Taking Sides

When Frontline Employees Choose their Customers over their Company

Dissertation

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Ehrenwörtliche Erklärung zu meiner Dissertation
mit dem Titel: „Taking Sides - When Frontline Employees Choose their Customers over their Company“

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1. Introduction

In this chapter the setting of the study as well as its aims and structure will be outlined.

1.1. Setting

The importance of frontline employees for the success and effectiveness of organizations, particularly in services, is recognized by researches and practitioners alike (Hartline and Ferrell 1996; Singh 2000). They play a central role in building and developing customer relationships and have a significant influence on perceived service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty (Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault 1990; Grönroos 2007; Hartline, Maxham, and McKee 2000). Through this they also have a considerable impact on the overall performance of the firm (Capon, Farley, and Hoenig 1990; Hays and Hill 1997).

There is much empirical evidence that suggest that this positive influence of frontline employees on company performance is stronger when there are close interpersonal bonds between the employees and the customers. A feeling of rapport in the customer-employee relationship, characterized by a personal connection and enjoyable interactions (Gremler and Gwinner 2000) encourages positive word-of-mouth communications by customers (Gremler, Gwinner, and Brown 2001; Macintosh 2009). Commercial friendships (Price and Arnould 1999), a particularly close form of interpersonal bonds between employees and customers, also encourage behaviors that positively influence the business relationship and ultimately the bottom line of companies (Grayson 2007; Johnson and Selnes 2004). These behaviors include loyalty and positive word-of-mouth (Beatty et al. 1996; Price and Arnould 1999) as well as an open attitude and greater willingness to share information (Geiger and Turley 2003).

However, close interpersonal bonds not only come with benefits, but also involve costs and drawbacks. There is a dark side to a good understanding between employees and customers.

In the literature on frontline employee behavior and performance, one of the most salient issues is the fact that they are often faced with differing and even conflicting demands and expectations by their organization and management on the one side and their customers on the other (Behrman and Perreault Jr 1984; Chung and Schneider 2002). For example, customers may demand higher price concessions, a more customized service, and a larger share of the frontline employee's time and resources than are compatible with the organization's demands for efficiency and profitability. In role theory, the incongruence of these demands is referred to as role conflict or intersender role conflict (Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman 1970; Singh 2000). Role conflict is associated with a number of significant negative impacts both on the employees themselves and the organization. These effects are well documented by a large number of empirical studies. Role conflict has been linked to lower work performance and quality (Churchill et al. 1985; Singh 2000; Varca 2009) and a reduced commitment to service quality

(Schwepker Jr and Hartline 2005). The human consequences of role conflict include burnout, lower job satisfaction and a decrease in organizational commitment (Bettencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie 2005; Singh, Goolsby, and Rhoads 1994; Singh, Verbeke, and Rhoads 1996). These in turn affect organizational success and the quality of customer relationships.

Close interpersonal ties and a good understanding between employees and customers seem to increase the role conflict experienced by employees. Varca (2009) has shown that call centre employees that expressed empathy towards their customers, that were courteous, showed patience, tried to build rapport with customers and similar behaviors, experienced greater role conflict than those employees who did not. One possible explanation is that as the emphatic employees have invested more emotionally, the conflict situation becomes more meaningful to them. Not being able to resolve this conflict satisfactorily, will lead to greater levels of stress (Varca 2009).

In the case of commercial friendships, the connection between close interpersonal bonds and increased role conflict is particularly evident (Grayson 2007). Friendship demands an intrinsic orientation, the friendship should be important to both parties for its own sake rather than because of any extrinsic benefits it may offer (Carrier 1999; Price and Arnould 1999). In fact, perceiving that one party is looking for such extrinsic benefits, in other words has an instrumental motivation to sustain the friendship, is likely to damage the relationship (Allan 1979). Business relationships however are inherently instrumental; the involved parties interact to achieve aims that have value outside of the relationship (Grayson 2007; Mandel 2006). Although it is possible to reconcile instrumental orientations with friendship (Allan 1979), this leads to considerable role tension, particularly in a business context (Geiger and Turley 2003; Grayson 2007; Price and Arnould 1999).

So, while close interpersonal bonds between frontline employees and customers offer a lot of potential benefits to companies, they can also increase the stress through role conflict felt by employees and thereby reduce employee performance. The closer an employee feels to a customer, the more weight a perceived conflict between the wishes and expectations of that customer and the expectations of the company or management of the frontline employee carries (Varca 2009). The challenge then is to design the customer interface in such a way that companies can profit from close relationships between their employees and their customers while at the same time reducing the resulting role conflict and its impact. This calls for a thorough understanding of the role conflict concept and the way it is experienced by frontline employees.

The importance of this issue has inspired a wealth of research looking at many different aspects of role conflict such as consequences (e.g. Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Goolsby 2010), antecedents (e.g. Varca 2009) and coping strategies (e.g. Grover 1993; Singh 2000). However, there is still little known about the actual decision processes of frontline employees when dealing with this form of role conflict. When faced with contradictory expectations by such important actors as customers and their own organization, how do frontline employees decide which demands they give precedence to? Anecdotal evidence collected in discussions with frontline employees and customers suggests that frontline employees sometimes decide to side with the customer against the expectations and interests of their own company. In extreme cases, this may even result in frontline employees betraying their own organization. An example would be an insurance sales person that helps a customer fill in a non-justified claim in such a way that it will be granted by the insurance company.

For management to be able to address these issues, it is vital to better understand employees' decision processes in such conflict situations. It is especially important to better understand what may induce frontline employees to favor customers over their own company. What are possible motivations and reasonings and what circumstances affect this decision?

1.2. Research Aims

For the reasons outlined above, it is important for both researchers and managers to better understand the behavior of frontline employees in role conflict situations, caught between demands of their customers and expectations of their company. This research project therefore aims to explore and describe such situations, with a particular focus being laid on understanding the following issues:

- How do frontline employees decide whose demands to give precedence to when expectations from customers and their own organization collide?
- How do they explain their decision?
- What factors influence their choice?
- And how do they feel about such situations?

These questions will be addressed using a qualitative empirical study. The findings will offer a better understanding of what happens in role conflict situation in which company and customer demands collide. The findings will also be used to develop recommendations both for future research of this topic and for companies on how to deal with the challenges arising from this situation.

1.3. Structure and Content

After the setting and aim of the research project have been described in chapter 1, chapter 2 sets the scene by looking at some of the challenges frontline employees face. It outlines the central role frontline employees play and looks at sources of conflict and stress in frontline work. This information then serves as a background for the rest of the study.

Chapter 3 looks at literature on role theory in general and role stressors, such as role conflict and ambiguity, in particular. It addresses how people take on and define roles and discusses the difference between in- and extra-role behaviors. After discussing role stressors, the antecedents and consequences of role conflict and ambiguity are discussed. Finally the chapter looks at strategies discussed in the literature for solving role conflict situations.

Chapter 4 looks at evidence from research literature that assists in evolving a better understanding of how frontline employees decide how to act in role conflict situations. When role demands from the company and the customer collide, a frontline employee can decide to (a) *side with the company* or (b) *side with the customer*. As well as deciding to side with one of the parties, frontline employees could also be siding against them. In other words, a frontline employee could decide to take the side of the customer because (c) he or she wishes to *side against his or her company*. Alternatively, (d) the wish to *side against the customer* could be behind the decision to favor the company's role demands. Chapter four looks at each of these options in turn and discusses insights from extant research relevant to each.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 thus provide the theoretical background from which to launch the empirical investigation. The insights, ideas and aspects drawn from these chapters serve as sensitizing concepts for the empirical investigation. They provide initial ideas to pursue, and help to develop questions to ask participants and ideas as to where to look for data.

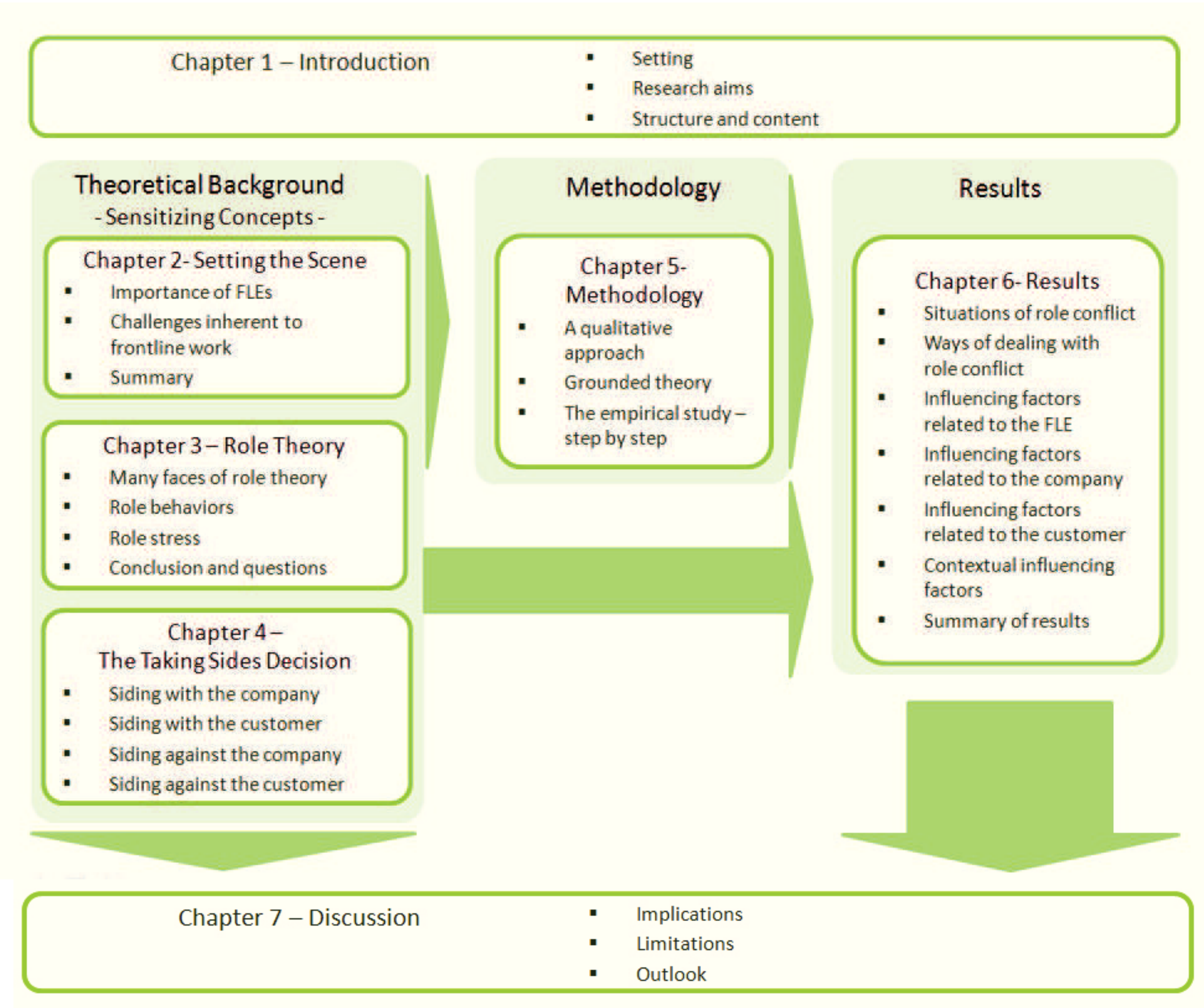
The empirical study is carried out using a qualitative approach. A grounded theory approach is used; the methodology is discussed in chapter 5. This chapter also gives an outline of the reasoning behind choosing a qualitative method. Chapter 5.3 describes the individual steps taken during the study in detail.

The results of the study are presented in chapter 6. Chapter 6.1 will take a look at the type of role conflict situations described in the interview material. Chapter 6.2 will then structure and discuss the various ways in which the frontline employees interviewed resolved role conflict situations. Factors influencing the decision on which approach to choose are discussed in chapters 6.3 to 6.6. A summary of all results is given in chapter 6.7.

Finally, chapter 7 concludes this research report. Chapter 7.1 looks at the implications for research and business. Limitations of the study and a critical assessment of the quality of the empirical research are discussed in chapter 7.2. The report ends with the outlook given in chapter 7.3.

An overview of these chapters is given in figure 1. This also illustrates how the individual chapters of this report fit together.

Figure 1: Overview of Chapters in Research Report



2. Setting the Scene: the Services Frontline Employee

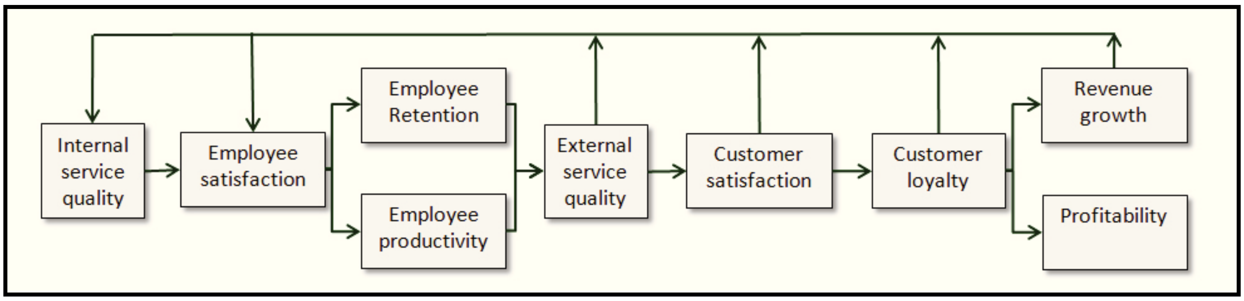
At the heart of this research project are services frontline employees. To explore how they may feel and react to conflicting expectations by customers and members of their own organization, it is important to gain a sense for the characteristics of frontline work and the specific challenges associated with customer contact positions. The following chapter sets the scene by first outlining the central role frontline employees play in service organizations. It then looks at various sources of conflict and stress in frontline work. This information serves as a basis for understanding the context in which this study takes place.

