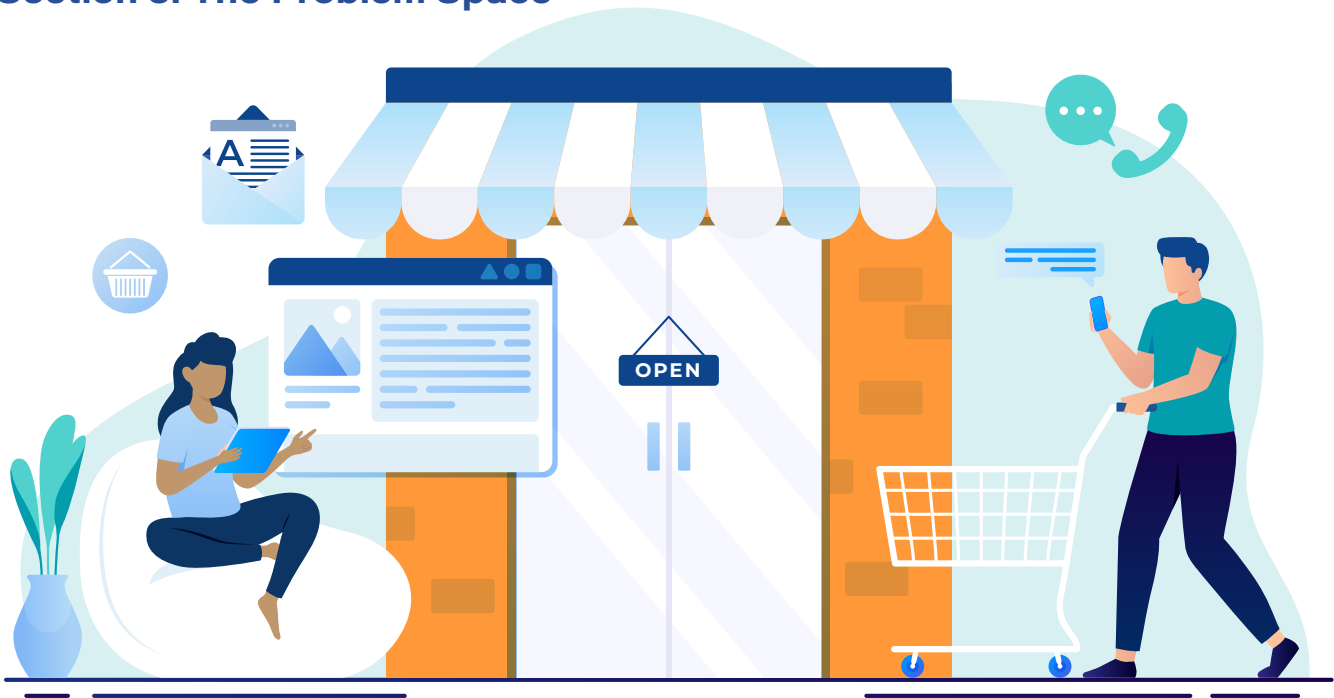
3. Collaboration

- Is there a means to facilitate team building and knowledge sharing?

4. Organizational Norms for Exploration

- Is the working environment conducive to learning and training?
- Are the employees treated fairly and equally?
- Is the mental health of employees prioritized?
- Are there accessible and reliable feedback channels?

Section 3: The Problem Space



Understanding Technology in the Retail Context

DEFINING TECHNOLOGY IN RETAIL

Driven by the constant technological evolution and consumers' demand for worthwhile in-store experiences, retailers are adopting new, attractive, and interactive technologies. The best technologies catch consumers' attention and improve retail management strategies. Therefore, the capacity to install new technology and the demand for it paves the way for a new retail setting (Patano, 2019). In response to this new setting, retailers are installing smart technologies such as interactive displays, smart shopping carts, radio frequency identification systems (RFID), shopping assistant systems, near-field communication systems (NFC), and augment-reality interactive technology (ART) in stores worldwide. These smart technologies claim to benefit retailers by offering better customer experience, improved firm management, cost

reductions, and ultimately increased business profitability (Roy et al., 2017).

While not a complete list, when discussing technology in retail this may also include artificial intelligence (AI), generative AI, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), interactive interfaces, robotics, machine learning (ML), and AI-powered automated systems. Examples of these technologies are widespread in Canada. Self-checkouts are a common example, with their adoption in major chains from grocery stores to fashion retailers, it's become an industry standard. However, the perceived usage and satisfaction by customers, vis-à-vis the adoption and implementation of this technology among retailers, may point to a disconnect in the rollout of such technology.

Section 3: The Problem Space

BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING TECHNOLOGY IN RETAIL

Roger's proposed Theory of Innovation Diffusion emphasizes the adoption of new technology and innovation among users in social systems. It is an adaptive process where the individual's choices change over a period. Similarly, the adoption of technology in retail is also diffused. Although at an early stage of research, understanding rates of technological diffusion across different-sized stores, concludes that large retail stores are more willing to adopt new technologies compared to small- and medium-sized retailers (Roy et al., 2017). A reason for this may be the larger stores' ability to allocate funds to implement the latest technology.

Socio-technical systems (STS) is an interdisciplinary concept that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s in response to the growing recognition that technological innovations could not be effectively implemented without also considering the social context in which they were being introduced. The STS approach emphasizes the interdependence of technical and social factors in the design, implementation, and management of complex systems. Frequently, systems fulfill their technical requirements, yet are deemed unsuccessful as they fail to provide the anticipated assistance for actual work within the organization. The issue lies in techno-centric methods of designing systems, which overlook the intricate connections among the organization, the individuals executing business processes, and the system that sustains these processes (Baxter et al., 2011).

Roy et al., (2017) describe how the consumer's perceived risk of using smart retail technologies may lead to lower or reduced intention to use the technology. Similarly, customer satisfaction will have a positive direct effect on behavioural intentions toward smart retail technologies. Hence, it is critical for large retail companies to understand the consumer experience before rolling out technologies. This can be done by considering the human factors of using the technology and viewing technology as a tool to facilitate desired behaviour among consumers.

Section 3: The Problem Space

CRITERIA FOR SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY IN RETAIL

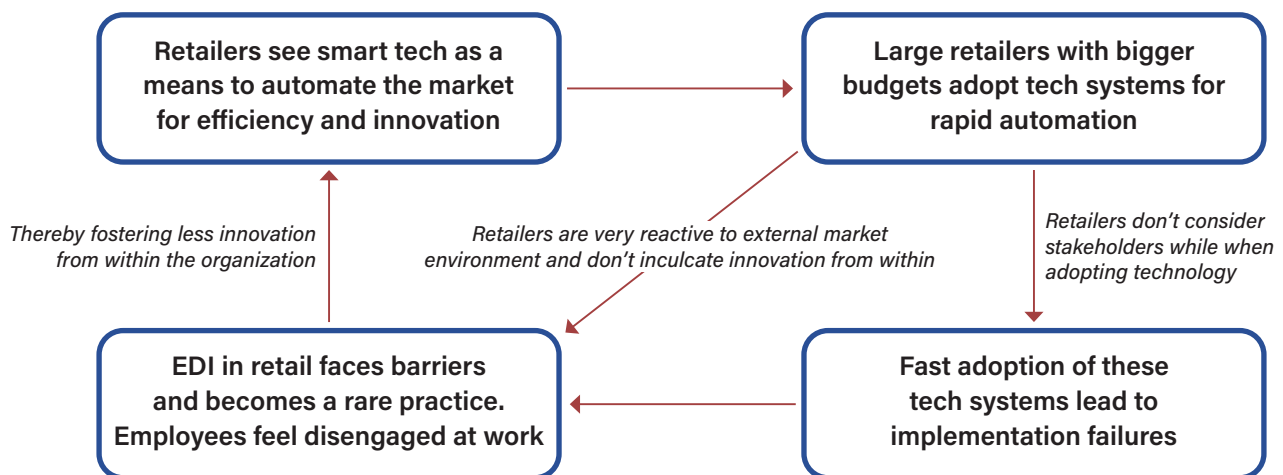
The creation of robust socio-technical systems requires input from all key stakeholders, including those who work within different parts of the system. Furthermore, the design and performance of the organizational system can only be understood and improved if both social and technological aspects are treated as interdependent parts of a complex system (Ainley, 2019). Engineering innovation, as seen from the lens of EDI, can then be a participative process where the knowledge and expertise of people within the organization can be leveraged for the development and evolution of new technology. It would seem intuitive that people who interact with in-store technology every day be an integral part of designing it, but that's often not the case in the retail industry. Frontline employees are easily left behind in the innovation processes.

As large retail stores adopt and keep up with fast-paced smart technologies, it is imperative to view technology and automation as tools for building relations with consumers. Considerations must be made regarding the complexity of the social system that creates and implements these technologies in the store environment, thereby including the frontline employees in the process of innovation.

A McKinsey & Company (2020) report, identified three distinguishing factors of larger companies meeting their automation targets, we have adopted these for technology integration as a whole and have expanded to include a fourth requirement:

1. **Make technology a strategic priority**
2. **Focus on people as much as technology**
3. **Develop an operating model that enables scaling**
4. **Inclusion of frontline employees in design and implementation**

Figure 1. EDI and Technological System



Section 4:

Insights & Analysis

In this section

Making Sense of What We Heard: INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Making Sense of the Sector: SYSTEM MAPPING & CAUSAL LAYERED ANALYSIS

Section 4: Insights & Analysis

Making Sense of What We Heard

INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Through a series of semi-structured interviews, we heard from a cross-section of employees with experience working for large retailers including supermarkets, pharmacies, mall retailers, and big box stores. Our six participants represented different ages, genders, and ethnicities. We spoke to employees in the role of cashier, sales associate, store-level manager, and head office operations. Each unique voice provided a valuable perspective on the roles and the sector. We synthesized the data collected during the interviews into categories reflective of the questions we posed, and the personal anecdotes and perspectives heard during the interviews. Insights and interpretations are presented based on the aggregate data in conjunction with the context provided in our background research. The results have been broken into four categories with subheadings as follows:



EDI Results

- Minimal control to make changes
- Innovation as expertise
- Innovation is not the focus
- Disconnect between corporate and store levels
- Holding back talent



Technology Results

- Automation implementation
- Technology failing employees
- Technology replacing jobs
- Customer technology adoption
- Data-driven store operations



Future of Retail Results

- Fewer in-store staff
- Mixed feelings about the future



General Results

- The human touch

Section 4: Insights & Analysis

EDI Results

Minimal control to make changes

Retail spaces are hierarchical work environments where the most decision-making power is held at the corporate level. Lower-level employees have minimal control to innovate, and management may not have the autonomy or will to push frontline insights further to enact change. Employees feel disheartened when they are not heard, and they ultimately give up on trying to affect change at all. As one interviewee described, even when they tried to make a stock change to improve the store for customers, it was quickly reset to corporate specifications. For them, innovation feels far-fetched. Even for employees at the corporate level, convincing the upper management to embrace employee-driven innovation “feels like swimming upstream”.

Innovation as expertise

Another common issue is that frontline employees don't feel they possess the necessary expertise to innovate. The concept of innovation may appear grander than it is and confined to the arena of corporate-level suits. As one interviewee pointed out “I'm not sure if associates see themselves as experts to innovate, innovation is an amorphous process, not everyone has the skill to do it.” It appears frontline employees may also take daily problems in the store for granted and view them as normal issues they just have to live with. Most are unable to see themselves as people who can push for change, and the minimal control felt further discourages the sharing of ideas.

Innovation is not the focus

As we heard from multiple respondents, getting pulled in different directions and an increased workload doesn't leave much room to spend time on innovation efforts. In addition, enacting change may not be a priority for many employees. One interviewee explained their place of work was “a good company, in a nice area, with good customers.” For them the sense of safety and community they felt while at work was a driving factor in their decision to continue working and they didn't particularly feel the need to push for change.