2.1. The Importance of Frontline Employees for Service Companies

Frontline employees are crucial to the success of service companies. They are generally the first and often only contact with the company that a customer has (Hartline, Maxham, and McKee 2000). Due to the intangible and interactive nature of services, customers base their evaluation of the service on their experience with the frontline employee (Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault 1990; Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1988). In a sense, the frontline employee embodies the service. Measures for service quality, such as Parasuraman et al's SERVQUAL (1988) reflect this – three of the five dimensions of SERVQUAL directly or indirectly relate to frontline employee behaviors (namely responsiveness, assurance and empathy).

Due to their influence on customer attitudes and behaviors, frontline employees directly impact a firm's performance, as is illustrated in the service profit chain (Heskett, Sasser, and Schlesinger 1997; 2003). The model proposes that there are important relationships between internal service quality, employee satisfaction, retention and productivity and external service quality, which is related to customer satisfaction and loyalty, which in turn is connected to revenue growth and profitability (Heskett et al. 1994, see figure 2).

Figure 2: The Service Profit Chain (Heskett et al. 1994)



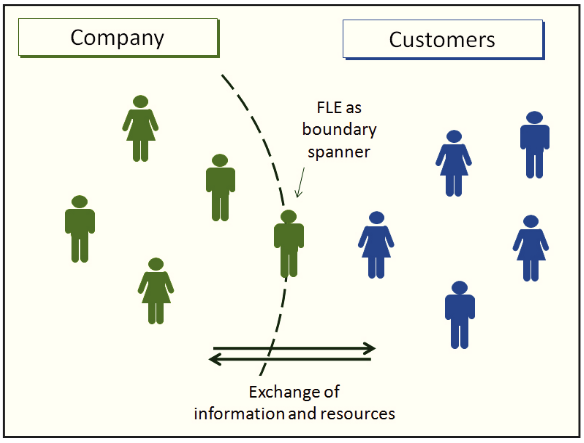
This is on the whole supported by empirical research (Anderson and Mittal 2010; Heskett, Sasser, and Schlesinger 2003; Rucci, Kirn, and Quinn 1998) and has found wide acceptance in management practice (Homburg, Wieseke, and Hoyer 2009)[1]. For example, a study by Deloitte Consulting in 2007 found that the companies on Fortune magazine's list of the "100 Best Companies to work for in America" significantly outperformed the companies that make up the Standard & Poor's 500 stock index (Dickler 2007). Other studies report that companies that manage their employees well and have high levels of employee satisfaction outperform companies that do not by as much as 30 to 40 percent (Pfeffer 1998; Webber 1998).

The way a company manages their frontline employees and the employee's attitudes and behaviors in customer contact situations can thus become a sustainable source of competitive advantage (Lovelock and Wirtz 2007). A thorough and profound understanding of how frontline employees deal with the demands placed on them during their work can help develop management guidelines to improve employee satisfaction.

2.2. The Challenges Inherent to Frontline Work

Frontline employee work is inherently stressful. There are many potential sources of conflict and incongruent expectations, requiring frontline employees to constantly make trade-offs, try to reconcile diverging demands and decide where to focus their energy. The word frontline literally means a boundary between two positions, places or ideas (American Heritage Dictionary 2010). In this context, the boundary is that of the organization, dividing the internal operations from the external environment. Frontline Employees act as boundary spanners, bridging the gap between the organization and its customers (Adams 1980; Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler 2009). They are exchange agents, facilitating the flow of information and resources across the interface (Leifer and Delbecq 1978) and interacting with customers on behalf of the organization (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Frontline employees as boundary spanners



Two masters with many wishes

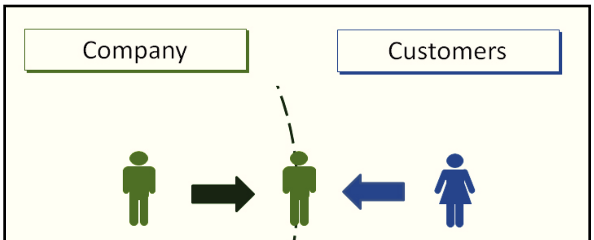
As boundary spanners, frontline employees interact with two parties, who both direct expectations towards the employee. An image often used to portray this situation is that of someone standing between two masters (Chung and Schneider 2002; Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler 2009). The employee must strive to satisfy both and both can reward or punish

[1] Not all academic research supports the service profit chain, with some studies finding small or non-significant effects. It has also been criticized for not considering the costs of providing service quality, which may be an explanation for the non-significant relationships between service quality and profitability found in some studies (Brown and Mitchell 1993; e.g. Brown and Chin 2004; Herrington and Lomax 1999; Szymanski and Henard 2001). The service profit chain has also been extended and developed further to include other concepts, such as employees' and customers' identification with the company (Kamakura et al. 2002).

the employee for his or her behavior, at least to some extent. An organization can use incentives, praise or promote employees, or penalize and even dismiss them. Customers may have less influence, but they can make the service encounter more or less pleasant, can praise or complain about the employee and of course their behavior influences employees' productivity and job success (see for example Garma and Bove 2011; Wang et al. 2011; Yi, Nataraajan, and Gong 2011).

This in-between position poses a challenge for employees when the expectations of the organization and the customer diverge or even become mutually exclusive. A typical example for such a situation found in the services literature and used in the introduction is a company demanding efficiency and productivity and the customer wanting personalized care and quality (Bowen and Ford 2002; Chung and Schneider 2002; Singh 2000). In these cases, a frontline employee must decide whom to give precedence to and whose interest will be more respected. How frontline employees do this and how they perceive and react in such situations, are central questions of this research. Various factors have been discussed in extant research that may make such a decision more difficult or bias the frontline employee towards one side or the other. This includes empathy and a good relationship with the customer (see for example Varca 2009), relying directly on the customer for income, for example from tips or commissions (see for example Rosenbaum 2009) and personal judgments on the legitimacy of the company's or the customer's expectations (see for example O'Brien, Hill, and Autry 2009). A more detailed look at such influencing factors will be taken in chapter 4.

Figure 4: Different expectations from frontline employees by company and customers



Frontline employees are faced with expectations and demands from both their company and customers. These expectations can differ and even be contradictory.

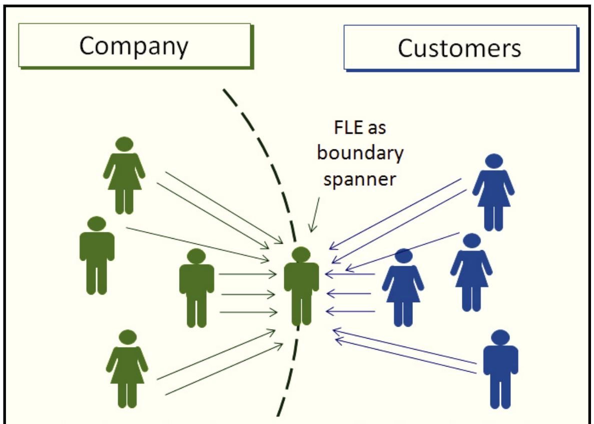
The image we have looked at so far places the frontline employee between two parties, with each side presenting the employee with a particular expectation (see figure 4). The expectations from one side may differ from that of the other, but are otherwise presented as clear and succinct. The reality of course may be far more complex. The demands and expectations placed on the frontline employee from each side of the organizational boundary may themselves be varied, ambiguous or partially incompatible. Companies generally expect their employees to fulfill both quality and productivity goals (Lovelock and Wirtz 2007; Mahesh and Kasturi 2006; Singh 2000; Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler 2009). While these two aspects of frontline employee performance are positively related (Singh 2000), neither aim can be maximized without some cost to the other.

This point is very well illustrated by a case study of an Israeli call center presented by Aviad Raz and Elad Blank (Raz and Blank 2007). The agents working in the call center are required to deliver high quality service, be "empathetic, out-going and emotionally reflective" (Raz and Blank 2007) and find the best solution for the customer. At the same time, their company sets very high and rigid efficiency targets. Call center agents are expected to handle an average of 12.3 calls an hour, with conversations lasting just over 3 minutes. Call center agents are also shown their average calls per hour on their computer screen during their shift. The best solution for the customer frequently requires more time than an acceptable solution would. Call center agents must therefore prioritize either the quality goal, delivering the best service, or the efficiency aim, keeping the call time low and being able to handle a high number of calls per hour.

As well as delivering excellent service and improving quality, frontline employees are also often expected to do selling, cross-selling and up-selling (Lovelock and Wirtz 2006). The selling tasks may, at least partially, conflict with the aim of delivering excellent service and building trust. Frontline service staff engaging in selling activities, in trying to get customers to buy more or different products, may be perceived as more sales than service staff and result in lower customer trust and satisfaction (Martin 2007). Another example of conflicting expectations by the company would be the demand for managers to be both innovative and remain strictly within their budgets (Marginson and Bui 2009).

Similarly, customers can have incompatible expectations of frontline employees. An everyday example for this would be different customers standing in line waiting for a service. One customer might expect a prolonged social interaction and want to chat to the employee. The next customer in line may wish for the exchange to be done very quickly, with as little unnecessary interaction as possible. Conflicting expectations from different customers are most likely when frontline employees serve customers in turn or serve many customers simultaneously (Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler 2009).

Figure 5: Expectations from frontline employee can be contradictory on both sides



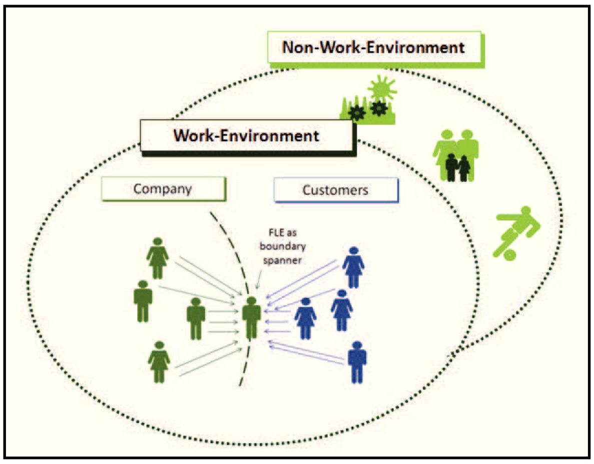
The demands and expectations placed on the frontline employee from within the company or from the customers can themselves be (partially) incompatible.

Frontline employees therefore not only have to balance the expectations from both sides of the organizational boundary, but also the different demands from each side (see figure 5).

Demands from work and non-work environment

Frontline Employees are also faced with different demands and expectations from within their work environment (such as their company and their customers) and from outside their work (Kossek and Ozeki 1998; O'Driscoll, Ilgen, and Hildreth 1992). This can be demands arising from family and friends, or from off-job activities such as sporting events, education and social activities (Wickham and Parker 2007). As well as balancing a multitude of job-related expectations, frontline employees need to take non-work demands into consideration. If these demands are incompatible, this can lead to conflict and stress, which in turn affects the job performance and attitudes of frontline employees adversely (Boles, Wood, and Johnson 2003).

Figure 6: Expectations from work- and non-work environment



Conflict between work and non-work expectations may for example arise when a customer comes into a store just before closing time. The customer will expect the frontline employee to treat them with as much consideration and care as at any other time in the store. The frontline employee on the other hand may have non-work obligations, such as a waiting family, and therefore be under pressure to deal with the customer quickly to be able to finish work. The possible conflict between work-related and non-work related expectations and demands on the frontline employee is shown in figure 6. While this is not unique to frontline employees, but experienced by every employee, it nevertheless represents a significant source of conflict and stress.

Conflicts between job-related expectations and personal values, feelings and beliefs - emotional labor by frontline employees

Conflict in a frontline position can also arise because of differences in the way employees are expected to act and feel, or at least be seen to feel, and their own personal beliefs, values and personalities. For example, frontline employees may have to act in a very subservient manner that may grate with personal values of individualism or equality, or feelings of self-esteem (Shamir 1980).

A particular challenge in frontline work is that frontline employees are expected to show a warm, friendly and accommodating manner regardless of their own personal feelings and of how the customers act towards them. Many studies on frontline employees report that the employees frequently describe customers as difficult, unfriendly, unreasonable and arrogant (Harris and Ogbonna 2006; Mahesh and Kasturi 2006; Scott 2003). Yet the employee has to be courteous and friendly in response. The incongruence in how employees feel treated by a customer and how they may wish to react, and how they are expected to react, can be the cause of frustration and emotional stress (Mahesh and Kasturi 2006; Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler 2009).

The fact that frontline employees need to manage their emotions during their work is captured by the concept of emotional labor (Hochschild 1983). It is defined as the "effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally desired emotions during interpersonal transactions" (Morris and Feldman 1997, p. 987). This refers to employees displaying the emotions their organization expects them to in order to create the intended service experience for customers. Employees' emotional expression has become part of the service offering (Wichroski 1994). Service organizations therefore usually have explicit or implicit norms and standards for which emotions should be expressed towards customers and which suppressed (Groth, Hennig-Thurau, and Walsh 2009; Hochschild 1983). These norms and standards are referred to in the literature as display rules (Ekman 1973; Rafaeli and Sutton 1987). Which emotions are to be shown in what manner will depend on context – an air hostess will be expected to act differently from a customer complaints employee or an employee working in counseling.

Emotional labor can have several negative effects on frontline employees, adversely affecting their well-being through stress, burnout and emotional exhaustion (Brotheridge and Grandey 2002; Hochschild 1983; Morris and Feldman 1997) and leading to lower job satisfaction (Abraham 1999). How stressful emotional labor is depends on a number of aspects, including the degree of emotional labor required and the emotional labor strategy adopted by the employee. Morris and Feldman (1996) describe the following dimensions to capture emotional labor:

- Frequency with which emotional displays are required,
- Variety of emotions that are to be expressed,
- Attentiveness to required display rules (including regarding emotional intensity) and
- Emotional dissonance

The first two aspects are fairly straight forward. The more often emotions have to be displayed and the greater the variety of emotions needed, the more attention and emotional energy is required (Morris and Feldman 1996). Attentiveness to required display includes the duration and the intensity of the emotional display. The longer interactions with customers are, the less formalized they are likely to be and the more attention and emotional stamina is usually required (Hochschild 1983). It may also be more difficult for employees to hide their own personal feelings and to suppress personal feelings that would violate organizational or social norms (Smith 1992). Emotional intensity refers to the strength with which an emotion is to be expressed (Morris and Feldman 1996). The more intensely the emotion is to be displayed, the more effort an employee must expend to either actually feel these emotions or to pretend to feel the emotion. For instance, a store clerk may be required to give polite smiles and be friendly, but not display any intense emotions. This can be contrasted with frontline employees with tasks that involve counseling, such as nursing.

Emotional dissonance describes the conflict between genuinely felt emotions and emotions displayed because of organizational display rules (Middleton 1989). Frontline employees engage in emotional labor even when the emotions they have to show are emotions they actually feel (such as a frontline employee being truly happy to greet a new customer). However, emotional labor becomes more difficult and stressful when the organizationally required emotion differs from the actually felt emotion (Abraham 1999; Rafaeli and Sutton 1987). This may for example be the case when frontline employees have to be courteous and friendly to unfriendly and aggressive customers. Another example would be frontline employees having to promote products that they do not actually believe to be good products.

The literature describes two main strategies that employees can engage in to display the required emotions: surface acting and deep acting (Hochschild 1983)[2]. Surface acting involves employees managing only their outward behaviors to adhere to display rules, whereas deep acting involves employees actively attempting to create the feelings they are supposed to be expressing (Grandey 2003; Hochschild 1983; Johnson and Spector 2007). For example, an employee who puts on a concerned face when handling the complaint of a difficult customer is surface acting. An employee who attempts to understand that customer and sincerely feels regret at the customer's difficulties and then expresses this regret, is deep acting. Both strategies involve effort and are forms of emotional labor.

In surface acting, there is necessarily a greater emotional dissonance – a greater difference between felt and displayed emotion. Empirical studies have shown that because of this dissonance, surface acting leads to emotional exhaustion (Abraham 1999; Grandey 2003; Morris and Feldman 1997). Deep acting does not appear to have the same detrimental effect. Many studies report a non-significant relationship between deep acting and emotional exhaustion (Brotheridge and Lee 2003; Grandey 2003; Totterdell and Holman 2003). However, Bozionelos and Kiamou (2008) find that deep acting is emotionally exhausting in situations where an intense display (and thus feeling) of emotion is required.

Emotional labor is an important part of frontline employee work because of the impact it has on customers' feelings and attitudes. Several studies have shown that frontline employees' display of emotions affect customers' emotional state and service experience (Barger and Grandey 2006; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2006; Pugh 2001; Sutton and Rafaeli 1988; Tsai and Huang 2002). Positive displays of emotion by frontline employees, such as smiling, can lead to positive emotions in customers (Barger and Grandey 2006). This transfer of emotions is attributed to a process called emotional contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson 1994) – emotions are 'passed on' from one person to another during a social interaction.

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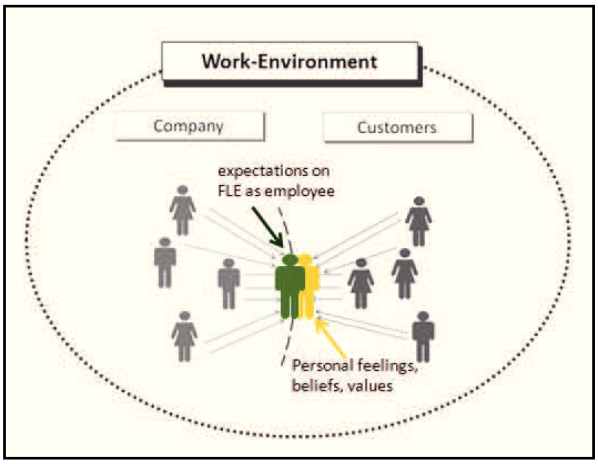
[2] Surface acting and deep acting are also sometimes described as dimensions of emotional labor, see for example Brotheridge and Lee (2003) , Groth et al. (2003), and Kruml and Geddes (2009).

This can happen on a subconscious level through ‘primitive emotional contagion’ and is due to people’s “tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, and movements with those of another person and, consequently, to converge emotionally” (Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson 1994, p. 5). Emotional contagion can also occur on a conscious level (Barsade 2002) in which people actively search for the emotions of others they interact with as a type of social information about situations. Unlike with primitive emotional contagion, which is mostly subconscious and automatic, people’s evaluation of how authentic a displayed emotion is, decides whether an emotion is adopted (Barsade 2002).

The positive affect, or good mood, of customers influences how they evaluate service quality (Barger and Grandey 2006; Pugh 2001; Tsai and Huang 2002) and other service-related aspects such as rapport with the frontline employee (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2006). A customer in a good mood will evaluate a service more positively than a customer in a bad or neutral mood (Pugh 2001). This is due in part to the link between affect and judgment (Forgas 1995). A further reason for this relationship is that the display of positive emotion can be seen as an expected part of the service and is therefore included in the evaluation (Hochschild 1983; Tsai 2001; Wichroski 1994). Recent studies emphasize the importance of the authenticity of employees’ emotional displays and of using deep acting (Hochschild 1983) to not only influence customer affect in the short term but also lead to lasting customer satisfaction (Groth, Hennig-Thurau, and Walsh 2009; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2006).

Research on emotional labor and emotional contagion emphasizes the importance of frontline employees managing their inner feelings and thoughts as well as the expression of their emotions for the success of a service encounter. They also indicate that service companies have a considerable interest in frontline employees’ emotional state and expressions, creating expectations on frontline employees to feel and act in a certain way.

Figure 7: Tension between organizationally required and inner emotions

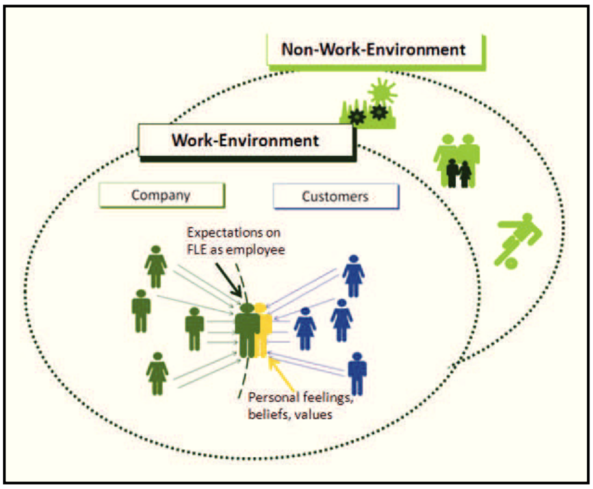


The need to regulate inner feelings and thoughts as well as conflicts between personal feelings and organizationally required emotional displays is a further source of stress frontline employee work (illustrated in figure 7).

2.3. Summary

This chapter outlined the critical importance of frontline employees for the success of service organizations. They are often the first and only contact with the company a customer has and thus often embody the service. Their attitudes and behavior as well as their emotional displays are an inherent part of the service offering. Because of their influence on customers' attitudes and behaviors, frontline employees also directly impact company performance.

Figure 8: FLEs are faced with a multitude of differing, partially incongruent expectations



Frontline work is inherently stressful, as employees are faced with a multitude of expectations from different sources. As at least some of these expectations will be in competition with each other, frontline employees have to constantly try to reconcile conflicting demands, make trade-offs and decide where to focus their energy. Potential sources of conflict include differing expectations from customers and the company, diverse demands from within an organization or from different customers. As well as the demands from the company and customers, frontline employees also have to address conflicts between expectations from their work and non-work environment (such as family and friends) and between the attitudes, emotions and behaviors expected from them at work and their own personal feelings, values and beliefs (see figure 8).

This research project focuses on a particular type of conflict that is intrinsic to frontline work and arises from conflicting expectations from customers and the company. However, as this chapter has shown, this is just one type of potential conflict between demands and expectations. In reality, frontline employees are surrounded by a myriad of partially conflicting expectations, and constantly have to choose how to address these. Balancing the different expectations and deciding which demands to give precedence to in cases where expectations are incompatible, is part of everyday frontline work. A better understanding of how frontline employees choose within one set of demands may also offer insights on conflicts in other situations. Also, the understanding that frontline employees are always dealing with different demands is important as context for the rest of this study.

How people perceive expectations, form a concept of what others, for example a company, expects from them and how they deal with differing expectations are all questions that are addressed by role theory. The next chapter will thus take a closer look at role theory and at how it can help address the research questions posed by this project.

3. Role Theory

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts …"
(Shakespeare 1599, As You Like It - Act 2, Scene 7).

Role theory provides a valuable theoretical basis for understanding interactions between individuals in social encounters. These interactions are seen as primarily determined by the roles each individual adopts (Goffman 1959). Role theory has long been used to understand individual behaviors by researchers in marketing and management as well as fields such as social psychology, sociology and organizational behavior (Broderick 1998; Welbourne, Johnson, and Erez 1998; Wickham and Parker 2007). Researchers from across these fields see roles as playing an important part in social structure (Mead 1934; Turner 1978) and as central to understanding employee behavior in organizations (Katz and Kahn 1978; Welbourne, Johnson, and Erez 1998). Because of the relevance to the behavior of individuals in organizations and in social encounters in general, I believe that role theory will be highly useful in understanding how frontline employees deal with different expectations from their company and customers.

This chapter therefore gives an overview of role theory, looks at how role theory was developed and describes its basic elements. It will address how people take on and define roles, take a closer look at so-called extra-role behaviors and describe role-related sources of stress for frontline employees. In particular, it will focus on role conflict, as this concept is central to this project's research question. The chapter will also present a variety of ways in which people attempt to deal with role conflict and other forms of role stress.

3.1. The Many Faces of Role Theory

Role theory is concerned with the behaviors associated with certain socially defined positions (Solomon et al. 1985). It is based on a theatrical metaphor, the idea that people as social actors take on 'parts' or roles for which 'scripts' are written similar to the way an actor in a play would perform a role according to the script for that part (Biddle 1986; Broderick 1998). One of its core premises is that the social interaction between people is largely determined by the roles each person adopts (Goffman 1959). Effective social interaction depends on a shared understanding of these roles and associated scripts, and thus of the behaviors that are appropriate (or inappropriate) for people in certain social situations (Heide and Wathne 2006; Sarbin and Allen 1968).

Role theory has been adopted by a wide range of research disciplines and academics with very different backgrounds (Biddle 1986; Broderick 1999). It should be noted that role terms are used differently in different academic fields (Biddle 1986). For example, some authors use the term role to refer to characteristic behaviors (Biddle 1986; Burt 1982), others for social parts that need to be played (Winship and Mandel 1983), and others focus instead on the scripts for social conduct (Bates and Harvey 1975; Zurcher 1983). Biddle (1986) identifies five different perspectives in role theory: functional, symbolic interactionist, structural, organizational and cognitive role theory. While all these perspectives make use of the basic theatrical metaphor of people taking on roles which are connected with scripts and tied to expectations, the definitions, processes and explanations for role phenomena vary. They also focus on different phenomena and issues. For example, organizational role theory is mostly concerned with how roles of employees, defined as the behaviors expected of an employee in a certain position, enable the effective functioning of organizations (Katz and Kahn 1966; Wickham and Parker 2007). A detailed portrayal of all these perspectives and the differences between them goes beyond the scope of this dissertation. An insightful and in-depth discussion of the various perspectives can be found in the paper by Biddle (1986)[3].