Disconnect between corporate and store levels

Innovation efforts are often top down—using staff to gain feedback but not actively engaging them in the innovation process. The staff is sometimes asked to share feedback in a survey but are not often looped into what happens to that feedback or what if any innovation efforts are inspired by their insights. As one interviewee recalled, “We had a suggestion box at one point, but the suggestions were never looked at.” From the perspective of retailers, processing feedback from part-time employees may seem time-consuming. For stores where suggestions are taken annually, employees only think about giving suggestions at a particular time of the year, as opposed to thinking about it actively. Real-time suggestions by employees may be shared verbally with their managers, but there is no guarantee the manager will share them up the chain to the corporate level.

Section 4: Insights & Analysis

EDI Results (continued)

Holding back talent

It's the opinion of some employees that management may have their own agendas in place that hinders the development of lower-level employees. In one interviewee's account, they explained, "The problem is that other folks aren't as engaged as I am, so I was told by my manager to lower my standards. I didn't understand that, and I think that if you have a high-performing employee others should get up to that level, so I was pretty thrown off". They also recalled using their personal time to email the district manager directly with ideas, circumventing the unsupportive manager. As outlined in Section 3, EDI is closely linked to leadership support, without appreciation and guidance, there will be a loss of talent. On the training and development front, we observed that even if training programs were available, and the employees completed them, they didn't automatically move up, leaving eager employees feeling frustrated.

Technology Results

Automation implementation

A common issue that was pointed out during the interviews was that the automation in-store was not effectively implemented. Self-checkouts being one of the most common technologies still caused issues and needed human assistance. As one respondent recollected, "Customers complained about long lines (at self-checkout), things didn't scan properly, and the right prices were not shown. Every five minutes customers needed help. I don't like self-checkouts—they're painful to

handle as we were not given proper training." Store employees are often tending to their jobs as well as helping customers use technology. Assisting with technology may be a tacked-on task in addition to their regular duties and tiring to do repeatedly. However, the employees do point to the brighter side of automation sighting that self-checkouts offer shoppers the choice to skip the long lines, or they can opt to wait to be checked through by a cashier. In general, those we spoke to had mixed feelings about technology and automation integration. While technology typically improves processes, the change can be challenging, with cashiers and sales associates often having the hardest time keeping pace. Efforts by employees to adapt to new technologies may not be obvious to shoppers. As one interviewee explained, new technology may improve backend processes, but the changes may not be apparent to the consumer.

Technology failing employees

With large retailers, abundant technology may be integrated without first ironing out all the bugs. As in socio-technical systems, with quick adoption as the goal, usage and maintenance may not be top of mind. One employee we spoke to described how new price scanners didn't show the correct price, but that head office has yet to make good on their promise to roll back the faulty scanners. Technology failure can be a daily occurrence, as one interviewee mused, "The scale machines don't show the right price, and causes confusion—this happens every day". Another respondent described how a newly introduced stocking automation system didn't account for seasonal and end-of-aisle items and reported inaccurate stocking data leaving store stockers unsure of if they should restock or not.

Section 4: Insights & Analysis

Technology Results (continued)

Technology replacing jobs

It's often assumed that technology and automation will free up employees to do less mundane tasks, however in reality, instead staff may be let go. As mentioned earlier, technology takes time to integrate, requires staff training and customer support, and sometimes never functions at full capacity. Yet it seems that stores are still cutting employees when new technology is introduced, leaving the remaining staff overworked and overwhelmed. As one employee told us, "Tech integration means they fired staff so then there aren't enough staff to do everything this and made for an unhealthy workplace". The shortage of employees, spurs the need for more automation, creating further staff shortages, increasing the workload for employees, and reinforcing the cycle.

Customer technology adoption

One of the biggest human factors for the success of automation is the audience. Depending on demographics such as age and ability, customers adopt differently. Several respondents noted that the employees had to train and encourage customers to use technology. One interviewee stated how "45+ aged don't like using the self-checkouts, the younger generation like it better". A repeated pattern of customer dissatisfaction and resistance to change was observed by multiple employees we interviewed. Older shoppers often find it more difficult to adjust to newly introduced technology with retailers catering to younger demographics more eager for seamless human-free shopping experiences.

Data-driven store operations

As we learned, stores are often managed with multiple data-driven devices. Retailers track stock using Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags synced to a cloud-based app. Stock and consumer spending data is collected and synthesized to push sales and meet budgets- a symptom of high consumerism. However, data driven operations only reflect a part of the picture and don't always factor in employee experiences or fully account for employee capacity. As described by one interviewee, "The data collection creates a disconnect between the corporate level and the store level—they don't see the in-store team as real human beings with emotions to be considered". Overburdened employees trying to keep pace with data-driven goals have little time to connect with customers and risk burnout. Retailers should be mindful of relying too much on data-driven metrics to measure store operations and account for tacit processes.

Future of Retail Results

Fewer in-store staff

All those we heard from seemed to be well-aware of the fact that retail jobs are currently being replaced by technology and automation and appear to be resigned to the idea that this trend will continue. One respondent proposed, "There will be less employees in the future stores and roles will become more managerial". Another employee predicts there will be smaller stores with fewer associates, shifting labour efforts to stocking and fulfillment.

Section 4: Insights & Analysis

Future of Retail Results (continued)

Mixed feelings about the future

The respondents felt that automation and tech integration is inevitable in retail, but still believe they will have a role in the future, working in conjunction with technology. The employees hoped that in-store staff would be supporting the technology or better yet, managing it. They see training and development of employees essential to keeping up with the changing environment. Feelings were mixed however, with many expressing both feelings of optimism and pessimism regarding the future roles of frontline retail employees, as one interviewee stated, “With tech, humans will do what humans can do”. There was an overwhelming sense of positivity among the respondents that the value of the human touch in retail will remain.

General Results

The human touch

A common theme arising from the interviews was the importance of the human element in the ecosystem at the store level. One observation is the motivations of the customers and employees may differ from those of the corporation. As one interviewee pointed out, Canadian consumers sometimes go shopping as an activity rather than just to fulfil essential needs. For some shoppers, the human interaction aspect is a draw and both consumers and store employees alike may consider in-store interactions as an integral part of their notion of community. As we heard from one interviewee, long-time employees, even those working in large retail chains, may view their coworkers and even repeat customers

as family. This need for the human element is often overlooked in the name of efficiency and disproportionately affects elderly and disabled populations who may have unique challenges left unaddressed by integrated technologies built to serve a broad audience. As one respondent explained, “Lots of senior customers don’t like to use the self-check outs and prefer to talk to a human”. As collected during the interviews, these folks are often better served by humans who can quickly respond to their needs with understanding and empathy.

INTERVIEW INSIGHTS SUMMARY

The feedback we heard from those we interviewed aligns with previous research in EDI and backs up the criteria requirements for successful EDI implementation as described in Section 3. The employees we spoke to felt they really didn’t have the ability to innovate or enact change even though many felt they had useful insights to share. Technology integration and automation, seem to be a blessing and a curse for both the customers and the employees. With self-checkouts still being a point of contention it’s difficult for both groups to buy into the benefits of continuous and rapid deployment of technologies. Although technology is touted as freeing up workers for less menial tasks, in reality, employees may be let go rather than reallocated and those that continue may be left under-trained in the new automation. Surprisingly, some of the employees we spoke to remained positive overall about the sector and felt they would still have a role in the future—but felt that their role would become much more about assisting and interacting with technology than with customers.

Note: Quotes have been edited for length and grammar.

Making Sense of the Sector

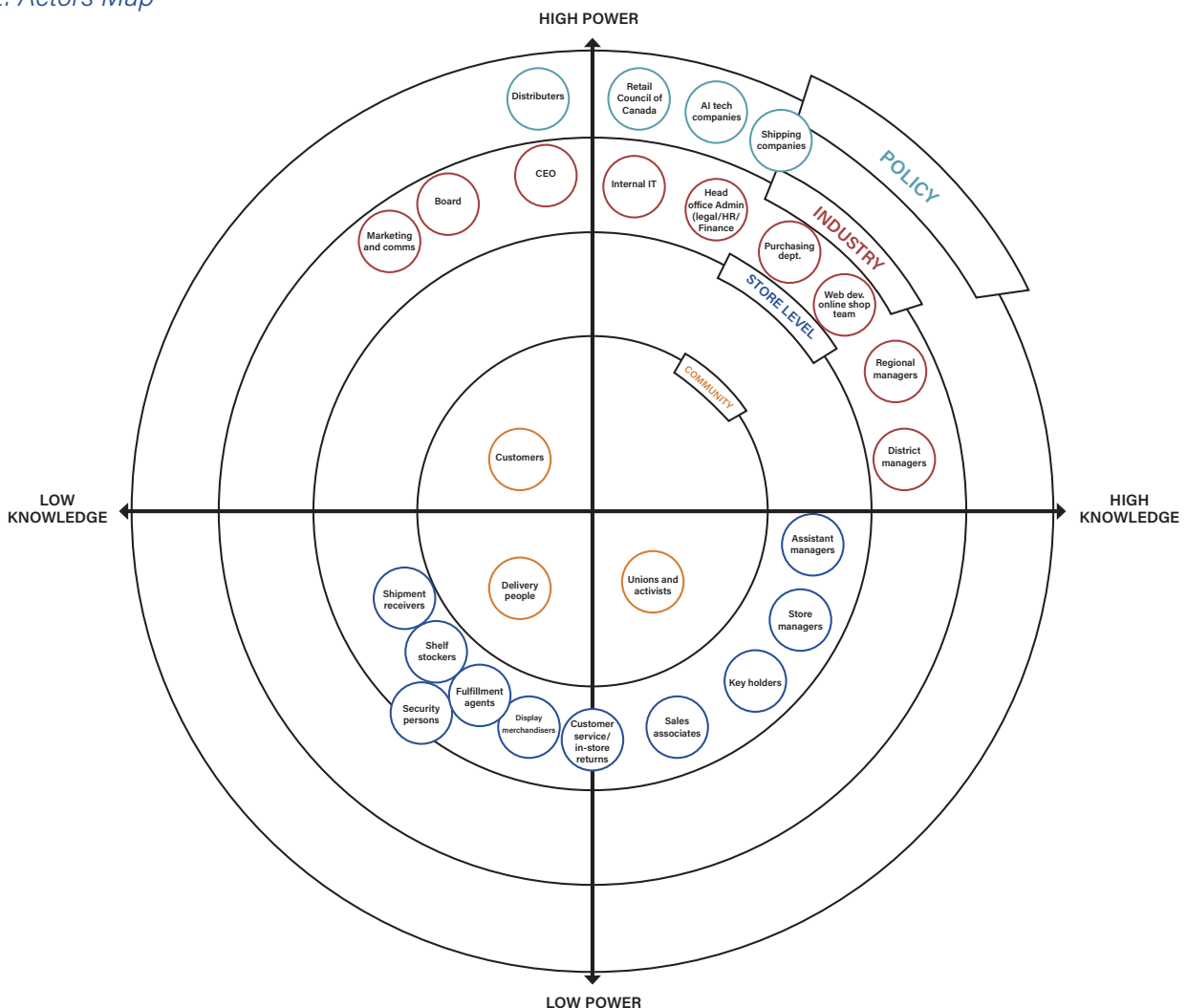
SYSTEM MAPPING AND CASUAL LAYERED ANALYSIS

Our background secondary research along with the data collected in the interviews and through ethnographic observations contributed to our understanding of the sector. Systems tools and methods were applied to aid in a further understanding of the stakeholders, the knowledge and power dichotomy, and the challenges faced within the store-level ecosystem.

Stakeholder Analysis

Exploring the stakeholders through the lens of knowledge and power it was apparent that there exists a divide between who has control over approving new technology efforts and those who must implement them. Employees have first-hand real-time knowledge about issues but have low power to enact change.