In the marketing literature on frontline employees it is generally not made explicit which form of role theory is used. However, by looking at the authors cited for definitions of role and role theory terms, it appears that the organizational role theory perspective is most commonly applied. However, authors from the other perspectives, particularly from functional (e.g. Linton 1936; Parsons 1959) and symbolic interactionist perspectives (e.g. Sarbin 1982; Sarbin and Allen 1968), are also cited (see for example Solomon et al 1985). The following chapters will therefore outline the core concepts and ideas of these perspectives. The focus will lie on organizational role theory.

3.1.1. Organizational Role Theory

Organizational role theory can be said to originate in the seminal works of Gross and colleagues (1958; Morris and Feldman 1997; Price and Arnould 1999; Zurcher 1983) and Katz and Kahn (also Kahn et al. 1964; 1966; 1978). They describe organizations as social systems that are preplanned, task-oriented and hierarchical (Biddle 1986; Simpson and Carroll 2008). Within the organization, there is a network of interrelated functional groups of employees, each carrying out specific work tasks and in some way transforming an input into an output, which becomes the input of someone else until an organizational goal is fulfilled (Simpson and Carroll 2008; Wickham and Parker 2007). Thus, all employees carry out specific tasks that are expected and required by others in the organization (Biddle 1986; Katz and Kahn

[3] A further discussion on different forms of role theory with a different understanding of role terms and conceptual backgrounds can be found in a paper by Simpson and Carroll (2000). They differentiate between role theory from a constructionist perspective, an open systems perspective and role theory in terms of current research on identity construction.

1966). For an organization to function efficiently, it is crucial that the tasks and processes carried out by individual groups of functional employees come together as seamlessly as possible.

Katz and Kahn describe role behaviors as follows:

> *Role behaviors refer to the recurring actions of an individual, appropriately interrelated with the repetitive activities of others so as to yield a predictable outcome. (...) When we abstract some of the essential persisting features from the specific acts comprising role behaviors we speak of roles"* (Katz and Kahn 1966, p.175).

In other words, a role is a collection of behaviors tied to a certain work position that employees are expected to adhere to (Wickham and Parker 2007). It refers to the role or part each employee plays in achieving an organizational goal. Katz and Kahn (1966) express this as follows: The "activity defined the role, and the office is merely the point in organizational space associated with that role and activity" (p. 181). To illustrate, the roles of a waiter or waitress would include taking orders from customers, relaying those orders to kitchen staff, taking food and beverages from the kitchen to customers, collecting payment from customers and bringing this to a till or management, and cleaning tables after customers have left. The term "waiter" or "waitress" refers to the office carrying out these roles.

A role may consist of just one activity, such as cleaning the table, or a series of activities, such as taking orders, relaying these to the kitchen, picking up the orders and bringing them to the table. Multiple roles may be defined into a single office, and multiple offices may be held by a single person (Katz and Kahn, 1966). An example would be a waiter who is also headwaiter and receptionist in a hotel.

Roles are not tied to the individual, but the position that individual occupies in the organization: *"in formal organizations the roles people play are more of a function of the social setting than their own personality characteristics"* (Katz and Kahn, 1966, p.175). The role of waiter or waitress described in the above example is independent of the person occupying the role (although individual factors can of course influence how well that role is carried out; Biddle, 1986).

Roles do not exist in isolation but are interdependent with other roles in the organization. They are defined in relation to the needs and expectations of others occupying connected social roles and can reflect either formal requirements of the organization or the expectations of other organizational members (Biddle, 1986, Katz and Kahn, 1978). The role of the waiter or waitress may therefore be defined by the formal expectations of the organization as well as the demands and expectations by all groups that the waiter or waitress interacts with in order to carry out organizational tasks. The other groups of people that a person interacts with in order to carry out their roles are called their role set. To be more precise, the role set for a particular office is made up of all the other offices in an organization that it interacts with. Katz and Kahn (1966, p. 173-174) cite an example by Merton (1957) for the office of press foreman, who interacts with a general foreman, superintendent, stock foreman, inspector, shipping foreman and 14 press operators. These 19 offices are the role set of press foreman.

In the example of the waiter or waitress, the role set might consist of head waiter/waitress, management, cooks, bar staff and customers. Here, the role set cannot be given an exact number, as the number of customers a waiter interacts with varies.

Role episodes – how roles are given and reinforced

For an organization to function effectively and efficiently, the collection of roles held by employees must be effectively communicated, fully understood and accepted (Katz and Kahn, 1966). Also, organizations must have a way to control for deviance, for differences between role enactment and role expectations. According to organizational role theory, organizations achieve this through role episodes (Wickham and Parker 2007).

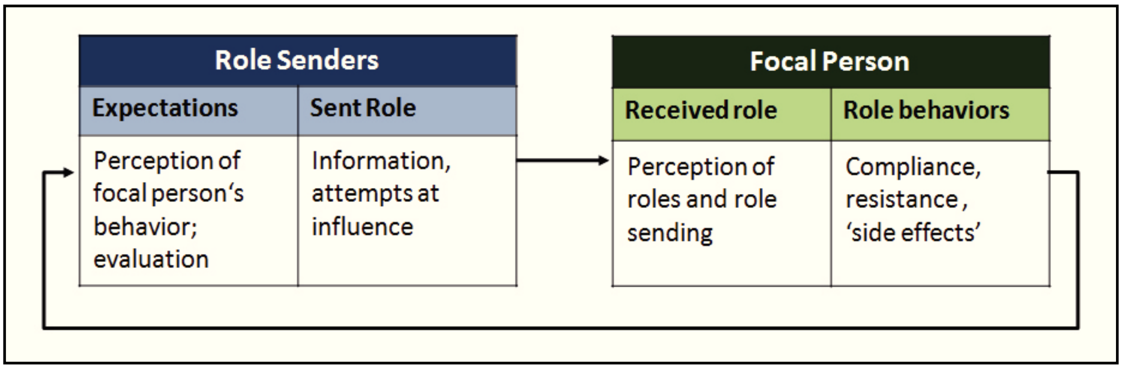
Role episodes consist of interactions between employees in which role expectations and role behaviors can be measured in some form (Katz and Kahn 1978; Wickham and Parker 2007). For example, when an employee defects from expected role behaviors, (e.g. carrying out tasks too slowly or ineffectively) management can respond with information or other attempts to influence the behavior of the employee and to clarify role expectations.

Katz and Kahn (1966, p. 182) describe the role episode as being based on four concepts:

- *Role expectations:* evaluative standards applied to the behavior of a person occupying an office or position within the organization
- *Sent role*: communications stemming from role expectations and sent by members of the role set as attempts to influence the focal person
- *Received role:* focal person's perception of the role sendings addressed to him or her. These include those that the person sends to him- or herself.
- *Role behavior:* the response of the focal person to the complex of information they have received.

In a role episode, the role senders have certain expectations of the focal person and communicate these to the focal person. The role expectations and the sent role are dependent on the motivations, cognitions and behaviors of the members of the role set (Katz and Kahn 1966, 1978). The sent role is received by the focal person, whose reception of the role and the role behaviors are in turn influenced by their motivations, cognitions and behaviors. The role senders evaluate the focal person's role behavior and then send information about their evaluation to the focal person. They may also attempt to influence the focal person's behaviors, particularly if the actual role behavior differs from the expectations. The focal person may then change their understanding of their roles and either comply with this new understanding and adjust their behaviors, or resist the new definition. They may also have to deal with side effects of their behavior, such as negative consequences in the form of greater stress, cost of adjustment or similar (Katz and Kahn, 1966). A model of a role episode is shown in figure 9.

Figure 9: A model of a role episode (Katz and Kahn, 1966, p. 182)



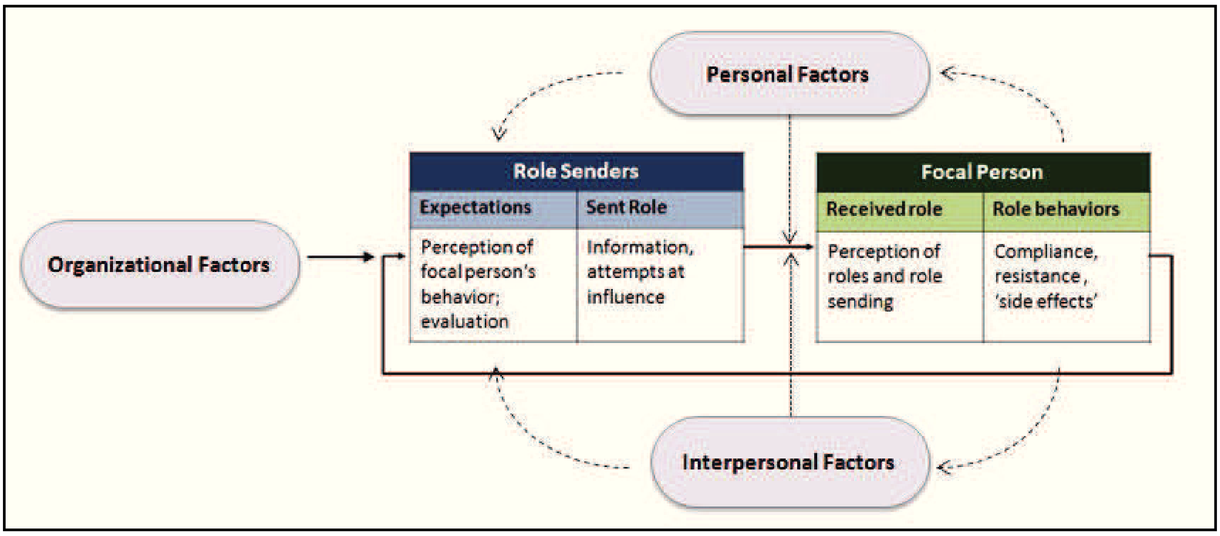
The depicted model is of course a simplification of reality, as Katz and Kahn themselves point out (1966, p. 183). In reality, role episodes are part of a complex and ongoing process. The model is an aid for analysis by presenting role expectations as a starting point. It treats role expectations as if there was only a single role sender who is completely consistent in his or her expectations, or as if there were consensus between role senders (Wickham and Parker 2007, Katz and Kahn 1966). The model also ignores context (Katz and Kahn, 1966). For example, if an employee is usually very good at fulfilling role expectations and falls short due to external influences, such as a personal crisis or a change in work flows, role senders may not try to correct this behavior.

Role taking – influencing factors outside the role episodes

When an employee takes a new position within a company, they take on the roles communicated to them by their employers and their role set (Jackson and Schuler, 1992; Wickham and Parker 2007). This is then reinforced through role episodes. However, as stated above, this ignores factors that also influence the role taking and the role perceptions of employees. Katz and Kahn identify three such factors: organizational, personal and interpersonal (1966). This is illustrated in figure 10.

Organizational factors include the structure of the organization, its formal policies, rewards and penalties. These factors can characterize the organization as a whole or describe only some part of it. These factors directly influence the expectations held about a role and the role communication sent to persons associated with that role. Personal variables, referred to by Katz and Kahn as "enduring attributes of the person" (1966, p. 187), include individual characteristics of the employees, such as their personalities, motives and values. These attributes affect role episodes in that they impact the role perceptions perceived by a person as well as influence the reactions and evaluations of others in the role set. Katz and Kahn (1966, p. 188) postulate a further interesting hypothesis: those role behaviors also influence the personality, in that "*we become what we do, and in a sense unbecome what we do not do*." In other words, the behaviors that people engage in to carry out their roles changes who they are.

Figure 10: Factors influencing role taking (Katz and Kahn, 1966, p. 188)



The third group of factors affecting role behaviors and role taking are interpersonal factors. These refer to the nature and quality of the relationships an individual has with the people who are part of their role set (Katz and Kahn 1978). The quality of interpersonal relationships between an employee and the members of his or her role set will influence role perceptions and role expectations. Consider for example the difference likely to be found in the role expectations, communications and evaluations between a waiter and a manager who are friends and between a waiter and a manager who dislike each other. Also, an employee's role behavior influences the interpersonal relations with members of his or her role set. For example, an employee who consistently underperforms in their role behaviors is likely to be less liked and trusted than an employee who tends to perform well (Katz and Kahn 1966).

Role conflict – the problem with multiple roles and role expectations

As stated above, the role episode model assumes that the role expectations sent to an employee are consistent and that there is consensus on how and with what priority an employee should fulfill his or role. This is unlikely to always be the case in organizational reality and therefore role conflict can occur. Katz and Kahn (1966) define role conflict as the simultaneous sending of two or more role sendings where the compliance with one makes the compliance with the other or others more difficult. Organizational role theory distinguishes between four basic forms of role conflict: intrasender, intersender, interrole and person-role conflict. Intrasender role conflict occurs when the expectations of a single member of the role set of an employee are incompatible. Intersender role conflict refers to incongruent expectations from different members of the role set. Interrole conflict denotes conflict between different roles held by the same person. Person-role conflict occurs when the requirements of a role and the needs and values of the person carrying out the role are not compatible.

Organizational role theory sees role conflict as a source of stress for employees and as debilitating for organizations as a whole (Katz and Kahn 1966, 1978, Rizzo et al. 1972). For organizations to prosper, such role conflicts must be resolved (Biddle 1986).

Much of the empirical research done on role conflicts has been done by researches using the work of Katz and Kahn (1996, 1978) and the organizational role theory perspective. As role conflicts lie at the heart of the research questions of this paper, addressing how frontline employees deal with different expectations from their employers and their customers, the role conflict concept will be covered in greater depth in chapter 3.3.1.

Criticisms of Organizational Role Theory – too simplistic, rigid and outdated?

While organizational role theory has been very successful, particularly in management and marketing research (Biddle 1986, Wickham and Parker 2007), it has also been criticized. One of the most salient limitations of organization role theory discussed in literature rests on the fact that since its development in the 1960s and early 1970s, organizational role theory has not been substantially re-conceptualized (Wickham and Parker 2007, George 1993, Simpson and Carroll 2007). Organizations themselves and the challenges faced by them due to developments in society have changed extensively since then. Organizational role theory sees organizations as being preplanned, task-oriented and hierarchical as well as stable and rational (Biddle 1986). This does not reflect most modern organizations, with flexible and often broad job descriptions (Simpson and Carroll 2007) nor does it take into account the many other roles people play within and outside of organizations (Wickham and Parker 2007) (Wickham and Parker 2007, Jacobs and Gerson 2001, Boles 2003, O'Driscoll 1993). Organizational role theory can be said to have failed to keep pace with the changes in the organizational context during the past decades (George 1993, Wickham and Parker 2007).

Few attempts have been made to develop organizational role theory further. The one major area of theory development stems from research on work-life balance issues (Boles, Wood, and Johnson 2003; Wickham and Parker 2007). This research has aimed to integrate family and other non-work roles that impact employees working lives into organizational role theory. However, the main concepts and assumptions of role theory remain largely unchanged.

Despite this, organizational role theory remains extensively used as a theory for explaining employee behavior in marketing and management research (e.g. Arnold et al. 2009; Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Broderick 1998; Goolsby 1992; Grayson 2007; Onyemah 2008; Singh 2000; Singh and Rhoads 1991). Much of the research on frontline employee behaviors and role conflicts of employees in general uses organizational role theory as a basis. Despite its shortcomings and problems, organizational role theory is a theoretical basis well suited to the central aims of this dissertation and will therefore be used in this project.

3.1.2. Other Role Theory Perspectives

As described in chapter 3.1, although organizational role theory is the most common role theory perspective, it is not the only one found in the marketing and management literature. Authors from other perspectives on role theory are also sometimes cited by researchers in the marketing and management literature. It is usually not made explicit which type or perspective on role theory is chosen for a particular piece of research, and sometimes authors from different perspectives are cited. To present a more rounded understanding of the role concept and of role theory, the following chapter will give a very brief outline of the other perspectives. As mentioned in chapter 3.1, more in-depth discussions of these perspectives and role theory can be found in Biddle (1986).

Functional Role Theory

The functional role theory approach is built on work of Linton (1936) and particularly the work of Parsons (1959). It was the dominant perspective in sociology at least until the 70s (Biddle 1986) and is still often described as *the* role theory in many sociological textbooks (Abels 2009). In this perspective, roles are the shared, normative expectations of the behaviors that are characteristic of people in certain social positions within a stable social system (Bates and Harvey 1975; Biddle 1986) . In other words, roles consist of the expectations people generally have of how others in a social position should behave. Actors learn these norms and are relied upon to conform to the norms associated with their position and to sanction others for nonconforming behavior.

Functional role theory has been criticized for several reasons, among them that social systems are not stable, norms may or not be shared within a system and may or may not lead to sanctioning and conformity and that roles may reflect other cognitive processes as well as be based on shared normative expectations (Biddle 1986). While functional role theory usually is not named directly in marketing texts, prominent authors from this tradition, such as Ralph Linton and Talcott Parsons, are sometimes cited in marketing literature on role theory. Examples include texts by Broderick (1998; 1999) and Grover (1993).

Symbolic Interactionist Role Theory

Symbolic Interactions Role Theory is rooted in the works of George Herbert Mead (1934). Its focus lies on the evolution of roles through social interaction and the cognitive concepts through which people interpret their own and others' behaviors. The concept of norms also plays an important role in this perspective of role theory, and shared norms are seen as being associated with social positions. In contrast to functional role theory, these norms do not define roles but merely provide a broad set of guidelines within which roles can be constructed. Roles themselves are seen as reflecting norms, attitudes, contextual demands and negotiation (Biddle 1986). The role concept here can thus be seen as more flexible and varied as is the case in the functional role theory perspective.

Symbolic interactionism and with it the symbolic interactionist view of role theory has been criticized for using fuzzy and inapplicable definitions and to ignore empirical research. Researchers in this tradition are said to often fail to discuss the contextual limits for their research. This has been said to have weakened contributions from symbolic interactionism and the relevance of their perspective on role theory (Biddle 1986). As with functional role theory, symbolic interactionism is not usually directly connected to research using role theory in the marketing literature. However, prominent authors from this tradition, including George Heribert Mead (1934) and Theodore Sarbin and Vernon Allen (1968) are sometimes cited in the marketing literature. Examples include Grayon (2007) and Solomon et al (1985), the latter of which is himself often cited by marketing papers using role theory (for example Heide and Wathne 2006; Michaels, Day, and Joachimsthaler 1987).

3.2. Which Behaviors are Role Behaviors?

As outlined in the introduction to chapter 3, role theory is often used as a basis for understanding employee behaviors in organizations. Roles are defined as a collection of behaviors tied to a certain work position that employees are expected to carry out (Wickham and Parker 2007, Katz and Kahn 1966). A waitress is expected to serve guests in a restaurant and a financial adviser in a bank is expected to support customers in decisions on their finances.

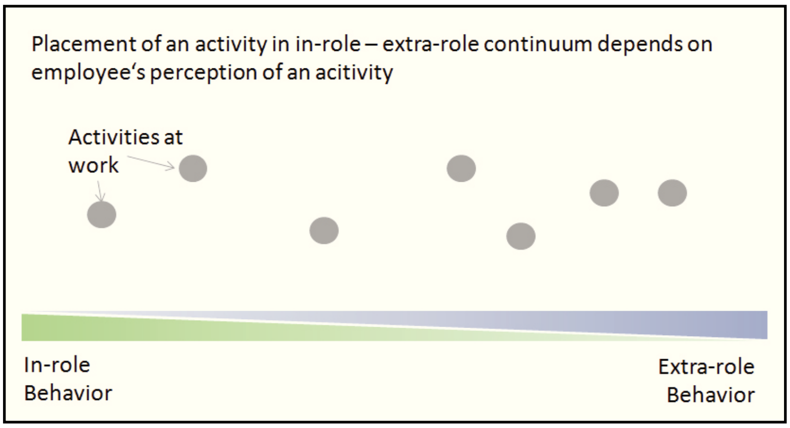
However, employees' behaviors at work encompass a whole range of activities that are not expected of them as part of their position. Some of these may be positive for the company and some detrimental. For example, the waitress in the above example may make an extra effort to engage in small talk with customers and put them at their ease, she may help new employees to orient themselves quickly in work or she may cover for a colleague. She might also be rude to customers or hide somewhere for a quiet smoke. Or, to address the research questions of this project, she may give a customer a bigger portion than the restaurant intends or decide not to charge a coffee refill. Which of these behaviors are role behaviors and which are not? How does one differentiate between role and non-role behaviors?

Researchers studying employee behaviors address these different types of behavior. They differentiate between behaviors that are role-prescribed, also referred to as in-role, and those that are at the employee's discretion (i.e. are extra-role). Both types of behaviors make up an employee's effectiveness and thus impact organizational success (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne 1998) and in recent years the attention in marketing research on employee performance has shifted more and more from a sole focus on in-role behaviors to including other, extra-role behaviors (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne 1998; Raub and Robert 2010).

So what are in-role behaviors? In-role behaviors have been defined as expected behaviors “that are directly involved in producing goods or services, or activities that provide indirect support for the organization’s core technical processes” (Van Scotter, Motowidlo, and Cross 2000, p. 526). They are directed towards formal tasks, duties and responsibilities, such as those included in a job description (Williams and Anderson 1991). In contrast, extra-role behaviors are important for organizational effectiveness but discretionary in nature (Moorman, Niehof, and Organ 1993; Organ 1988). They are not part of traditional job descriptions or task statements and not recognized by formal reward systems (Hoffman et al. 2007), although they may influence how management evaluates employee performance (Rioux and Penner 2001; Yun, Liu, and Takeuchi 2007). Examples for such behaviors may be acting courteously and helping others, encouraging and motivating others, participating in organizational affairs and showing dedication to the job and the organization (Podsakoff et al. 2000).[4]

It can be difficult to differentiate exactly between in-role and extra-role behaviors. For example, is being friendly and courteous an in-role or extra-role behavior of a waiter? How friendly does he have to be for the behavior to become extra-role? Research by Tepper, Lockhart, and Hoobler (2001) suggests that it may be more appropriate to see positive work behaviors on a continuum from entirely role-prescribed to entirely extra-role, with the majority of work behaviors falling somewhere between the two extremes. They also argue, along with other researchers (Graham 1991; Lam, Hui, and Law 1999; Morrison 1994), that the distinction between in-role and extra-role is ambiguous and depends on employees’ understanding of their role behavior (see figure 11). Lam and colleagues (1999) have also pointed out that employees' perceptions of their job responsibilities and requirements may differ

Figure 11: In-role – extra-role continuum of work activities



[4] It should be noted that various different but related conceptualizations and operationalizations of these discretionary behaviors exist in the marketing literature (2008). These include organizational citizenship (Hoffman et al. 2007; Podsakoff et al. 2009), prosocial organizational behavior (Bateman and Organ 1983; Smith, Organ, and Near 1983), extra-role behavior (Brief and Motowidlo 1986), organizational spontaneity (Van Dyne, Cummings, and Parks 1995), voice behavior (George and Brief 1992), and contextual performance (Van Dyne and LePine 1998). An overview of the differences and similarities between various concepts can be found in Podsakoff et al. (Borman and Motowidlo 1997). For the purposes of this research, the extra-role concept as defined by Organ (2000) and Hoffman et al (1988) is used.

substantially from their employer's perceptions (see also Hsiung and Tsai 2009). The in-role – extra-role distinction is likely to be especially fuzzy for service employees due to the difficulty in exactly specifying frontline service employee job responsibilities and behaviors (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Hartline, Maxham, and McKee 2000; Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1988).

In-role and extra-role behavior both refer to employee activities that are beneficial to the company and intended to promote organizational effectiveness and success (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne 1998). However, employee behaviors can also be detrimental to the company, such as the waitress in the example at the beginning of this section sneaking off for an extra break during work or not complying to company guidelines. This type of behavior is referred to as work deviant behaviors (Dunlop and Lee 2004; Rotundo and Sackett 2002). These behaviors "violate significant organizational norms and in doing so threaten the well-being of an organization, its members, or both" (Robinson and Bennett 1995, p.566). If these behaviors are carried out in a service context by frontline service employees, they are referred to as a form of service sabotage (Harris and Ogbonna 2006). Work deviant behaviors and especially service sabotage will be looked at in greater detail in a later chapter (see 4.3 and 4.4).

For this research project, the following aspects are of particular interest:

- Employee behaviors at work include those behaviors that are prescribed by their job description and expected of them (in-role) as well as other types of discretionary behaviors. These can be positive for the organization (extra-role) or detrimental (work deviant behaviors, service sabotage).
- The line between in-role and extra-role behaviors is fuzzy and behaviors are likely to lie on a continuum between these points.
- Whether a behavior is relatively more in-role or extra-role depends on the employee's definition of their job and the particular activity. This may differ substantially from the employer's understanding of what constitutes in-role behaviors.

3.3. Role Stress

As described above, the work-related behaviors and activities of employees are described in role theory in terms of role and in- or extra-role behaviors. As discussed in chapter 2, the many different expectations on frontline employees and the characteristics of frontline work can result in conflicts and stress while carrying out these behaviors. Role theory looks at these issues in terms of role stressors – factors related to roles that can induce stress and lead to negative (and possibly positive) consequences for frontline employees and their organization.

Research on role stressors and their effects has a prominent place in the marketing literature.

The topic is frequently described as one of the most extensively researched fields in marketing, particularly with regard to front line employee effectiveness (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Goolsby 1992; Singh 2000). Yet despite this large body of research, the field still generates continuous interest and research efforts (e.g. Arnold et al. 2009; Kim, Knight, and Crutsinger 2009; O'Brien, Hill, and Autry 2009; Onyemah 2008; Varca 2009). One of the reasons for the relevance of role stressors in research is the strong impact they potentially have on employee efficiency and well-being as well as on organizational success. A study by Churchill and colleagues (1985) shows that role stress accounts for more variance in boundary-spanner performance than skill, motivation, personal aptitude or organizational factors (1985). While some research suggests that this impact can also be positive (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Onyemah 2008), the general consensus in research is that role stress is detrimental to both employees and organizations (Brown and Peterson 1993; O'Brien, Hill, and Autry 2009; Singh 2000). The possible consequences of role stressors will be explored in more detail a little later in this chapter.