Figure 2: Actors Map



Section 4: Insights & Analysis

Challenges and Influences

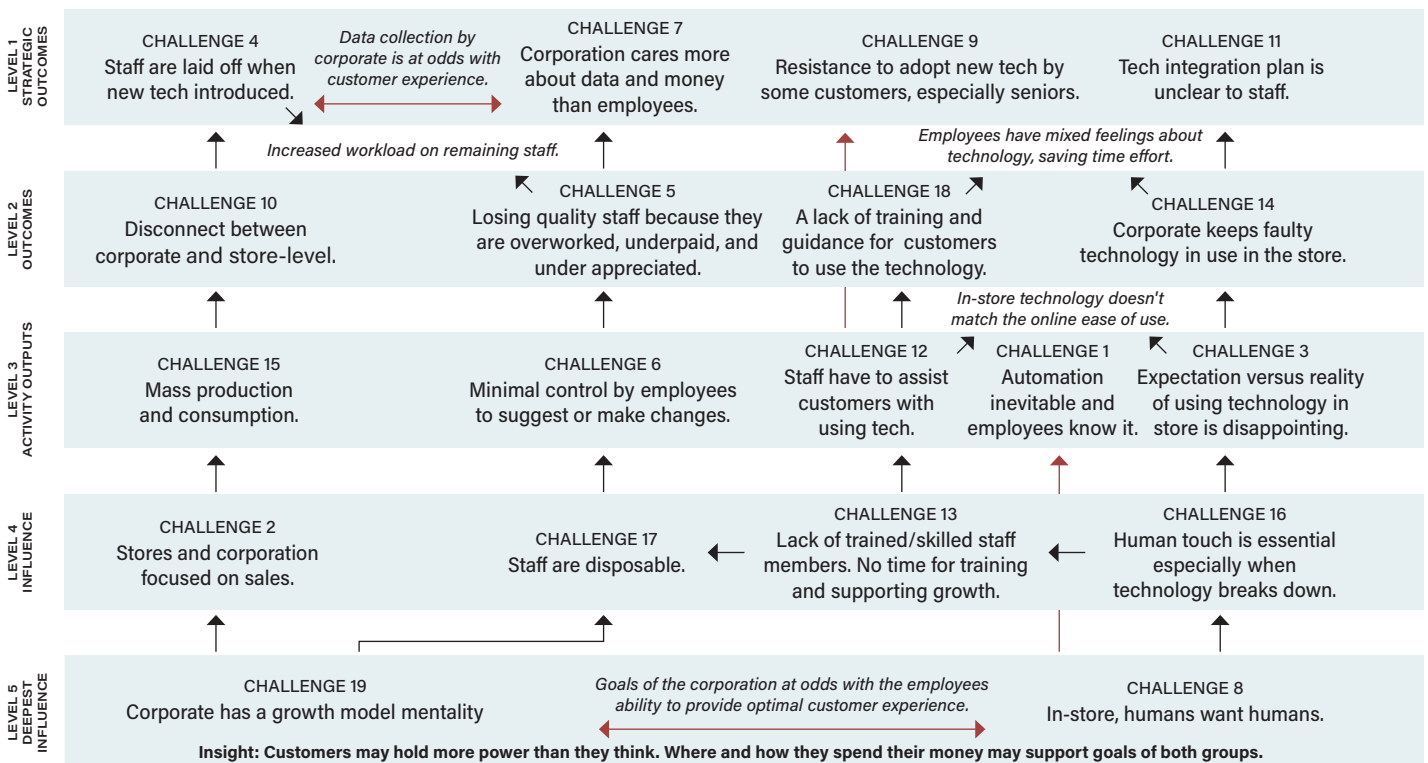
We used an influence map (see, Figure 3, below), to better understand the challenges faced by employees and customers while interacting with technology and to trace areas where there may be power struggles between stakeholders. In doing so we uncovered that customers hold more power than they may be aware of. Through their spending habits, they can show companies that they still need humans in retail. However, it's difficult to collect this data as the issues resolved by sales associates may be through one-off real-life interactions not captured by data devices.

Some of the deep held beliefs exposed in the influence map were further explored in the casual layered analysis. The deepest influence comes from interactions with customers. Shoppers still need

humans for in-person assistance. The second deep influence is the growth mentality of retailers which may be at odds with humans wanting humans. The goal of the retailers is ultimately to increase sales while the goal of the employees and customers is to have a positive exchange while effectively fulfilling their shopping needs. The staff are aware that automation is inevitable but may be unclear about the path to get to technology integration that fully meets the needs of customers. Frontline employees are often not privy to the larger technology strategies happening at the corporate level or how they will affect their role. Employees are then left holding the bag when automation fails and bearing the brunt of customer dissatisfaction as illustrated in the causal loop (see Figure 4, pg. 33).

Figure 3: Influence Map

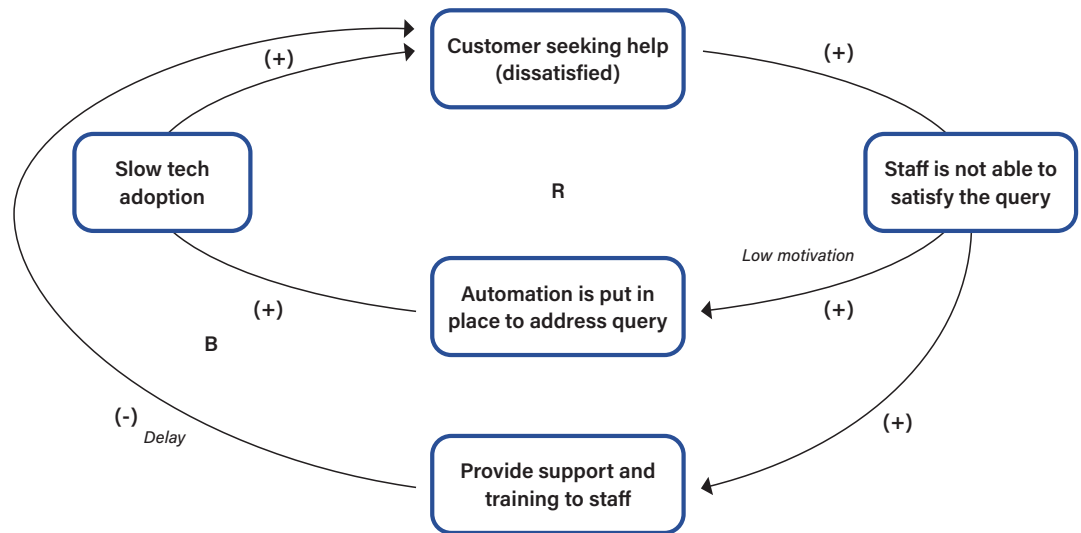
Starting from the bottom moving up the influence map outlined the key challenges experienced in the retail system at a store-level with respect to customer service, employee experience, and technology integration.



Section 4: Insights & Analysis

Figure 4. Causal Loop

The diagram depicts a reinforcing and balancing loop. At the top, customers seeking help are dissatisfied, feeding into staff not being able to satisfy the query. This in turn causes corporate to put automation in place to try to address the query, causing low motivation in staff. Technology can take time and effort, reinforcing customers needing help. The second loop is a balancing loop where support and training is given to staff better equipping them to address customer queries, however there is a delay as this takes time to implement before queries can be fully addressed.



Causal Layered Analysis

Synthesizing the data from the background research and interviews, along with the trends that were emerging in our horizon scanning exercise (described in Section 5), we conducted a current causal layered analysis (CLA) to uncover the trends, underlying causes, and values contributing to a negative deep myth about retail employees. A second emerging CLA helped map a more desirable reflection of their role in the sector.

With the current CLA, we see that there is a deep myth or stigma attached to the retail job. There is the misconception that it is not as fulfilling or purposeful as other jobs. It may be viewed as an interim role on the way to other more professional aspirations. These stem from beliefs that emphasize careers that require post-secondary programs as being more important than labor-based professions. More creative jobs with academic backing and held in higher regard than those roles that require more repetitive tasks, this is backed up by a major class divide and escalated consumerism.

There is, however, a societal shift occurring. Having come through the pandemic together, there is a collective sense of compassion. During the pandemic, we gained a deep understanding of the importance of mental health and community. This awareness and empathy are reflected in the retail sector. Employees are banding together and speaking out and demanding more of the benefits typically afforded to the rest of the workforce. Many of these employees were considered essential workers during the pandemic, risking their health to make sure the rest of us could get our groceries. Frontline workers in retail may already view their current job as a career. As shown in the emerging CLA, the rest of society may also be starting to understand the important role frontline employees play.

Section 4: Insights & Analysis

Figure 5: Current CLA

LITANY

(events and trends)

The day-to-day occurrence, the most commonly accepted headlines of the way things should be (Inayatullah, 2008).

- Rise of e-commerce
- Minimum wage for retail workers
- Not enough training provided to employees
- Automation will take over jobs
- Automation will free up employees for less monotonous tasks

STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS

(underlying causes)

Deeper systemic causes of the issue that can be social, economic, technical, cultural or political (Inayatullah, 2008).

- Poverty and privilege
- Class divide
- Academia superior to hands on skill
- Esclated consumerism
- Retail heirarchy, base level is less creative
- Capitalism
- Reliance on technology as its abundant and cheap
- Throwaway culture

WORLDVIEWS AND VALUES

(paradigms)

This is the big picture, the paradigm that defines the problem and informs how we understand it (Inayatullah, 2008).

- Entitlement by consumers
- Retail workers are not knowledgeable
- Retail work is repetitive and mundane
Jobs only matter if you have a post-secondary education
- Valuing economic exchange over human exchange

DEEP MYTH

(metaphors)

This is the deepest level of causes that are driving the issue. These causes are firmly rooted and believed, and often unconscious (Inayatullah, 2008).

**Retail job
is not a
real job**

Section 4: Insights & Analysis

Figure 6: Emerging CLA

LITANY

(events and trends)

The day-to-day occurrence, the most commonly accepted headlines of the way things should be (Inayatullah, 2008).

- Employees become brand ambassadors
- 4 day work week for retail employees
- Minimum wage increase for retail
- Unions getting stronger in retail
- Job vacancies higher in retail

STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS

(underlying causes)

Deeper systemic causes of the issue that can be social, economic, technical, cultural or political (Inayatullah, 2008).

- Rise in store fronts for retail
- Pandemic measures
- Increased employment opportunities in other areas
- Supply chain problems put on frontline employees
- Increased awareness of labour expectation
- Cost of living is increasing
- Government bringing retailers to justice
- Overburdened retail employees/retailers expect too much
- Stronger regulations for accountability

WORLDVIEWS AND VALUES

(paradigms)

This is the big picture, the paradigm that defines the problem and informs how we understand it (Inayatullah, 2008).

- Humans want humans
- Working in retail not worth it (wage v.s respect)
- Automation will free up employees for less monotonous tasks
- Considered essential workers during pandemic
- Mental health is important

DEEP MYTH

(metaphors)

This is the deepest level of causes that are driving the issue. These causes are firmly rooted and believed, and often unconscious (Inayatullah, 2008).

**Retail job
is not just
a job**

Section 5:

Future Landscape

In this section

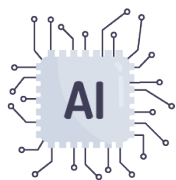
The Future of the Retail Sector: IDENTIFYING TRENDS

The Future Role of Frontline Employees: FORESIGHT SCENARIOS

The Future of the Retail Sector

HORIZON SCAN

The trends in this section were developed using signals collected during our horizon scanning exercise. The horizon scan involved sifting through news articles, journals, and media pieces across the internet, searching for shifts in the retail sector. While a few signals are pulled from international sources, the majority are from the United States and Canada and are selected to reflect the Canadian context. Looking at technology as a key driver of change in the sector, many trends include an element of technology. Trends explored in this section include:



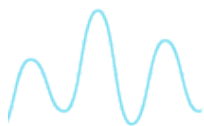
Driver of Change

- In-store AI Assists Seamless Shopping and Stocking
- Indoor Positioning Systems (IPS) Guide and Target
- Augmented Reality Aids Consumers and Employees
- AI and Biometrics Provides Personalized Experiences
- Robots Replacing Human Hands
- Supply-chain Management is Streamlined with AI



Additional Existing Trends

- The Great Resignation
- Micro-fulfillment Centres
- Experience Economy
- Omnichannel Experiences



Emerging Trends

- Cyber-attack on Titans: Retailers struggle to keep data secure
- Bargain Boom: Discount stores serve savvy shoppers
- Better Together: Employees find support in unions
- Play to Pay: Interactive personalized experiences provide amusement
- Automated Environment: Increased technology is a double-edged sword for sustainability
- Engagement Done Differently: Fun and flexibility for frontline roles
- Social Supports: Making room for mental health

Section 5: Future Landscape

Driver of Change

Today, technology and automation are increasingly integrated into everyday life. The pandemic forced many to adopt and embrace technology at a faster pace than ever before. As described by economist Daniel Susskind, in a 2020 *TIME* article, "This pandemic has created a very strong incentive to automate the work of human beings" (Semuels, 2020). The recent introduction of generative AI has the world buzzing about the mass implications. Rapidly changing technology and automation is here to stay, and it's one of the major drivers of change in the retail sector. Not only transforming stores and shopping experiences but also the role of frontline retail employees. The existing trends below are a sample contributing to the driver.