Role stressors are generally conceptualized using three related but distinct constructs – role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload (Behrman and Perreault Jr 1984; Kahn et al. 1964; Singh 2000). Of these three, role conflict and role ambiguity have received the lion’s share of attention (Boles and Babin 1994; Brown and Peterson 1993; Singh 2000), with most researchers focusing on just these two. *Role conflict* refers to the focal person feeling torn between opposing expectations in demands from different roles or role partners and feeling unable to fulfill all role expectations sent at him or her. *Role ambiguity* refers to feelings of uncertainty and insecurity concerning role expectations or a lack of information necessary to fulfill a role. Finally, *role overload* occurs when the focal person feels that the cumulative role demands placed on him or her are more than can be fulfilled (Kahn et al. 1964; Onyemah 2008; Singh 1998) .

For this research project role conflict and to a lesser extent role ambiguity are of particular interest. Role conflict lies at the heart of the research aim – how frontline employees react to conflicting expectations from their company and their customers. Role ambiguity may also be of interest, as whether or not a particular demand or expectations stands in contrast to the company’s expectations would depend on the frontline employees understanding of the expectations and demands placed on his or her role. The following chapter therefore looks at role conflict and role ambiguity in more detail. It will look at the definitions and operationalizations of these constructs, possible consequences and ways of dealing with role stress.

3.3.1. Role Conflict – Being Caught Between Expectations

Definition of Role Conflict

The study of role conflict in organizations in the marketing and management literature is founded on the theoretical basis provided by the work of Kahn and colleagues (1964) and Katz and Kahn (1966). Kahn et al. define role conflict as “the simultaneous occurrence of two (or more) sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other” (1964, p. 19).

As described in chapter 3.1.1 (see page 20) organizational role theory recognizes four basic forms of role conflict intrasender, intersender, interrole and person-role conflict. The first three of these are conflicts in the sent role:

- **Intrasender role conflict** occurs when the expectations of a single member of the role set are incompatible. This means that one member of the role set sends different messages about a role or roles to the focal person. For example, a frontline employee may be asked to be very friendly to customers and to provide great customer care as well as to deal with each customer in a minimum of time. This is often the case in call centers, where call center agents are under high pressure to work quickly and handle a high number of cases as well as giving friendly and competent advice (see Dean and Rainnie 2009; Raz and Blank 2007).

- **Intersender role conflict** refers to incongruent expectations from different members of the role set. In other words, two or more of the people that the focal person interacts with to carry out their role have different expectations of the employee. This is one of the central sources of potential conflict for frontline employees, who may be approached with different expectations by customers and members of their own organization (Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler 2009).

- **Interrole conflict** denotes conflict between different roles held by the same person (Katz and Kahn 1966). For example, a babysitter is usually expected to build a good relationship with the child and make the child feel comfortable and happy as well as to exert authority and prevent the child from unwanted or dangerous behaviors.

The fourth form of role conflict arises from a combination of externally sent role expectations and internal forces or role expectations which the focal person expects of him- or herself.

- **Person-role conflict** occurs when the requirements of a role and the needs and values of the person carrying out the role are not compatible. This can mean that the person needs to act against their own beliefs, such as for example a vegetarian waiter recommending a meat dish or a bank advisor selling an investment package promoted by his or her bank that the advisor deems to risky. It can also mean that employees have to act against their own mood and feelings and having to be friendly to unfriendly customers, hide their own negative feelings while at work and pretend to feel more pleased and excited about their work than they actually do. This aspect falls under emotional labor (Hochschild 1983; Morris and Feldman 1996), which is addressed in more detail in chapter 2.2.

Measurement of Role Conflict

While research on role conflict in the marketing and management literature generally uses the theoretical foundation and definition as described by Kahn et al (1964) and Katz and Kahn (1966), operationalizations for measuring role conflict differ (Pandey and Kumar 1997). To help develop a better understanding of what is meant by role conflict and what research on role conflict actually looks at, I will take a short look at role conflict measurements commonly used in the literature.

The most widely used measurement scales are the self-report measures developed by Rizzo, House and Lirtzman (1970). Based on the concepts by Kahn et al (1964) they constructed 15 items to measure subjective role conflict. After these were subjected to a factor analysis the authors were left with the final scale consisting of eight items (see table 1).

Table 1: Measurement Items on Role Conflict by Rizzo et al. (1970)

1. I have to do things that should be done differently.
2. I receive an assignment without the manpower to complete it.
3. I have to buck a role or policy in order to carry out an assignment.
4. I work with two or more groups who operate quite differently.
5. I receive incompatible requests from two or more people
6. I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others
7. I receive an assignment without adequate resources and materials to execute it.
8. I work on unnecessary things.

What is noticeable about this scale is that many items cannot be clearly assigned to one type of role conflict and that two items (item 2 and 7) address an incongruence between the demands placed on a role and the available resources. This conflict between role demands and resources is also included in other measures of role conflict (House 1980). It is not part of the facets of role conflict originally developed by Kahn and colleagues (1964), but depending on the cause of the incongruence can be part of one of the conflicts in the sent role as described in the original definition. It may be a form of intrasender conflict, if someone in a related role is responsible for the incompatibility. For example, a superior may give an employee a task to do but provide insufficient resources for the employee to actually be able to do so. It can also be caused by organizational factors. In this case, the employee may perceive it as interrole conflict or person-role conflict, depending on whether the employee feels the lack of resources is due to the organization or to their own insufficient ability or capability (Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman 1970, p. 155).

The scale has been strongly criticized (see for example Kelloway and Barling 1990; King and King 1990; Tracy and Johnson 1981) as suffering from a variety of deficiencies. The main problems include a questionable match between the stated content domain and the actual item content for many of the items, insufficient attention to convergent and discriminate validity and confusion regarding the definition of the construct itself. However, despite these shortcomings, the scale remains the dominant form of measuring role conflict in the marketing and management literature (Arnold et al. 2009; Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Kim, Knight, and Crutsinger 2009; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne 1998; for example used in O'Brien, Hill, and Autry 2009; Onyemah 2008).

Researchers often select only some of the eight items by Rizzo and colleagues (1970) and adapt these to their particular research problem, sometimes changing the wording quite significantly. For example, O’Brien, Hill and Autry (2009) investigate how role conflict may be influenced by employee-customer interactions during retail returns. They use four of the items from the original scale by Rizzo and colleagues (1970) and rephrase them as follows (table 2):

Table 2: Items Used by O’Brien, Hill and Autry (2009) for Role Conflict

1. When I handle returns, I have to “cheat” certain rules or policies to get it done effectively.
2. Often, our company returns policy makes it difficult to provide for my best customers’ best interests.
3. Sometimes when handling returns, I have to work around company rules to keep the customers happy.
4. I often do not have the resources or knowledge to execute the return.

These differences in wording and in the selecting of items which explore different aspects of role conflict may be one possible explanation for the inconsistencies in findings in different studies (King and King 1990; Pandey and Kumar 1997).

To address some of the shortcomings of the scales by Rizzo and colleagues (1970), other scales have been developed. Pandey and Kumar (1997) set out to develop a scale reflecting all four dimensions of role conflict as conceptualized Kahn and colleagues (1964). They developed an initial set of 224 statements after an extensive literature review, which were reduced to 30 items after three empirical studies. Their scale has three dimensions – person-role conflict, interrole conflict and within-role conflict. The last dimension includes items capturing both intersender and intrasender conflict. These items could not be empirically separated into two distinct factors. Pandey and Kumar (1997) hypothesized that "the respondents could not or did not distinguish between a single role sender and multiple role senders" or that "the characteristics of the sample was such that the presence of intrasender conflict was always accompanied by intersender conflicts or vice versa" (p. 193).

Examples for the measures used in this scale can be found in table 3. The scale is published in full in Pandey and Kumar's 1997 article in the International Journal of Conflict Management.

Table 3: Examples from the Scale Developed by Pandey and Kumar (1997)

Factor: Within Role Conflict (incorporating inter- and intrasender role conflict)
13 Items

- When I have two important tasks assigned to me by two superiors, I am in a dilemma to select one of them to take up first.
- The expectations of my colleagues and subordinates from me are in conflict.
- I am unable to fulfill the conflicting expectations of my peers.

Factor: Interrole Conflict
8 Items

- My personal interests remain neglected due to my involvement with work.
- I feel guilty about neglecting my family due to job demands.
- My job constrains me in meeting my cultural interests.

Factor: Person-Role Conflict
9 Items

- My idea of what my job should be is very different from what it really is.
- The work I do is not contributing towards achieving my personal aims and aspirations.
- The values in my workplace are in accordance with my personal values (reverse coded).
- I am unable to fulfill the conflicting expectations of my peers.

3.3.2. Role Ambiguity – Faced with Unclear Expectations

Definition of Role Ambiguity

As is the case with role conflict, the theoretical and conceptual roots of role conflict lie in the work of Kahn and colleagues (1964) and Katz and Kahn (1966). They define role ambiguity as "a direct function of the discrepancy between the information available to the person and that which is required for adequate performance of his role". Subjectively it is the difference between the actual state of knowledge and that which provides adequate satisfaction of his personal needs and values (Kahn et al. 1964, p. 73). Role ambiguity therefore captures uncertainties as to what exactly is expected of a person carrying out a role.

King and King (1990) refined the definition of role conflict further. They differentiate four forms of role ambiguity. The first three relate to task ambiguity, which they base on Kahn and colleagues' description of role ambiguity as resulting "from lack of information concerning the proper definition of the job, its goals and the permissible means for implementing them" (1964, p. 94). From this classification, King and King (1990) postulate three specific forms of role ambiguity:

- **Ambiguity about one's scope of responsibility** refers to uncertainty of how much a role actually entails and what exactly is required. For example, employees could ask themselves whether their job as a retail assistant also involves cleaning the store.
- **Ambiguity about the role behaviors necessary of fulfill ones responsibilities** refers to uncertainty about how responsibilities are to be met. This means that the employee may be unsure of how exactly he or she is expected to carry out a specific role. For example, an employee in a bank may be uncertain as to how exactly his superiors want him or her to behave when dealing with customers.
- **Ambiguity regarding role senders** refers to uncertainty about whose expectations must be met and what exactly different role senders expect of them. A bank teller may for example be unsure whether the expectations of his or her direct superior or another manager in the bank are relevant to certain role behaviors. They may be unsure whether to behave as detailed in the job description or as their colleagues do.

The second type of role ambiguity (and the fourth specific form) is related to the socioeconomical aspects of one's roles and performance.

- **Ambiguity on the consequence of one's actions on the attainment of one's goals and the wellbeing of oneself, the role set and the organization** refers to uncertainty on what and who is going to be affected by one's role behaviors. For example, a waiter may be unsure of who is going to be affected in a restaurant if he or she takes an order by a customer that is not on the menu (such as a customer requesting a dish to be prepared without oil).

Kahn and his colleagues (Kahn et al. 1964) stated that individuals are more likely to experience role ambiguity if they:

(1) cross boundaries,
(2) provide innovative solutions to non-routine problems, and

(3) experience diverse role expectations and demands from inside and outside the organization.

All of these criteria can be applied to frontline employees. They are in boundary positions and likely to be faced with demands from inside and outside the organization, for example managers and customers (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Chung and Schneider 2002; Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler 2009). Also, particularly in services, frontline employees are likely to often have to come up with novel solutions to problems due to the difficulties in precisely defining employee behaviors and predicting customer behaviors in the service encounter (Hartline, Maxham, and McKee 2000; Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1988).

Measurement of Role Ambiguity

Akin to role conflict, measures of role ambiguity used in the marketing and management literature are also rooted in organizational role theory (Kahn et al. 1964). As in the chapter on role conflict, I will give a short overview on some common measures of role ambiguity to help develop an understanding of the role ambiguity construct.

The most commonly used measure is the self-report measure by Rizzo House and Lirtzman (1970; see also Singh and Rhoads 1991). A study by Jackson and Schuler (1985) showed that 85% of studies on role ambiguity use this scale. In the 25 years since that study, the scale still remains highly popular (see for example Arnold et al. 2009; Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Kim, Knight, and Crutsinger 2009; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne 1998; Onyemah 2008; Singh 1998).

Rizzo, House and Lirtzman (1970) constructed 15 items based on the concepts by Kahn et al (1964). After factory analysis the final scale for measuring subjective role ambiguity consisted of six items (see table 4).

Table 4 : Measurement Items on Role Ambiguity by Rizzo et al. (1970)

1. I feel certain about how much authority I have.*
2. Clear, planned goals and objectives for my job.*
3. I know that I have divided my time properly. *
4. I know what my responsibilities are.*
5. I know exactly what is expected of me.*
6. Explanation is clear of what has to be done.*

* Items are reverse coded.

The scale developed by Rizzo and colleagues is a one-dimensional scale, capturing the overall ambiguity associated with a particular role. It does not address the breadth of role ambiguity as defined by Kahn et al. (1964) and King and King (1990). As with the role conflict measure developed by Rizzo et al. (1970), the role ambiguity scale has been much criticized in the literature (see for example Kelloway and Barling 1990; King and King 1990; Tracy and Johnson 1981). The main criticisms can be summarized as concerning (1) lack of clarity and precision of the items, (2) the lack of recognition of the multidimensionality of the underlying construct, (3) the failure to represent the breadth of role concepts and (4) poor discriminability (Singh and Rhoads 1991).