In-store AI Assists Seamless Shopping and Stocking

In-store AI-powered automation has become a rapidly evolving tool for implementing seamless operations for the store and customers alike. Acting on the mental models of customer habits and store function, AI integration in many cases eliminates the need for human labour. For example, Amazon Go Grocery model stores powered by Just Walk Out uses a network of cameras and IoT sensors to recognize when a customer picks an item and automatically charges their credit card. Inventory management powered by AI, has the potential to use machine learning algorithms to assist manual auditing. (Shortwell, 2023).

Indoor Positioning Systems (IPS) Guide and Target

IPS systems require integrated hardware throughout the store, but once set up, shoppers can easily navigate and find items using an app on their phones. Besides making the shopping experience easier, the store collects data about shopping patterns to support targeted suggestions, tracking customer traffic, and item tracking. (Shortwell, 2023).

Augmented Reality Aids Consumers and Employees

AI-powered augmented reality (AR) tools empower shoppers with customization options and product awareness and offer assistance to store employees. AI-powered virtual try-on technology allows shoppers to see how they look in different products. AR rendering can show the worker which parts of the shelf do not align with the planogram. AR navigation can help shoppers find the items that they need in store just by following directions on their phones and can help employees navigate when paired with their AR core-capable device. (Shortwell, 2023).

AI and Biometrics Provides Personalized Experiences

Technologies like biometrics and face recognition can identify customers revisiting a store and remember their likes and dislikes. Paired with advanced AI algorithms identifying demographic data, social media impressions, and digital footprints, retailers can decode their customer's interests and offer a personalized experience. (Mani, 2020)

Section 5: Future Landscape

Driver of Change (continued)

Robots Replacing Human Hands

A radical step towards automation—robot workers are not just doing mundane human tasks but are doing them more efficiently. Using AI technologies and integrating with cloud software, they assist human employees by streamlining in-store operations—providing customer service and supporting autonomous delivery and inventory management. In 2023, at Mark's apparel store outside Vancouver, a Sanctuary AI robot successfully performed assorted retail tasks that would normally be done by human workers. (Shortwell, 2023), (Claburn, 2023).

Supply-chain Management is Streamlined with AI

All aspects of the retail supply chain, including inventory, staffing, distribution and delivery can now be managed in real time using AI-enabled logistics management tools. These tools can predict demands for products using data from historical sales, location, and buying trends. New AI-powered drones can reach difficult corners in warehouses and automatically update a central database with available inventory. (Mani, 2020).

Additional Existing Trends

Other existing trends contributing to change in the retail sector include:

The Great Resignation

More than 20 million people have left their jobs and frontline workers now have better alternatives. (Forecasting the Future of Stores, 2022).

Micro-fulfillment Centres

Smaller facilities located closer to residential areas take advantage of falling commercial real estate prices and offer convenience for consumers. (Martins, 2023).

Experience Economy

Companies are using in-person experiences to connect with customers, even when sales are not involved, for example, Lululemon offers free in-store yoga classes. (Brown, 2022).

Omnichannel Experiences

Seamless experiences across digital and physical retail stores allow customers to buy online and pick up in-store. Best Buy's omnichannel experience lets customers shopping online locate items at another store and have them shipped to a selected 'My Store' (Kathi, 2022).

Temporary Pop-up Shop

Temporary stores are established, mainly by online-only retailers, direct-to-consumer marketers, and other retailers, to sell seasonal products. These stores, unlike year-round showrooms and guide shops, are closed once their purpose is fulfilled. (Shankar, V., et.al., 2021).

Section 5: Future Landscape



Emerging Trends

By scanning for signals, we have identified emerging trends relevant to the retail sector. Each trend includes a brief description highlighting key points derived from the signals listed just below. To ensure a well-rounded search we used the STEEPV categories. The appropriate category is posted under each trend to provide a quick reference of the main themes. Implications are derived from the sensemaking of the trend along with knowledge gained in our background research and considered through the lens of EDI and the impact on frontline retail employees. Waging each trend against the criteria for successful EDI implementation developed in Section 3, we propose the potential for EDI on a scale of low, low-med, medium, med-high, and high.

Section 5: Future Landscape

CYBER-ATTACK ON TITANS: Retailers struggle to keep data secure

Categories

TECHNOLOGY & ECONOMY

Potential Opportunity for EDI



Data breaches and cyber-attacks have increasingly become problematic in Canada. A new report from Mastercard (Amanat, 2023) shows that the average data breach costs Canadian businesses \$5.64 million, and only 39 per cent of businesses are implementing adequate cybersecurity tools. With the rise of the Internet of Things (IoT) connecting devices and the thirst for omnichannel experiences by customers increasing the exchange of data, companies and consumers alike are at risk. To make matters worse, retailers experiencing data breaches often keep silent, putting their customers and business at further risk. Although there is an attempt to support retailers to mitigate risk levels, more oversight may be needed to enforce safeguards against these data breaches.

Signals:

- Indigo bookstore in Canada gets attacked by [ransomware that stole employee data](#), employee union concerned.¹
- [Sobeys admits to data breach](#) in fall 2022, alerts customers.²
- Top Canadian liquor retailer, [LCBO confirms success of cyber breach](#).³
- [Cyber-attacks hit Canadian retailers hard](#), causing unprecedented damage.⁴
- Retail Council Canada is assisting retailers in building processes and infrastructures that [protect their organizations and customers](#).⁵

Implications:

- With enough customer awareness, customers may be hesitant to disclose personal details to retailers.
- Retail employee unions would come to the forefront of safeguarding their information.
- Close ties between retailers and financial technology companies will be severed and retailers would demand a more integrated systems for payment as opposed to multiple software that integrate to form one point of sales (PoS) system.
- Employees in the retail stores would be trained to prevent and identify early signs of data breaches.

Section 5: Future Landscape

BARGAIN BOOM: Discount stores serve savvy shoppers

Categories

ECONOMY

Potential Opportunity for EDI



In the face of an economic recession, discount stores have emerged as champions in retail. With the rising cost of food and other consumer staples, savvy shoppers are looking to cheaper discount stores. To maintain their customer base, mid-high-level retailers are incorporating discount stores as a part of their bigger chains. Additionally, there is a resurgence of independent smaller discount stores across Canada.

Signals:

- Formerly shut down retail- Zellers by The Bay Co., [relaunches 12 stores across Canada](#)⁶
- [Dollarama sales skyrocket](#) allowing to open 70 new stores across Canada⁷
- Discount stores such as Costco and Walmart are among the [most respected Canadian stores](#)⁸
- Food inflation on rise by the [big grocery retailer Loblaws](#)⁹
- Mall-based store Macy's is changing their strategy to move out and [open independent stores](#)¹⁰

Implications:

- Although consumers might be buying more in discount stores, Canada's retail sales will still be on the rise due to mass sales.
- Canadian retailers might suffer losses but not as much as American owned retailers.
- Local and no-name brands will rise in popularity.
- Technology will become integral to discounting supply chain processes.
- Mass buying will accelerate the use of shelf and inventory management technology.
- Circulation and sales of low-quality products in the retail
- Larger stores may not allocate resources however the smaller stores present more potential for EDI.

Section 5: Future Landscape

BETTER TOGETHER: Employees find support in unions

Categories

SOCIETY & VALUES

Potential Opportunity for EDI



Post-pandemic retail employees have realized the importance of employee rights, better pay and benefits. In 2022, Starbucks Union started aggressively advocating for better pay and benefits and has caught on to inspire a chain reaction among other retail unions. Previously retail employee unions have been hesitant to voice employee concerns due to inconsistent company unionization. With the government holding more retailers accountable for malpractices, unions have found the courage to speak up for employees. Overall, there seems to be a revolutionary wave of compassion and a sense of justice for retail employees, demanding dignity and pride in their jobs despite financial distress.

Signals:

- Post Indigo bookstore ransomware attack, [union is increasingly alarmed](#) and is demanding disclosure.¹¹
- Canadian unions on a mission [to hold big retails accountable](#) for their actions.¹²
- [Unions finally having the courage](#) to join labor movement since Starbucks, especially in service industry.¹³
- [Loblaws under scrutiny by government](#) to testify over food price gouging.¹⁴
- [Canadian cannabis workers finally joining unions](#) for better pay and health/safety concerns.¹⁵
- [Canadian retailers should create unionized middle-class retail jobs](#) to protect themselves against competitors and empower employees.¹⁶
- [Federal minimum wage increased](#) in Canada¹⁷

Implications:

- Retail employees would be more empowered to take up retail jobs as full-time.
- Better work conditions for employees would mean less stress about meeting basic needs.
- Political organizations supporting employee unions for gaining new vote banks.
- Retail industry holding back from malpractices and treat employees more fairly.
- Consumer attitudes changing towards retailers that don't adhere to union concerns.
- As the basic needs of employees are met, they can have better voice in the store and therefore can think out-of-the-box.

Section 5: Future Landscape

PLAY TO PAY: Interactive personalized experiences provide amusement

Categories

TECHNOLOGY & ECONOMY

Potential Opportunity for EDI



Retailers are looking at shoppers of the future. 53% of Canadian retailers (Grocery Business, 2022) are creating entirely separate marketing approaches to target Generation Z. This is indicative of the adoption of trends such as AI, AR, and VR in retail with a focus on streamlining processes and alleviating pain points. However, brick-and-mortar stores are trying hard to compete with online shopping, providing unique interactive shopping experiences. They allow shoppers to interact with products in an exciting, gamified manner, driving sales through meaningful personalized shopping experiences. The focus is on adding to the experience economy of the retail sector with a twist of playful technology.

Signals:

- [Interactive technologies in retail stores across the world](#) is gaining traction and serving the customer with a unique personalized shopping experience.¹⁸
- [Varied usage of interactive experiences](#) enriching customer experience- interactive shop windows, transparent touchscreen displays, RFID tagged smart products, etc.¹⁹
- [Concepts of smart mirror and virtual shelves](#) that connect with online preferences of each shopper.²⁰
- [Using 3D technologies](#) to enable cheaper alternative for product showcase in the store.²¹
- [Tech companies are teaming up with retail](#) to launch gamified experiences in-store.²²

Implications:

- The interactive technologies are bound to ultimately become experts at product suggestion. This might take over “the human touch” of answering the question “How does this look?”
- The cost of such innovative interactions can sometimes be high, so the adoption of this will be limited to larger retailers or luxury market.
- Retailers work with game developers to device new ways to reach consumers.
- Employees will have to work together with technology. If implemented properly, employees might get inspired to suggest more technological/playful solutions for customer engagement.

Section 5: Future Landscape

AUTOMATED ENVIRONMENT: A double-edged sword for sustainability

Categories

TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

Potential Opportunity for EDI



Automation and robotics have the potential to improve environmental sustainability by streamlining processes, clearly monitoring waste, reducing supplies required, and cutting down on emissions produced from travel. Yet these same technologies also risk negatively impacting the environment through increased energy consumption and resource depletion. With both positive and negative factors at play, integration of these technologies will require increased scrutiny and oversight to ensure they are truly creating a sustainable and positive environmental impact.

Signals:

- Retail automation technologies such as RFID and IoT sensors can [help retailers monitor their supply chains and reduce waste](#) by optimizing inventory management.²³
- [Automation is a double-edged sword](#) potentially offering environmental improvements while increased energy and resource use impact ecosystems.²⁴
- [Robotics could have negative implications](#) including excessive energy consumptions, accelerated depletion of resources, and inequality-driven environmental hazards.²⁵
- [Automation can help businesses become more enviro-friendly](#) by reducing paper and supplies and streamlining shipping processes to reduce emissions.²⁶
- [Automation matters less than vehicle type](#), whether a robot or a person delivers your package, the carbon footprint would essentially be the same.²⁷
- [Artificial intelligence reduces the environmental strain](#) caused by travelling to physical stores and minimizes waste materials sent to landfills.²⁸

Implications:

- Automation and robots may be prematurely integrated in the retail sector to be more sustainable without having full awareness and metrics on the true impact.
- Using sustainability as a scapegoat, retail companies might site environmental improvements as a reason for employee layoffs.
- While there's less human involvement, the increased need for human oversight of technology allows for insight-driven employee engagement.

Section 5: Future Landscape

ENGAGEMENT DONE DIFFERENTLY: Fun and flexibility for frontline roles

Categories

SOCIETY & TECHNOLOGY

Potential Opportunity for EDI



With labour shortage across the world, especially in the retail sector, employee engagement is finally taking the front seat in driving retail operations. Retailers are trying everything to retain employees—from making the employees feel closer to the brand by gamifying their sales, to deploying workforce technology that gives employees flexible work schedules. There is a shift to acknowledge employees as assets and provide them with autonomy to prioritize their time to experiment with different types of work in the retail space.

Signals:

- [Independent retailers value employee engagement](#) as a unique competitive advantage.²⁹
- [Providing a great employee experience and well-being](#) has moved up as a priority for HR department from 2021-22.³⁰
- One US food supermarket is [fine-tuning flexible scheduling and freeing up time](#) for frontline employees.³¹
- [Tech leaders are advocating for work tech support](#) for frontline workers to bring flexibility.³²
- Businesses are finding the [best ways to integrate workforce technology](#) among frontline workers for employee engagement.³³
- [Radiant is increasing employee engagement](#) by gamifying the product introduction and sales experience.³⁴

Implications:

- Frontline retail jobs would finally be given fair treatment. It will require massive leadership support and change in mindsets.
- More employees might consider retail as a career and chart a career path.
- There's the risk for employee engagement to be primarily catered to Gen Z, omitting older employees.
- Workforce technology can be a double-edged sword, improving work schedules but increasing the burden for employees to keep up with and track assigned tasks.
- Employees are given flexibility and time to work at a realistic pace, fostering creative ideas.

Section 5: Future Landscape

SOCIAL SUPPORTS: Making room for mental health

Categories

SOCIETY & VALUES

Potential Opportunity for EDI



The importance of mental health came more into focus during the pandemic. Exacerbated by an increased sensitivity to stress and the pressures placed on staff by the pandemic, many frontline retail employees are seeking greener pastures. Experts advise retailers to focus on the mental well-being of workers and suggest providing stable schedules, safer working conditions, and benefits like paid sick leave and vacation time. There's a shift toward the importance of social supports and social interactions. This extends to the retail customers, with some stores adding slow lanes to allow time for meaningful staff-shopper experiences.

Signals:

- Mental health impacts caused by the pandemic [may be addressed with an uptake in social supports](#).³⁵
- Some say retailers should be focusing more on [stable schedules, safer working conditions and benefits like paid sick leave and vacation time](#).³⁶
- A new [Mental Health Guidebook](#) proposes strategies to retailers to improve psychological health and safety at work.³⁷
- [Retailers introduce a slow lane](#) to address the need for social interaction.³⁸

Implications:

- Retailers may divert more resources to mental and well-being strategies in an effort to retain talent.
- Companies may consider creating and advertising more social interaction opportunities within their stores as a way to meet the well-being needs of current customers and attract new ones.
- A refocus on people means that retailers are more inclined to actively involve employees in informing and co-creating mental health initiatives and in-store interactions.

The Future Role of Frontline Employees

FORESIGHT SCENARIOS

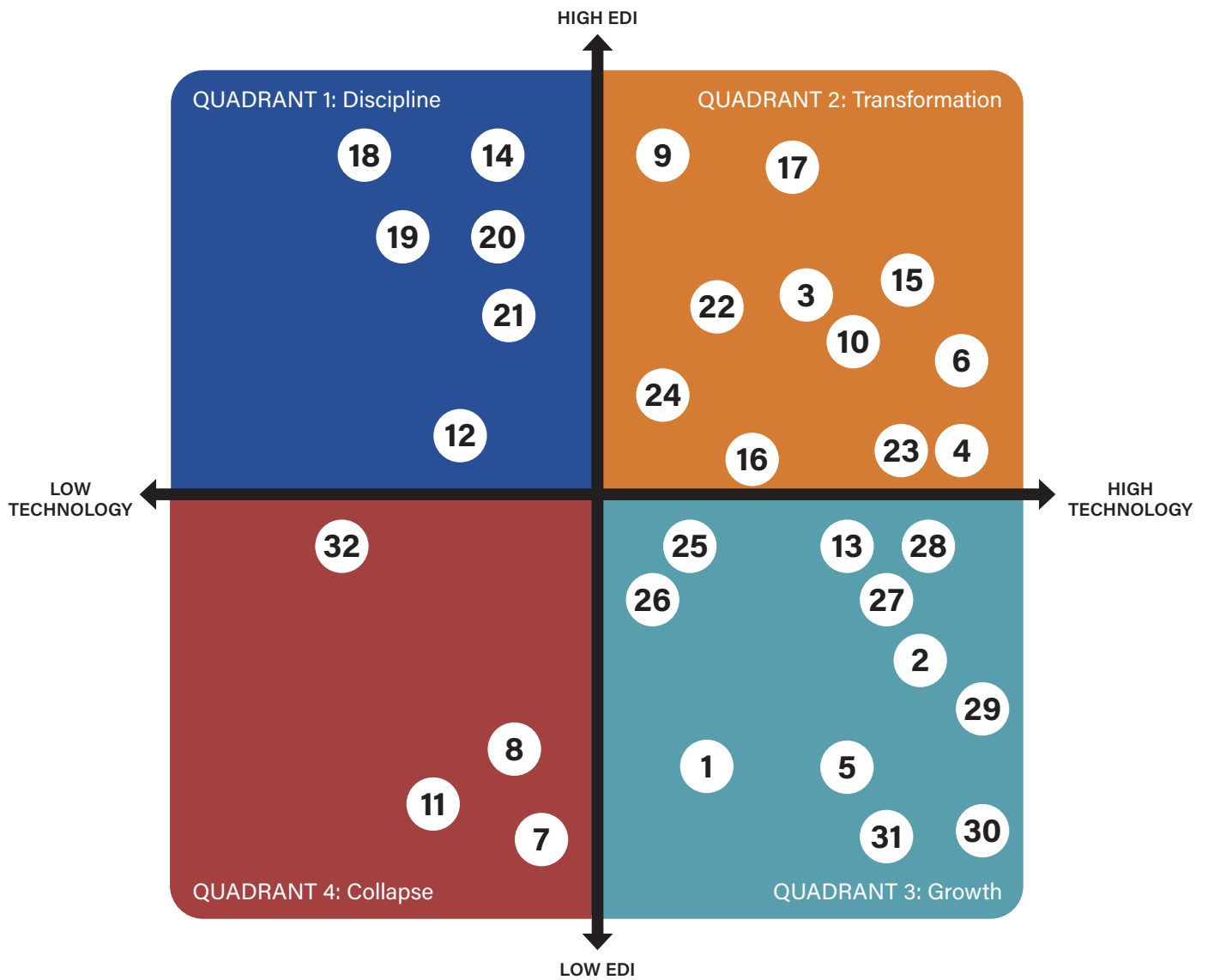
To gain a clearer picture of what the future might look like for frontline retail employees, we applied a 2x2 foresight method combined with Dator's Four Futures to develop four unique possible future scenarios in the year 2033. Using an axis of low-to-high EDI Implementation and low-to-high technology integration we first mapped the trends and interview feedback in the quadrants. The Dator's Four Futures categories: discipline, transformation, growth, and collapse are overlaid on the quadrants to help define and differentiate the world. With our research now mapped, we referred to the criteria for successful EDI implementation and successful technology integration, presented in Section 3, to consider how EDI and technology might appear in each future scenario. Combining our understanding of the retail sector established in our research with the trends and interview data we developed a fictitious but plausible description summarizing the distinguishing features present in that possible future scenario. Aligning with our original focus and research question, we specifically outline how the role of frontline retail employees may look in 2033.

Figure 7: 2x2 Matrix Legend

Driver of Change Trends	13. Bargain Boom: Discount stores serve savvy shoppers	22. Digitization will increase and less staff will be needed
1. In-store AI Assists Seamless Shopping and Stocking	14. Better Together: Employees find support in unions	23. Individualization and customization will be important
2. Indoor Positioning Systems (IPS) Guide and Target	15. Play to Pay: Interactive personalized experiences provide amusement	24. Technology will be at the front but there will still be a place for frontline employees
3. Augmented Reality Aids Consumers and Store Employees	16. Automated Environment: Increased technology is a double-edged sword for sustainability	25. Store staff are primarily managerial level
4. AI and Biometrics Provides Personalized Experiences	17. Engagement Done Differently: Fun and flexibility for frontline roles	26. Through technology integration, will only need one employee to do the work of many
5. Robots Replacing Human Hands	18. Social Supports: Making room for mental health	27. Labour focused in backroom duties as opposed to customer facing
6. Supply-chain Management is Streamlined with AI		28. Scan and go will be industry standard
Additional Existing Trends	Interview Feedback About the Future	29. Customers will be able to help themselves
7. The Great Resignation	19. Retailers will look to maximize efforts from labour forces	30. We may not need humans at all
8. Micro-fulfillment Centres	20. There will be an economic sweep to assess needs	31. Cashier role will become more technology and operations based
9. Experience Economy	21. Employees will remain part of the community	32. Smaller boutique stores will become popular with a small amount of stock that can be ordered online
10. Omnichannel Experiences		
11. Temporary Pop-up Shop		
Emerging Trends		
12. Cyber-attack on Titans: Retailers struggle to keep data secure		

Section 5: Future Landscape

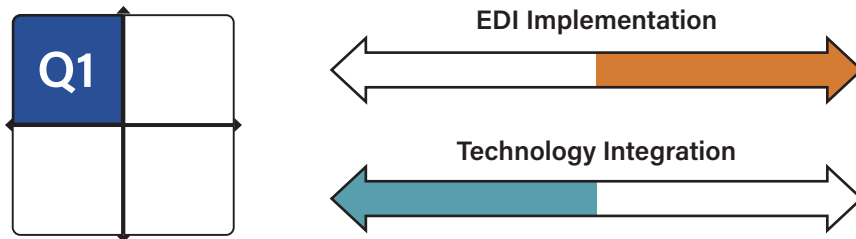
Figure 8: 2x2 Matrix



Section 5: Future Landscape

Scenario 1: DISCIPLINE

Technology Can't Hold Me Down



As a backlash to the risks of generative AI and in light of increased cyber-attacks, there is less trust in technology and a call for more governance in the deployment of technology in retail. Burdened with an increased cost of conforming to stricter regulations, along with wage and benefit increases imposed by stronger employee unions, many retailers have cut back on new technology integration efforts. This is only exacerbated by the increased cost of proprietary technologies, resulting in stores keeping outdated or failing technology systems in place to the detriment of frontline workers who must interact with and support these systems. Luckily, there's an increased focus on mental health and additional supports are made available through the union agreements to alleviate stress on employees. Faced with technological challenges, employees turn to each other to help devise ways to work with and around failing automation.

Implications for EDI Implementation

To envision EDI in this scenario, we applied the criteria for successful EDI implementation and considered the following questions:

1. What might retail look like in a situation of **medium to high EDI** implementation?
2. How might the successful implementation of EDI be helped or hindered?
 - Employees will have their own purpose for working.
 - There will be high rewards for innovation and the leaders will be open to hearing new ideas. This, however, might increase competition among employees.
 - Retailers create small squads for innovation fostering collaborative efforts. Employees also engage consumers in the innovation process.
 - Mental health and wellness are important and retailers have guides in place to prevent burnout.