To address these issues, Singh and Rhoads (1991) developed a multidimensional measure of role ambiguity. Their measure is based on the work by King and King (1990) and the multidimensional measures addressing some dimensions of role ambiguity developed by Ford, Walker and Churchill (1975) and Chonko, Howell and Bellenger (1986). Over a series of three steps and two empirical studies they generated a 45-item measure capturing seven facets of role ambiguity. Four of these facets are divided further into different dimensions. Examples of items for these facets are given below in table 5.

Table 5: Examples for Measurement Items on Role Ambiguity by Singh and Rhoads (1991)

Facet	**Dimension**	**Item**
Company (9 items)	Flexibility (2 items)	How much freedom of action I am expected to have. How I am expected to handle nonroutine activities on the job.
	Work (4 items)	The sheer amount of work I am expected to do. Which tasks I should give priority.
	Promotion (3 items)	What I can do to get promoted. How vulnerable to job termination I am.
Boss (9 items)	Support (4 items)	To what extent my boss is open to hearing my point of view. How far my boss will go to back me up.
	Demands (5 items)	How to meet the demands of my boss. What aspects of my job are most important to my boss.
Customer (8 items)	Interaction (3 items)	How much I am expected to interact with my customers. How much service I should provide my customers.
	Objection (3 items)	How I am expected to handle my customers' objections. How I am expected to handle unusual problems and situations.
	Presentation (2 items)	Which specific company strengths I should present to customers. Which specific product benefits I am expected to highlight for customers.
Ethical (6 items)	External (2 items)	If I am expected to lie a little to win customer confidence. If I am expected to hide my company's foul-ups from my customers.
	Internal	How I should handle ethical issues in my job.

	(4 items)	What I am expected to do if I find others are behaving unethically.
Other managers (4 items)	-	How managers in other departments expect me to interact with them. What managers in other departments think about the job I perform.
Coworkers (5 items)	-	How my coworkers expect me to behave while on the job. How much information my coworkers expect me to convey to my boss.
Family (4 items)	-	About how much time my family feels I should spend on the job. How my family feels about my job.

In this scale, all of the facets of role ambiguity measured relate to a role sender (either a specific role sender, such as the boss, or a group standing for role senders, such as family or company). The only exception to this is the facet "ethical". What is interesting is that the facet "customer" does not treat role ambiguity in regard to uncertainty about the customers' expectations of the employee. While the wording of the items does not specify who the relevant expectations come from, it seems to relate more to a general expectation inherent to a particular role or job. This is very different from the other facets where the person or persons having the expectation are specified. Compare for example:

"*About how much time my family feels I should spend on the job."* (item from family facet)

and

"*How much I am expected to interact with my customers*." (item from customer facet)

The wording of the "customer" facet items are not tied to a specific person in the role set having the expectation, much like the items in the "company" facet. It may be interesting to also look at role ambiguity concerning customer expectations of the employee.

3.3.3. Consequences of Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity

As mentioned in the beginning of chapter 3.3, role stressors such as role ambiguity and role conflict have a significant impact on the productivity, attitudes and well-being of frontline employees as well as on organizational success. Churchill and colleagues (1985) show that role stress explains more variance in boundary-spanner performance than skill, motivation, personal aptitude or organizational factors.

The general consensus in the literature is that role stress has a negative impact on frontline employees and important outcome variables. This is supported by a large number of empirical studies. Role stress, in particular role conflict and role ambiguity, has been linked to lower work performance and quality (Churchill et al. 1985; Flaherty, Dahlstrom, and Skinner 1999; Singh 2000; Varca 1999). It has been shown to increase burnout, tension and turnover intentions and to reduce job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Brown and Peterson 1993; Brown and Peterson 1994; Chung and Schneider 2002; Churchill, Ford, and Walker Jr 1976; Hartline and Ferrell 1996; Jaramillo, Mulki, and Solomon 2006; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne 1998; Nygaard and Dahlstrom 2002; Singh 2000; Singh, Goolsby, and Rhoads 1994). Empirical studies have also found that role stress reduces the effort frontline employees put into their work (Brown and Peterson 1994) and their commitment to service quality (Schwepker Jr and Hartline 2005).

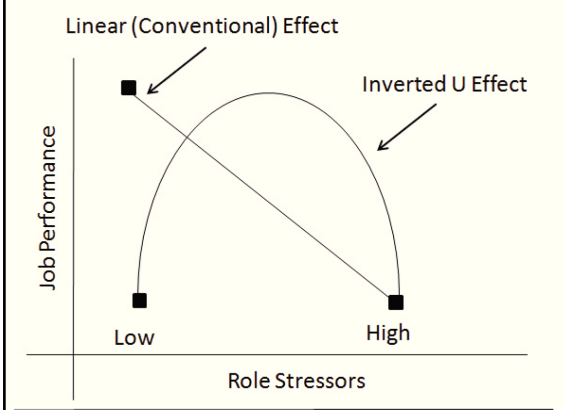
There are two main explanations in the literature as to why role stress should have such a detrimental effect on so many important personal and organizational outcomes. The first line of reasoning is that role stress overwhelms the frontline employees and binds cognitive and other resources that are then no longer available for important tasks (Cohen 1980; Kahn et al. 1964). The second line of argumentation is that role stressors leads to psychological withdrawal which then in turn leads to behavioral withdrawal (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Goolsby 1992). In other words, role stress leads frontline employees distancing themselves psychologically and emotionally from the situations in which role stress arises. This can for example lead to lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The psychological withdrawal then results in behavioral consequences, such as lower performance, absenteeism and turnover intentions (Goolsby 1992).

Most studies on the effects of role stressors assume a linear relationship: the more role stress, the stronger the detrimental effect – negative impact on desired outcomes, positive impact on undesired outcomes (Onyemah 2008; Singh 1998). In other words, role conflict and role ambiguity always have a harmful effect.

However, not all empirical studies support this view (Nygaard and Dahlstrom 2002). For example, Behrman and Perreault (1984) found a positive relationship between role conflict and performance. As well as these empirical findings casting some doubt on the linear perspective, evidence from the psychology literature on stress strongly implies a curvilinear, inverted-U relationship between role stressors and performance. Based on the clinical studies by Yerkes and Dodson (1908) and work by Selye (1956), moderate levels of stress are seen as beneficial to performance as they challenge employees to work at a higher energy levels (Levi 1972; McGrath 1970). Low and high levels on the other hand have a detrimental effect on performance. In other words, there is a "good" level of stress that heightens performance, whereas anything above or below that range reduces performance. But stress in this perspective is not inherently negative.

This view can be applied to role stressors, which are related to but distinct from actual felt stress. Stress is a psychological response to stressors, an emotional experience associated with nervousness, tension, strain, anxiety, exhaustion, depression and burnout (Cooke and Rousseau 1984). Stressors, such as role stress, cause stress. Following the curvilinear model, moderate levels of role stressors such as role conflict and role ambiguity should have a positive influence on performance, low and high levels should lower performance. Low levels of stressors may lead to low levels of stress, which can demotivate and hamper performance.

Figure 12: Linear and Curvilinear Model for Effect of Role Stress on Performance by Singh (1998)



Job performance is at the optimal level when role stressors are (1) low for the linear hypothesis and (2) at a moderate level for the curvilinear model.

Kahn and colleagues (1964) give explanations for a possible positive influence of role stress in their original work on role theory:

> *"To regard conflict simply as a disruption of an otherwise harmonious way of life is to overlook the fact that conflict often provides the basis for individual achievement and social progress. The same can be said for ambiguity, for while ambiguity implies a disorderliness that is antithetical to the very idea of organization, it also permits a kind of flexibility that can facilitate adaption to changing circumstances." (p.54)*

In support of the possible positive influence of role conflict, Weatherly and Tansik (1993) found that frontline employees often react to role stress by working harder. Singh illustrates the different assumptions of the linear and the curvilinear inverted-U perspective as shown in figure 12.

Although there is theoretical support for the inverted-U relationship between role stressors and performance and some empirical findings support the logic behind it, there is very little empirical support for the model itself. Studies by Singh (1998), Nygaard and Dahlstrom (2002), and Bhuian, Menguc and Borsboom (2005) all failed to find support for the curvilinear relationship. Onyemah (2008) argues that this may be due to methodical problems and that using samples with large heterogeneity may help overcome these issues. His study tries to address these problems by including salespeople from 30 different companies from five continents. The final sample includes over 2.500 people. Onyemah (2008) does indeed find support for an inverted-U relationship between role stressors and performance. He also shows that salespeople with longer tenured (i.e. more experience) are better able to cope with role stressors. For newly hired salespeople the role stressors also pass much more quickly from being functional (promoting productivity) to being dysfunctional. Their range of role stressor levels that support productivity is much narrower than that of more experienced employees.

In summary, role stressors such as role conflict and role ambiguity are generally seen as having a negative influence on frontline employee performance, attitudes and wellbeing. There is a large amount of empirical research supporting this view. Most of this research uses a linear model – more role stressors are always detrimental, less role stressors positive. The general recommendation of these articles is that companies should always aim to reduce both role conflict and role ambiguity.

Instead of the linear model, some researchers propose an inverted-U relationship between role stressors and performance. According to this, a moderate level of role stressors promotes productivity, while low and high levels hinder it. The recommendation to companies could thus be to lower, but also to maintain or even increase role conflict and ambiguity, depending on the current levels. While there is much theoretical support, there is very little empirical research available that has been able to support this model.

3.3.4. Selected Influences on Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity

Due to the considerable influence of role conflict and role ambiguity on many important outcome factors, researchers have aimed to better understand what aspects influence these role stressors (see for example Fisher and Gittelson 1983; Jackson and Schuler 1985; Michaels, Day, and Joachimsthaler 1987; Miles and Perreault Jr 1976; Rogers and Molnar 1976; Schaubroeck, Cotton, and Jennings 1989; Weeks and Fournier 2010). A variety of influencing factors have been identified, both on an individual and organizational level. In this chapter, I will give a short overview of factors that may be particularly relevant to this research project.

Influencing factors on an individual level

On the individual level identified antecedents include empathy (Varca 2009), self-efficacy (Mulki, Lassk, and Jaramillo 2008) as well as tenure (Onyemah 2008) and the perceived legitimacy of expectations (O'Brien, Hill, and Autry 2009).

Varca (2009) has shown that frontline employees working in a call center experience greater levels of role conflict the more empathy they feel for their customers. Empathy here is defined as “the ability to put yourself mentally in another person’s situation and understand how that person feels” (Varca 2004). The level of empathy invested by the frontline employees was measured using a seven item scale which described various job tasks related to emotional empathy. This included items such as “show patience with frustrated customer”, “show courtesy and manners”, “show empathy and express regret” and “develop rapport and credibility with customers” (Varca 2009, p.53). Respondents were asked how much time they spent with these tasks and how important this task was for success. Both the amount of time as well as the perceived importance of the task heightened the role conflict felt by the frontline employee. This implies that taking time to identify with the customer, to show empathic behaviors such as understanding, courtesy, and developing rapport come with emotional costs in the form of increased role conflict.

Self-efficacy has been identified as an individual characteristic that can reduce role conflict and role ambiguity (Mulki, Lassk, and Jaramillo 2008). It can be defined as an individual's belief in their ability to effectively perform tasks (Bandura 1994). In an organizational context, it relates to employees' confidence in their ability to address job situations. Studies of frontline employees have shown that employees with higher levels of self-efficacy report lower levels of role conflict and role ambiguity (Mulki, Lassk, and Jaramillo 2008). This is explained with the fact that employees with higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to see difficult job situations as a challenge rather than a threat (Bandura 1994) and to believe that they can control their work environment (Schaubroeck, Lam, and Lin 2000), which reduces the perceived role stress (Behrman and Perreault Jr 1984). It should be noted, however, that other researchers argue for the reverse causality: self-efficacy is negatively impacted by role conflict (Chebat and Kollias 2000). In other words, some researchers believe that high levels of role conflict lead to lower self-efficacy rather than self-efficacy reducing role conflict.

Tenure can reduce the perceived levels of role conflict and role ambiguity (Jackson and Schuler 1985; Onyemah 2008; Walker Jr, Churchill, and Ford 1975). The longer an employee works at a particular organization, the more he or she knows what is expected of him and the more they will have been exposed to company practices. They also possess a richer knowledge and more survival tactics and are better able to deal with unusual situations (Leong, Busch, and Roedder-John 1989). Their experience helps to reduce role stressors.

O'Brien, Hill and Autry (2009) looked at how retail employees deal with return episodes. Their study shows that the perceived legitimacy of the returns affected the level of role conflict experienced by the employees. This study is of particular interest as it looks at a research questions closely related to the aims of this project.

O'Brien and colleagues (2009) posit that retail frontline employees may feel role conflict during return episodes as they are faced with different expectations from the customer and their company. The retail company will incur a loss even during a perfectly legitimate return. There is also the risk of illegitimate returns, of customers abusing the return system. Many companies therefore set up rules for returns, such as time limits and the need for original wrapping, price tags still attached and the original receipt. These rules are designed to protect the company from wrongful returns and to help make the return system more manageable. The customers on the other hand want the best products and services at the lowest price possible. They act in their own interest, not that of the company. The frontline employee stands between the two parties, which can lead to role conflict even during a straightforward and legitimate return episode. O'Brien, Hill and Autry investigate how different forms of illegitimate return episodes influence the level of role conflict felt by the employees. They differentiate between the normative, cognitive and rules based legitimacy of customer returns (see table 6 for examples).