Section 5: Future Landscape

Scenario 1: DISCIPLINE (continued)

Implications for Technology Integration

To envision technology in this scenario, we applied the criteria for successful technology integration and considered the following questions:

1. What might retail look like in a situation of **low to medium technology** integration?
2. How might successful technology integration be helped or hindered?
 - Higher costs of proprietary systems and regulations mean retailers must closely monitor spending on new technology.
 - There's a focus on people as much as technology. The people-first approach focuses on personalized experiences.
 - Scaling is cumbersome for retailers, so many continue to use outdated or failing systems.
 - There's a greater push for employees to design and implement technology, as more proprietary tech includes more robust R&D.

Implications for Frontline Employees

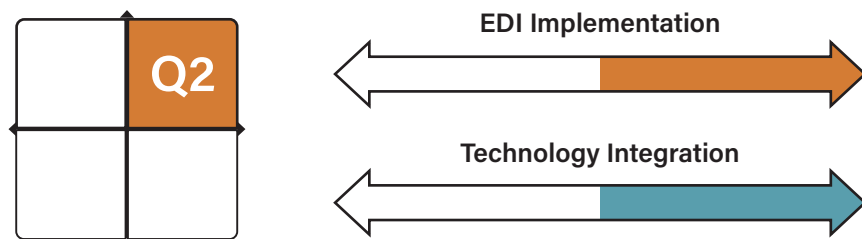
To envision the role of frontline retail employees in this scenario, we considered the following questions:

1. What might the role of frontline retail employees look like in a future where restraints have been imposed on the system, there's low to medium technology integration, and medium to high EDI implementation?
2. How might their opportunity for employee-driven innovation be helped or hindered?
 - Supports and benefits from unionization create job security.
 - Employees have more responsibility to ensure policies are adhered to.
 - Staff feel connected to their community and value helping customers.
 - Outdated technology is increasingly a problem for the staff.
 - There's an increased opportunity to collaborate with other employees to solve challenges presented by failing technology.
 - EDI implementation increases as employees often have to think on their feet to solve problems as a result of technology.
 - Unions protect those who are not good at their job, creating a negative work environment for others.

Section 5: Future Landscape

Scenario 2: TRANSFORMATION

Working Together, Hand in Hand



New technology is deployed strategically and in meaningful ways. Supply chains are streamlined through the support of robust technology, freeing up funds for retailers to focus on people-oriented innovation. With the continued growth of the experience economy and omnichannel experiences, human interactions are enriched by employee engagement by frontline employees. Having a heightened awareness of the negative environmental impact of the past, technology and automation is considered with sustainability in mind. AI, AR, and VR delight consumers and eliminate pain-points for both shoppers and staff by assisting with store navigation and stock management. Technology is viewed as a tool to aid and add to experience driven interactions creating opportunities for frontline employees to implement EDI along with technology to co-create better ways of doing.

Implications for EDI Implementation

To envision EDI in this scenario, we applied the criteria for successful EDI implementation and considered the following questions:

1. What might retail look like in a situation of **medium to high EDI** implementation?
2. How might the successful implementation of EDI be helped or hindered?
 - With employee engagement done right, employees feel aligned with the company's goals and purpose. They become brand ambassadors as their values reflect those of the company and have more agency and autonomy to voice their ideas.
 - Retailers value and reward employee ideas, in turn motivating engagement. With leadership supporting EDI channels for creating a seamless personalized experience for the customer through clienteling.
 - Collaboration is high as communication channels and idea sharing is supported by leadership and automated systems.
 - Employees are sufficiently trained on technology through ongoing efforts.

Section 5: Future Landscape

Scenario 2: TRANSFORMATION (continued)

Implications for Technology Integration

To envision technology in this scenario, we applied the criteria for successful technology integration and considered the following questions:

1. What might retail look like in a situation of **medium to high technology** integration?
2. How might successful technology integration be helped or hindered?
 - Technology will be a strategic priority, but it is balanced with the understanding that humans are still needed for experience-driven services.
 - Societal shifts support the value of retail employees.
 - For stock and item management, the operations have high scalability. But for personalized experiences, scalability depends on the audience demographic and store capacities to withhold scalable technology.
 - There's integration and involvement of frontline employees for innovation. With frontline innovation squads co-creating with the headquarters' innovation team.

Implications for Frontline Employees

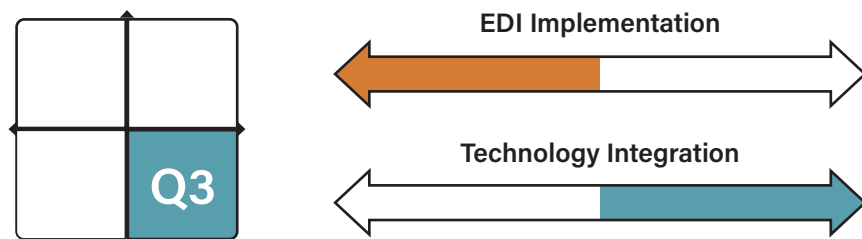
To envision the role of frontline retail employees in this scenario, we considered the following questions:

1. What might the role of frontline retail employees look like in a future where new ways of doing are embraced, there's medium to high technology integration, and medium to high EDI implementation?
2. How might their opportunity for employee-driven innovation be helped or hindered?
 - Employees act as brand ambassadors. With deep alignment with company values they have the autonomy to be themselves.
 - With experience economy comes a focus on clienteling. Playing up the personalized human factor is part of the sales pitch.
 - Ongoing learning will be part of the job with training sessions for technology scheduled as core duties.
 - Supported by technology and training, employees are subject matter experts in their retail setting.

Section 5: Future Landscape

Scenario 3: GROWTH

Everything, Everywhere, All at Once



Rapid implementation of technology continues, with the goal of replacing human staff. In this highly consumeristic and data-driven world, the almighty dollar is king, and keeping operational costs low is a top priority. With the cost of basic goods steadily increasing, savvy shoppers value price over experience. Focusing on high productivity and operating with the fewest people is a necessity to survive in the competitive and reactive retail market. Customers act as their own sales associates with little need for in-store staff—using IPS to locate items and seamlessly checking out via scan and go.

Implications for EDI Implementation

To envision EDI in this scenario, we applied the criteria for successful EDI implementation and considered the following questions:

1. What might retail look like in a situation of **low to medium EDI** implementation?
2. How might the successful implementation of EDI be helped or hindered?
 - Employees know their roles very well and influence operations but there's a lack of a sense of purpose if not aligned with the company.
 - Leader support is low. If the employees are not able to keep up, they are let go.
 - With retailers placing high importance on working with technology, employees are isolated from human colleagues.
 - There is training given to the employees to handle automation however, safeguards protecting human rights and well-being are lacking.

Section 5: Future Landscape

Scenario 3: GROWTH (continued)

Implications for Technology Integration

To envision technology in this scenario, we applied the criteria for successful technology integration and considered the following questions:

1. What might retail look like in a situation of **medium to high technology** integration?
2. How might successful technology integration be helped or hindered?
 - With consumers expecting a high level of technological integration, retailers focus on speedy deployment to stay pace with competitors, more than long-term strategic planning.
 - There's a heavy focus on customers. However, there is less of a focus on employees.
 - Scalability of operating models with robots, AI assistants, AR, IPS may be difficult. With the elimination of human employees in the set-up, consumer's human factors will have to be carefully gauged for scalability success.
 - The inclusion of frontline employees is low, with more emphasis placed on technology as the expert.

Implications for Frontline Employees

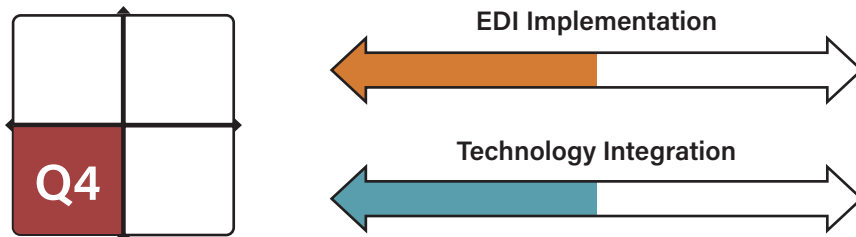
To envision the role of frontline retail employees in this scenario, we considered the following questions:

1. What might the role of frontline retail employees look like in a future where the system has continued on the current trajectory, there's medium to high technology integration, and low to medium EDI implementation?
2. How might their opportunity for employee-driven innovation be helped or hindered?
 - Frontline employees assist robots to perform daily tasks.
 - Integrated technology caters to all aspects of a store's front and backend operations, requiring little human oversight.
 - Backdoor processing means there's no need for customer-facing interactions.
 - Fully automated systems leave little room for spontaneous insights to occur, reducing the potential for EDI in the role of frontline employees.

Section 5: Future Landscape

Scenario 4: COLLAPSE

Should I Stay or Should I Go Now



Beginning with the Great Resignation, the retail industry continues to lose frontline workers to the gig economy and other opportunities offering a better wage and work environment. The staff left are disheartened from dealing with technological failures that remain unresolved by retailers preoccupied with stifled funds. Both staff and shoppers are annoyed by the practices of the major retailers sending some consumers looking to smaller boutique stores. These boutique and pop-up style shops offer an in-person opportunity to experience a sampling of goods which can then be ordered online and delivered to their home or picked up in-store or at local fulfillment centres. Customer service can vary greatly in these smaller shops, and employee engagement and EDI opportunities are often dependent on the will of the manager.

Implications for EDI Implementation

To envision EDI in this scenario, we applied the criteria for successful EDI implementation and considered the following questions:

1. What might retail look like in a situation of **low to medium EDI** implementation?
2. How might the successful implementation of EDI be helped or hindered?
 - Employees are somewhat siloed in their locations. EDI opportunities are often location dependent.
 - EDI is not consistent across stores and is dependent on the managers interest and ability to involve staff.
 - Smaller pop-up shops suffer from rapid turnover, so collaboration becomes difficult.
 - Since each small location faces unique challenges there is an understanding that employees may need to make decisions on the fly, however they may not be involved directly in innovation efforts.

Section 5: Future Landscape

Scenario 3: GROWTH (continued)

Implications for Technology Integration

To envision technology in this scenario, we applied the criteria for successful technology integration and considered the following questions:

1. What might retail look like in a situation of low to medium technology integration?
2. How might successful technology integration be helped or hindered?
 - Automation is not a strategic priority. In fact, it's not a priority at all.
 - There's a focus on people as boutique stores are in-person-driven.
 - Scaling technology is less of a focus, as smaller pop-ups are supported by streamlined repeatable processes.
 - Frontline employees are included in the process of implementing new tech but more so in the boutique settings than the fulfillment centres.

Implications for Frontline Employees

To envision the role of frontline retail employees in this scenario, we considered the following questions:

1. What might the role of frontline retail employees look like in a future where the system has begun to break down, there's low to medium technology integration, and low to medium EDI implementation?
2. How might their opportunity for employee-driven innovation be helped or hindered?
 - With less staff and failing technology, employees are spread thin and may find it difficult to provide a high-level of customer service.
 - While staff find themselves improvising to problem-solve issues arising from outdated technological infrastructure, there is little time for intentional EDI implementation.
 - Employees working at smaller pop-ups and boutique shops find more support in their role but it's dependent on the localized management style.

Section 5: Future Landscape

SUMMARY OF SCENARIOS

The scenarios introduced above are an amalgamation of the trends and the responses gathered throughout our research. Building these scenarios is significant in examining futures of retail that are plausible in the coming years. The focus of this exercise was to assess both positive and negative impacts of the scenarios and to navigate potential risks and opportunities for frontline retail employees. It also enabled us to highlight the most desirable future for retailers as well as frontline employees. In this regard, we observed the transformation scenario—Working Together, Hand in Hand—as an optimum future that integrates technology and supports employees in a meaningful way, thus paving the path for high innovation.

In summary, the role of frontline employees might change from being highly independent but burdened in scenario 1, to being well supported with technology in scenario 2. From facing identity crisis with technology's reign in scenario 3, to surviving with little rewards for their creative problem-solving in scenario 4. Examining the possible implications of these scenarios added important context to the conversation, sparking further discussion on how to engage employees for a better future.



Section 6:

Discussion

In this section

Reflections

Recommendations

Section 6: Discussion

Reflections

As we heard in our interviews, in many cases people still want and need human interactions in the retail space. Thus, it's fair to reason that if supported in a meaningful way by well-informed automation practices and governed by employee-oriented oversight there is the potential for frontline retail roles to be reframed and resilient. Scenario 2, reflects this ideal, envisioning a future where technology and frontline employees are at harmony.

Referring to the criteria for successful EDI integration established in Section 3, it seems that many retailers currently don't meet the requirements. Distracted by the promise of technology to automate and driven by the desire to stay relevant and competitive, they may be leaping before they look. Scenario 3, outlines a future where technology is the main focus. Scenario 1 and 4 also demonstrated some of the risks of rapid deployment of technology or what can happen if technology isn't adequately maintained. If retailers can shift some resources to fulfilling the EDI criteria, we believe that technology can still be integrated but that it can be done in a more holistic way. By providing frontline employees with the autonomy to use communication channels to share real-time feedback about new technology and store issues, and then by motivating them through making clear improvements, retailers can cocreate better processes for the benefit of all.

As discussed, technological solutions don't address everyone's unique needs. The elderly or disabled may be overlooked by technology, and some may struggle in silence when trying to adapt to new automation systems not built with them in mind. Also, for some

folks, the interactions experienced while shopping in real life create a sense of community, offering an opportunity for them to interact with other people and may contribute to positive well-being. In addition, many retail employees don't regard their roles as flippant stopovers on the way to a "real job" but rather see themselves as providing an important service. Unfortunately, retailers and customers don't always value their efforts. A societal and sector shift in values is needed. By considering flourishing business models rather than just growth models we believe the sector can create change. Consumers and employees also have a role to play. As seen in the backlash Loblaws received for high-food prices and the expansion of unions in retail, we have a voice, we just need to use it.

One of the four criteria for the successful integration of technology discussed in Section 3 is to focus on people as much as technology. While automation and scalability are next on the list, we believe that all are possible simultaneously. By including frontline employees in the conversations and strategies, retailers can achieve faster more stable results. Gaining more reassurance that new technology will not just work how it's meant to but also that staff will buy into automation and become ambassadors for adoption.

In our desired vision of the future, EDI, technology, and retail employees culminate in a circular reinforcing system, but as explained in the socio-technical system, this is only possible if human factors and community are also considered and prioritized.

Recommendations

As aptly put in Roger Martin's, *The Design of Business*, "A business that is overweighted toward reliability will erect organizational structures, processes, and norms that drive out the pursuit of valid answers to new questions" (Martin, 2009). While it is reasonable for retailers to focus efforts on technology integration and automation to streamline processes and stay current, we position that it would be short-sighted to not also focus on the human element in the equation—primarily frontline employees. As demonstrated in the scenarios, a future that combines higher levels of technology integration with higher levels of engaged human involvement offers the opportunity for meaningful employee insights. It stands to reason those companies that embrace this path will maintain a competitive advantage over their competition. We hope this report will inspire you and your organization to actively consider the frontline employee in the development of future processes and procedures. To that end, we offer a few ideas and pose questions for further discussion to assist in this work.

Potential Ideas

- Reward meaningful suggestions from employees about technology, automation, and process improvements.
- Build time into the integration process of new technology to beta test with employees and create organic feedback channels to obtain human-centric data.
- Apply an employee-first approach to technology integration. Consider how to upskill internal employees.
- Lead by example. Train store managers on how to support EDI by creating an ongoing open dialogue about ideas and providing wiggle room for staff to initiate change.

Questions for Conversation

Address supports

- How does your organization currently support EDI at the frontline employee level?
- How could it better support insights from frontline employees?

Address biases

- Do you believe that frontline employees have valuable ideas and insights unique to their role and experience?
- Do you believe that these insights can create innovation within your business?
- What would be needed to allow for more frontline voices to inform organization-wide change?

Address culture

- Does your organization value frontline employees?
- How do the decision-makers in your organization connect with frontline employees?
- What would need to change in the store to the corporate level to flatten unhealthy hierarchies?



Section 7:

Conclusion

When we set out on this project, our aim was to build a better understanding of how frontline retail employees are affected by the changing retail landscape and how this might impact EDI. As we quickly uncovered, it's almost impossible to explore this topic without also considering technology integration, as it is woven into almost every facet of the retail sector today. At the time of this study (2023), we had recently experienced the rapid deployment and uptake of technology spurred on by the pandemic. We were also experiencing the fear and excitement surrounding generative AI and all that it may mean for humanity. In that context, we find it is paramount to maintain a focus on the frontline employee. Those people who help us deal with that handy but at times unreliable self-check-out or the friendly-faced folks who remind us how to small talk after a day of working from home. Rather than pursuing a way forward focused on how to eliminate the need for this workforce, we hope our work will inspire others to consider the role these people will play in the future of retail.

Section 7: Conclusion

To support future research, it's important to recognize the limitations of our study. While we had a good cross-section of respondents for our interviews, we were only able to conduct six interviews. A larger interview pool would provide more extensive data to support the conclusions presented and may offer additional insights. We had originally intended to do a workshop with approximately 20 frontline retail employees. This future workshop would employ foresight tools to help participants envision and build out future scenarios. The firsthand experiential data would be beneficial in better understanding how today's workers envision their roles of tomorrow. While we actively recruited participants for a workshop—canvassing the mall, putting up posters, and posting on message boards—ultimately, we were unsuccessful in obtaining interest. In fact, interview participants were also difficult to pin down. Since many of the folks doing frontline retail work are making minimum wage and juggling busy family, school, or second job schedules, we predict that payment for their participation would be required to incentivize enough people to take part.

As we discovered in our background research there's very little existing literature on the intersection of employee-driven innovation and technology implementation and its impact on the role of frontline retail employees. While there is research in EDI and socio-technical ecosystems, we feel its place in the retail sector is ripe for further investigation. We have demonstrated in our research that the role of frontline retail employees

is being heavily shaped by technology integration. We have also discussed how this may affect the potential for EDI by these employees and presented possible future scenarios to aid in planning and risk management. Lastly, we have shown the importance of the frontline employee in the retail system and demonstrated that full replacement by technology may not be the best goal to pursue.

We hope our work inspires others to consider further study into the future for frontline retail roles. We urge future researchers to take a human-centric approach and actively involve frontline staff as collaborators. We maintain that as the people interacting with and experiencing the processes, technology, and problems that arise, they have valuable first-hand knowledge that can inform a richer understanding of the gaps and opportunities in this evolving sector. Also, if engaged with empathy and respect, they can offer innovative ideas to build more robust retail settings not only today but also in the future.

Section 8:

References

Section 8: References

SECTION 1

Aasen, T. M., Amundsen, O., Gressgård, L. J., & Hansen, K. (2012). *Employee-driven innovation in practice - Promoting learning and collaborative innovation by tapping into diverse knowledge resources*. LifeLong Learning in Europe. 4.

retail. (2023). In *Merriam-Webster.com*. Retrieved April, 16, 2023, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/retail>

Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. (2022, December 2). *The Daily — Labour Force Survey, November 2022*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221202/dq221202a-eng.htm>

Statista. (2023, January 9). *Number of employees of the retail trade industry in Canada 2008-2022*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/454100/number-of-employees-of-the-retail-trade-industry-canada/#:~:text=There%20were%20approximately%202.26%20million,compared%20to%20the%20previous%20year.>

SECTION 2

Babel. (2022, November 8). Jim Dator's Four Futures. *Exploring Your Mind*. <https://exploringyourmind.com/jim-dators-four-futures/>

Jones, P., & Van Ael, K. (2021). *Design Journeys through Complex Systems: Practice Tools for Systemic Design*. BIS Publisher.

Mattin, D. (2020, June 15). The Four Futures framework can help you plan for what's next. *www.linkedin.com*. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/four-futures-framework-can-help-you-plan-whats-next-david-mattin/>

Rhydderch, A. (2017). Scenario Building: The 2x2 Matrix. *Futuribles*. Retrieved from <https://www.futuribles.com/scenario-building-the-2x2-matrix-technique-2/>

SECTION 3

Ainley, N. (2019, March 6). *Socio-technical systems theory*. <https://business.leeds.ac.uk/research-stc/doc/socio-technical-systems-theory#:~:text=Socio%2Dtechnical%20theory%20has%20at,parts%20of%20a%20complex%20system>

Baxter, G., & Sommerville, I. (2011). Socio-technical Systems: From design methods to systems engineering, *Interacting with computers*, 23(1), 4-17.

Bailey, J. (2019). How Southwest Pioneered The Low Cost Carrier Model. *Simple Flying*. <https://simpleflying.com/southwest-lcc-model/>

Section 8: References

- Beloof, K. (2022). *Can Automation Improve Employee Engagement?* Smartsheet. <https://www.smartsheet.com/content-center/best-practices/productivity/can-automation-improve-employee-engagement>
- Guusto. (2022). 7 Ways to Improve Employee Engagement in Retail. www.linkedin.com.
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/7-ways-improve-employee-engagement-retail-guusto-gifts-inc/>
- Hiltunen, E. & Laitinen, T. (2021). Barriers of Employee-driven Innovation in a Small Retail Store. *Sustainable Entrepreneurship: Innovation and Transformation*, 93-103. <https://erepo.uef.fi/handle/123456789/24999>
- Holmquist, M., & Johansson, A. (2019). Employee-Driven Innovation: An Intervention Using Action Research. *Technology Innovation Management Review*, 9(5), 44–53. <https://doi.org/10.22215/timreview/1240>
- Kesting, P., & Ulhøi, J.P. (2010). Employee-driven innovation: extending the license to foster innovation. *Management Decision*, 48 (1), 65–84. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00251741011014463>
- Kesting, P., Ulhøi, J. P., Song, L. J., & Niu, H. (2016). The impact of leadership styles on innovation - a review and a synthesis. *Journal of Innovation Management*, 3 (4), 22–41. <https://doi.org/10.24840/2183-0606~003.004~0004>
- Mckinsey & Company. (2020, August 25). *The imperatives for automation success*. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/operations/our-insights/the-imperatives-for-automation-success>
- Nijhof, A., Krabbendam, K., & Looise, J. (2002). Innovation through exemptions: building upon the existing creativity of employees. *Technovation*, 22 (11), 675–683. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0166-4972\(01\)00088-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0166-4972(01)00088-8)
- Pantano, E., & Vannucci, V. (2019). Who is innovating? An exploratory research of digital technologies diffusion in retail industry. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 49, 297–304. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.01.019>
- Reynolds, J., & Hristov, L. (2009). Are there barriers to innovation in retailing? *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 19(4), 317–330. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09593960903331295>
- Roy, S. K., B., Sadeque, S., Nguyen, B., & Melewar, T. (2017). Constituents and consequences of smart customer experience in retailing. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 124, 257–270. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2016.09.022>
- Smith, P., Ulhøi, J. P., & Kesting, P. (2012). Mapping key antecedents of employee-driven innovations. *International Journal of Human Resources Development and Management*, 12(3), 224. <https://doi.org/10.1504/ijhrdm.2012.048629>

Section 8: References

SECTION 5

- Brown, S. (2022, August 23). *4 visions for the future of retail* | MIT Sloan. MIT Sloan. <https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/4-visions-future-retail>
- Burns, T., & Harris, T. (2022, March 24). *Forecasting the future of stores*. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/forecasting-the-future-of-stores>
- Claburn, T. (2023, March 8). Humanoid robot takes a retail job, but not one any store clerk wants to do. *The Register*. <https://www.theregister.com/2023/03/08/humanoid-robot-marks-canada/>
- Kathi, E. (2022, November 29). 19 Omnichannel Experience Examples from Top Brands. *Elastic Path Software Inc.* <https://www.elasticpath.com/blog/19-omnichannel-experience-examples>
- Mani, C. (2020, August 21). Seven Ways Artificial Intelligence Is Disrupting The Retail Industry. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2020/08/21/seven-ways-artificial-intelligence-is-disrupting-the-retail-industry/?sh=476aad0356ae>
- Martins, A. (2023). The Future of Retail: Trends for 2023. *Business News Daily*. <https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/9836-future-of-retail.html>
- Samuels, A. (2020, August 6). Millions of Americans Have Lost Jobs in the Pandemic—And Robots and AI Are Replacing Them Faster Than Ever. *Time*. <https://time.com/5876604/machines-jobs-coronavirus/>
- Shankar, V., Kalyanam, K., Setia, P., Golmohammadi, A., Tirunillai, S., Douglass, T., Hennessey, J., Bull, J. S., & Waddoups, R. (2021). How Technology is Changing Retail. *Journal of Retailing*, 97(1), 13–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2020.10.006>
- Shotwell, L. (2023). 7 Retail Technology Innovations Reviving the Stores in 2023. *MobiDev*. <https://mobidev.biz/blog/7-technology-trends-to-change-retail-industry>

Trend 1

- Amanat, H. (2023, March 18). Data breaches cost Canadian businesses nearly \$6M on average: Mastercard data. *CTVNews*. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/sci-tech/data-breaches-cost-canadian-businesses-nearly-6m-on-average-mastercard-data-1.6318684>
1. Reynolds, C. (2023, February 24). Some Indigo employee data was stolen in ransomware attack, retailer now says. *CBC*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/indigo-employee-ransomware-1.6759590>
 2. Arif, H. (2023, February 20). Sobeys admits to data breach in fall 2022, alerts customers. *Atlantic*. <https://atlantic.ctvnews.ca/sobeys-admits-to-data-breach-in-fall-2022-alerts-customers-1.6280542>

Section 8: References

- Adriano, L. (2023). Top liquor retailer confirms success of cyber breach. *Insurance Business Canada*. <https://www.insurancebusinessmag.com/ca/news/cyber/top-liquor-retailer-confirms-success-of-cyber-breach-433072.aspx>
- Toneguzzi, M. (2023, February 26). Cyber Attacks Hit Canadian Retailers Hard, Causing Unprecedented Damage [Expert Interview/Report]. *Retail Insider*. <https://retail-insider.com/retail-insider/2023/02/cyber-attacks-hit-canadian-retailers-hard-causing-unprecedented-damage-expert-interview-report/>
- Marty. (2023, April 5). *RCC's Retail CyberSecure program - Retail Council of Canada*. Retail Council of Canada. <https://www.retailcouncil.org/retail-cybersecure-program-rcc/>

Trend 2

- Evans, P. (2023, March 23). Zellers relaunches 12 stores across Canada today — and nostalgia is the door crusher. *CBC*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/zellers-launch-day-1.6787089>
- Feinstein, C. (2023). Bargain boom: Dollarama sales surge drives opening of up to 70 new stores across Canada next year. *thestar.com*. <https://www.thestar.com/business/2023/04/04/bargain-boom-dollarama-sales-surge-drives-opening-of-up-to-70-new-stores-across-canada-next-year.html?rf>
- CityNews*. (2023, March 16). <https://toronto.citynews.ca/2023/03/16/canadian-tire-costco-staples-respected-stores/>
- O'Neil, L. (2023, February 17). Loblaw CEO Galen Weston called to testify before government over food price gouging. *blogTO*. <https://www.blogto.com/eat~drink/2023/02/galen-weston-testify-parliamentary-committee-investigating-food-prices/>
- Weissman, C. G., & Weissman, C. G. (2023). Macy's Marc Mastronardi on the department store's revamped brick-and-mortar strategy. *Modern Retail*. <https://www.modernretail.co/operations/macys-marc-mastronardi-on-the-department-stores-revamped-brick-and-mortar-strategy/>

Trend 3

- The Canadian Press. (2023, March 11). Union "increasingly alarmed" about Indigo cyberattack, demands further disclosure. *CBC*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/indigo-workers-cyberattack-data-1.6776119>
- Scharbonneau. (2023, March 9). *Canada's unions: Urgent action required to rein in corporate greed | Canadian Labour Congress*. Canadian Labour Congress. <https://canadianlabour.ca/canadas-unions-urgent-action-required-to-rein-in-corporate-greed/>
- Dunne, J. (2022, June 30). Do unions at Starbucks mean the labour movement is picking up steam? *CBC*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/starbucks-union-labour-movement-1.6506307>
- <https://www.blogto.com/eat~drink/2023/02/galen-weston-testify-parliamentary-committee-investigating-food-prices/>

Section 8: References

15. Israel, S. (2022, October 28). Canadian cannabis unions make gains amid pay and safety concerns. *MJBizDaily*. <https://mjbizdaily.com/canadian-cannabis-unions-make-gains-amid-pay-and-safety-concerns/>
16. O'Brady, S. (n.d.). *What Canada can learn from Sweden about creating middle-class retail jobs*. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/what-canada-can-learn-from-sweden-about-creating-middle-class-retail-jobs-162486>
17. Canada, E. a. S. D. (2023, March 21). Federal minimum wage rising to \$16.65 on April 1. *Canada.ca*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2023/03/federal-minimum-wage-rising-to-1665-on-april-1.html>

Trend 4

- Grocery Business. (2022, June 15). *Walmart Canada unveils new grocery fulfillment technology at Ontario store*. <https://www.grocerybusiness.ca/news/walmart-canada-unveils-new-grocery-delivery-technology-at-an-ontario-store>
18. Ogino, S. (2023). 9 Examples of Innovative In-Store Technology. *Annex Cloud*. <https://www.annexcloud.com/blog/9-examples-innovative-in-store-technology/>
 19. Sinha, A. (n.d.). Interactive Retail Technology usage in enriching the in-store customer experience. *www.linkedin.com*. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/interactive-retail-technology-usage-enriching-in-store-aashish-sinha/?trk=articles~directory>
 20. D'Innocenzio, A. (2015, May 11). Interactive shelves to virtual dressing – shopping gets high-tech. *Global News*. Retrieved April 16, 2023, from <https://globalnews.ca/news/1991610/interactive-shelves-to-virtual-dressing-shopping-gets-high-tech/>
 21. Weir, G. (2022, August 3). *Leveraging the power of interactive experiences in retail - IT World Canada*. IT World Canada - Information Technology News on Products, Services and Issues for CIOs, IT Managers and Network Admins. <https://www.itworldcanada.com/sponsored/leveraging-the-power-of-interactive-experiences-in-retail>
 22. Melnick, K. (2023, February 23). *IKEA Teams With Meta To Launch An In-Store AR Game - VRScout*. VRScout. <https://vrscout.com/news/ikea-teams-with-meta-to-launch-an-in-store-ar-game/>

Trend 5

23. Shoalter Automation Limited. (2023, February 11). Retail in 2023: An Era of Artificial Intelligence, Omnichannel Retail, and Sustainability. *LinkedIn*. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/retail-2023-era-artificial-intelligence-omnichannel-/>
24. Dusik, J., & Sadler, B. (n.d.-b). What Effect Will Automation Have on the Environment? *IISD*. Retrieved

Section 8: References

- January 22, 2019, from <https://www.iisd.org/articles/automation-environment#:~:text=They%20could%20also%20enhance%20unsustainable,for%20recycling%20and%20waste%20management>
25. Joshi, N. (2021, November 8). The Negative Environmental Impact Of Robotics. *Allerin*. <https://www.allerin.com/blog/the-negative-environmental-impact-of-robotics>
 26. Grissom, D. (2022, February 17). *How Automation Can Make Your Business Eco-Friendly*. Impact Networking. <https://www.impactmybiz.com/blog/how-automation-can-make-your-business-eco-friendly/>
 27. Science Daily. (n.d.). Package delivery robots' environmental impacts: Automation matters less than vehicle type. *Science Daily*. Retrieved August 18, 2021, from <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/08/210818135230.htm>
 28. Yili, W. (2023, January 6). Here's how artificial intelligence can benefit the retail sector. *World Economic Forum*. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/01/here-s-how-artificial-intelligence-benefit-retail-sector-davos2023/>

Trend 6

29. Kshapcott. (2022). Independent Retailers on The Voice of Retail Podcast. *Retail Council of Canada*. <https://www.retailcouncil.org/community/store-operations/independent-retailers-on-the-voice-of-retail-podcast/>
30. Info-Tech Research Group. (2021, December 8). McLean & Company Reveals the HR Trends for 2022. *Cision PR Newswire*. <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/mclean--company-reveals-the-hr-trends-for-2022-301439740.html>
31. Jenkins, M. (2023, March 20). How Schnucks Optimized Frontline Operational Workflows and Fine-tuned Flexible Scheduling. *RIS News*. <https://risnews.com/how-schnucks-optimized-frontline-operational-workflows-and-fine-tuned-flexible-scheduling>
32. Machado, J. (2021, October 15). We Need To Allow Everyone To Work Differently — Including Frontline Workers. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2021/10/15/we-need-to-allow-everyone-to-work-differently---including-frontline-workers/?sh=420f40ae439c>
33. Esposito, A. (2023, March 15). Efficiency and Engagement: The Great Balancing Act of Workforce Tech. *Retail TouchPoints*. <https://www.retailtouchpoints.com/topics/store-operations/efficiency-and-engagement-the-great-balancing-act-of-workforce-tech>
34. Corrigan, J. (2022). Raydiant CEO: Fighting turnover in the retail industry. *HRD America*. <https://www.hcamag.com/us/specialization/employee-engagement/raydiant-ceo-fighting-turnover-in-the-retail-industry/424833>

Section 8: References

Trend 7

35. Humber, T. (2023). Canadian workers are avoiding each other: That's a 'huge issue' and an opportunity. *Talent Canada*. <https://www.talentcanada.ca/canadian-workers-are-avoiding-each-other-thats-a-huge-issue-and-an-opportunity/>
36. Bhattarai, A. (2021, June 21). Retail workers are quitting at record rates for higher-paying work: 'My life isn't worth a dead-end job!' *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/06/21/retail-workers-quitting-jobs/>
37. Marty. (2022, November 3). *New Mental Health Guidebook helps retail businesses to better understand workplace mental health and how it can impact their customers and business success - Retail Council of Canada*. Retail Council of Canada. <https://www.retailcouncil.org/press-releases/new-mental-health-guidebook-helps-retail-businesses-to-better-understand-workplace-mental-health-and-how-it-can-impact-their-customers-and-business-success/>
38. Wong, J. (2023, January 25). Got time? At this slow grocery store check-out lane, a leisurely chat is OK. *CBC*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/grocery-slow-check-out-lane-1.6724938>

SECTION 6

Martin, R. (2009). *The Design of Business: Why Design Thinking is the Next Competitive Advantage*. Harvard Business Press.

Section 9:

Appendices

Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions

Background Questions

1. What is your current role in retail? (Sales associate, key holder, manager)
2. What areas within the retail sector have you worked in? (For example, fashion, pharmacy, grocery stores, big box stores, etc.)
3. How long have you been working in retail?
4. Is this your primary/full-time job?
5. How do you see yourself continuing in your current role?

Technology

1. What have been the recent automation or tech intervention that have been introduced in the stores?
2. Why do you think the intervention was introduced?
3. How was the intervention received by employees?
4. If relevant to the customers, what were the reactions?
5. How has automation and tech affected your job? On a scale from made job easier or better to made job harder or worse.

Future of Retail

1. Considering the changes in the retail sector, how do you think retail roles (like yours) might look different in say 10 years from now?
2. How optimistic do you feel about the future of your role in retail? scale not at all to very optimistic.
3. How do you think the retail sector as a whole might change over the next 10 years?
4. Broadly speaking, what do you think are the best things that are happening in retail right now?
5. What do you think are the worst things that are happening in retail right now?

Employee-Driven Innovation

1. Do you feel you're engaged at work?
2. Have you ever had an idea about how to do something differently at work? If so, can you tell us about it?
3. What are the channels for you to share ideas at work?

Final

1. Is there anything we talked about today that you would like to elaborate on or anything you want to add about your experience?