The authors found that a normatively illegitimate return lead to lower levels of role conflict than a normatively legitimate return. In other words, when a salesperson believed the customer to violate a normative rule, for example return a used article, they will find it easier to side with his or her company and his or her own value system and against the customer.

Table 6: Types of legitimate customer returns (O'Brien, Hill, and Autry 2009).

Type	Definition of legitimate return	Example for illegitimate return
Normative	Customer adheres to socially accepted norms.	Customer wants to return a used article.
Cognitive	Customer gives a sensible and comprehensible reason for the return.	Customer gives a nonsensical reason for return, e.g. wants to return a dress because it cannot be hung on a wire hanger.
Rules-based	Customer return falls within the rules the company has stipulated for returns.	Customer wants to return an article bought three weeks ago in a store with a two week return policy.

A cognitively illegitimate return, a return for which the customer gives nonsensical reasons, was found to result in higher levels of role conflict. This is explained by the frontline employee simultaneously trying to protect his employer from a wrongful return, which the illogical reasons given by the customer may signal, as well as trying to please the customer. In other words, a nonsensical reason makes it less easy for the salesperson to believe in the integrity of the customer and therefore puts him or her in a position between protecting the company and pleasing a potentially innocent customer.

Rules-based legitimacy was found to have no direct effect on role conflict. If the return is within the rules, the employee can both follow company guidelines and fulfill the customer's wishes. If the return is not within the rules, the employee has a clear company guideline he or she can use to explain to the customer why the return cannot be accepted.

Interaction effects were also analyzed. It was found that return that was normatively and rules-based illegitimate would decrease role conflict and that a return attempt that was cognitively illegitimate and rules-based legitimate increased role conflict. Interestingly, if the return attempt was rules-based illegitimate, role conflict was much higher when it was also cognitively legitimate – i.e. when the return attempt was against the rules but the customer could give a good and understandable reason for wishing for a return. Role conflict was also very high, if the return was rules-based legitimate, but normatively illegitimate – the customer was within the rules given by the company for returns, but his or her behavior went against social norms. An overview of all these hypotheses, the reasoning behind it and the results are given in table 7.

Table 7: Influence of perceived legitimacy during return episodes on role conflict (based on O'Brien, Hill, and Autry 2009, p. 257).

Hypotheses Legitimacy of return attempt	Effect on role conflict	Comment by authors	Result
H_1: A normatively illegitimate return attempt	Decrease	Employee resents the socially unacceptable behavior (employee is siding with management and/ or his or her own value system	H_1 is supported
H_2: A cognitively illegitimate return attempt	Increase	Employee wants to understand the reason for the return (employee does not know whether to side with the customer or with management and the organization	H_2 is supported
H_3: A rules-based illegitimate return attempt	No effect	Employee has no reason to be conflicted.	H_3 is supported
H_4: A normatively and rules based illegitimate return attempt	Decrease	The socially unacceptable behavior of the customer overrides the neutral effect of the illegitimate rules	H_4 is supported. Return attempts that are both normatively and rules-based illegitimate lead to very low role conflict. Rules based and normatively illegitimate lead to higher role conflict
H_5: A cognitively illegitimate but rules based return attempt	Increase	Employee wants to understand the reason for the legitimate return even if the customer is operating within the rules.	H_5 is supported. Rules based and cognitively illegitimate lead to higher role conflict Return attempts that are both cognitively and rules-based illegitimate lead to very low role conflict.
H_6: A cognitively legitimate but normatively illegitimate return attempt	Decrease	Employee understands the reason but the socially unacceptable behavior of the customer overrides the desire to help.	H_6 is not supported.
Note: Each illegitimate return attempt is in comparison to its opposite – so role conflict on a normatively illegitimate return attempt is compared to a normatively legitimate return attempt.			

These results strongly imply that frontline employees weigh the legitimacy of expectations from different role partners and that different types of legitimacy are considered. The frontline employee acts as a judge of each expectation before deciding how he or she acts and how much this behavior is in the interests of the different parties. Role conflict is therefore not something that the employee just feels as a passive response to differing expectations. To the contrary, the employee actively evaluates the different demands and their possible outcomes.

While the study by O'Brien and colleagues was undertaken in a retail context and looked at a very specific customer-employee interaction, it is conceivable that these results would also apply in other contexts where employees have to weigh the interests of their company and their customers. The perceived legitimacy of different requests may therefore play an important role in such decisions.

Influencing factors on an organizational level

On the organizational level, organizational climate and management styles have been identified as important influencers of role stressors (Jackson and Schuler 1992; Jaramillo, Mulki, and Solomon 2006; Schuler 1977; van der Velde and Class 1996). Researchers have found that management adequately communicating expectations, specifying procedures and clarifying responsibilities help to reduce role stress (House 1971; Michaels, Day, and Joachimsthaler 1987). Supportive leadership styles (Michaels, Day, and Joachimsthaler 1987; Singh 2000) and empowerment (Chebat and Kollias 2000) have also been shown to reduce role conflict and role ambiguity.

A further important organizational factor that impacts on role stress relates to the values employees perceive their company to have and their own agreement with those values. Researchers have shown that the ethical climate of an organization and ethical conflicts can have a distinct impact on role conflict and ambiguity (Chonko and Burnett 1983; Jaramillo, Mulki, and Solomon 2006; Schwepker Jr, Ferrell, and Ingram 1997; Schwepker Jr and Hartline 2005). Ethical climate refers to employees' perceptions of the organization's practices, procedures, norms, and values with regard to what is seen as acceptable and ethical behavior (Babin, Boles, and Robin 2000; Schwepker Jr, Ferrell, and Ingram 1997). Ethical climate can thus serve as a set of guidelines for the behavior of frontline employees and help answer the question of "what should I do?" (Trevino, Butterfield, and McCabe 1998p. 450), reducing role stressors. A climate promoting ethical behaviors is likely to reduce ethical conflicts of employees with regards to what behavior is expected of them and what they believe to be right (Chonko and Burnett 1983; Schwepker Jr, Ferrell, and Ingram 1997). An organization with a high ethical climate is also less likely to ask employees to act in an unethical manner towards customers, such as lying to the customer or misrepresenting the organization, again reducing role stressors (De Coninck 2010; Schwepker Jr and Hartline 2005).

3.3.5. Coping with Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity

As addressed in chapter 3.3.3 on the consequences of role stressors, role conflict and role ambiguity can lead to employees experiencing considerable stress and discomfort and therefore seeking for ways to alleviate the situation (Grover 1993; Katz and Kahn 1966, Singh 2000). In their work on role conflict, Kahn and colleagues (1964, see also Gross, Mason, and McEachern 1958) propose three potential course of action for employees: choosing between the conflicting role demands, avoiding the situation in which conflict arises, or finding a compromise. These options are briefly explained below.

- *Choice* - In terms of a role conflict arising from differing expectations by customers and a frontline employee's company, the first suggested course of action, choice, would involve the employee to side either with their company or the customer. So, if an insurance agent believes a customer's claim falls within a grey area and believes management expects him or her to deny the claim, they can decide to side with their company or with the customer and accept the claim.

  Research on role conflict often views this choice primarily in the context of the relative strength of the role demands (Grayson 2007; Gutek, Searle, and Klepa 1991). Role strength is often understood in terms of how much power and influence a role sender has over the role receiver, the cost of not complying with the demands and the importance and quality of the relative relationship (Grover 1993; O'Driscoll, Ilgen, and Hildreth 1992). This implies that when one role partner or role demand is very strong, salient and important to the employee and the other is comparatively weak with little or no costs involved in not meeting these demands, the employee will choose the first role partner's demands.

- *Compromising* - The second course of action involves finding a compromise. This can mean partially fulfilling both the demands of customers and of the company. For example, an insurance agent faced with a potentially invalid claim, which he or she believes the company expects them to deny and the customer expects to be accepted, the insurance agent could partially allow the claim, settling for example for a smaller sum.

- *Avoidance* - The third option involves the avoidance or withdrawal from the situation in which role conflict arises. This can mean actual physical withdrawal. Empirical studies have linked role conflict to higher levels of absenteeism and job turnover (Anton 2009; Chung and Schneider 2002; Rugulies et al. 2007).

  However, as physical withdrawal is not always a viable option, a second option is to psychologically withdraw, to emotionally distance oneself from the source (or sources) of stress (Goolsby 1992). Frontline employees may distance themselves from the job and company, as is indicated by studies linking role conflict to lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Singh 1998). It can also mean that employees distance themselves emotionally from customers, making it less important to them to adequately fulfill those customers' demands (Cheng and McCarthy 2010; Varca 2009).

As well as these three options introduced by Kahn and colleagues (1964), other possible ways in which employees may react to role conflict can be found in the literature. These include voice and deceit.

- *Voice* – This concept was introduced by Hirschman (1970). It involves addressing or changing the role demands, and actively seeking to control, alter and manage the role conflict situation (Goolsby 1992; Grover 1993). In the context of this research project, this could involve a frontline employee drawing management or customer attention to situations in which colliding expectations from different sides create conflict. Griffeth and colleagues (1999) point out that employees may respond to objectionable workplace conditions, such as situations creating role conflict, with citizenship type behaviors in an attempt to change the situation.

  Studies in the sales management literature have found that higher levels of role conflict increase the likelihood of salespeople to try and influence their organization and their management in an attempt to change situations (Deluga 1989; Nonis, Sager, and Kumar 1996). This also indicates that frontline employees may react to role stressors such as role conflict by actively striving for change.

- *Deceit* – Grover (1993) discusses a fifth option, lying and by extension deceit. Frontline employees may behave according to the expectations of one role partner and simply deceive the other side by pretending to have also met their expectations. For example, frontline employees could let their management believe that they acted according to company regulations while actually having violated them to be able to better meet the demands of a customer. Conversely, frontline employees may lead customers on to accept that they did everything they could in the customer's interests while in fact they followed the expectations of their company (such as telling a customer that a service has been performed more thoroughly than is the case to meet certain time efficiency standards).

  Other research has also found that employees use lying to ease situations in which role conflict can arise. A study by Scott (2003) on employee dishonesty towards customers in the airline industry found that one reason for lying was to avoid having to explain or reason with customers over company policy. While the author does not directly relate this to role conflict, it is a way of dealing with difficult situation by presenting inaccurate or incomplete information. In this way, the flight attendants could adhere to company policy, but give customers a false but understandable reason for doing so.

It can be argued that deceit and lying are not necessarily new ways of dealing with role conflict distinct from choosing, avoiding or compromising. If an employee fulfills one demand in a role conflict situation and not the other, then this is essentially choice. Lying and deceit are used to cover this action and avoid repercussions from the role partner whose demands were not fulfilled.

The ways of dealing with role ambiguity discussed in the literature are less diverse, but essentially similar. As role ambiguity refers to uncertainty and insufficient information on role demands (Katz and Kahn 1966), one possible way for employees to deal with this is to seek more information (Marginson 2006). Nonis and colleagues (1996) find that salespeople with higher levels of role ambiguity are more likely to try and influence their management. This would be actively addressing the problem and could be compared to the "voice" option described above.

Withdrawal is also a possible reaction to role ambiguity (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Goolsby 1992). As in the case of role conflict, this can be in the form of physical avoidance, such as absenteeism and turnover (Anton 2009; Rugulies et al. 2007), as well as behavioral and emotional withdrawal (Goolsby 1992; Singh and Rhoads 1991). It is also conceivable that lying and deceit are used to cover up insecurities and uncertainties.

3.4. Conclusion and Questions

This section gives a summary of the concepts discussed in the chapter. It also looks at some interesting questions for this research project that arise from the issues discussed.

Role theory offers a valuable foundation for understanding interactions between individuals in social settings. It has been used in a large variety of academic fields to help explain behaviors. In the marketing and management literature in particular, it has a prominent function in learning about employee behaviors in organizations.

Because role theory has been adopted and evolved in many different academic fields, different perspectives on or types of role theory exist. In the business literature, the organizational role theory by Kahn and colleagues (1964) and Gross (1958) is the most commonly used perspective. While this approach has often been criticized (e.g. Simpson and Carroll 2008; Wickham and Parker 2007), it remains the dominant and almost sole perspective in marketing and management research. Because of its widespread use in explaining employee behaviors within organizations, it offers a valuable basis for this dissertation.

Some literature differentiates between in-role and extra-role behavior or employees. Extra-role behaviors are those that employees carry out although they are not directly tied to their position or explicitly of them (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne 1998). In-role refers to behaviors and activities inherent to a certain job position (Williams and Anderson 1991).

Tepper, Lockhart, and Hoobler (2001) and others (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Graham 1991; Lam, Hui, and Law 1999; Morrison 1994) argue that most employee behaviors lie on a continuum between solely in- or extra-role activities. Employees' understanding as to what constitutes in-role behaviors, and thus is part of their job requirements, and what is extra-role can differ substantially from their employer's perception (Lam, Hui, and Law 1999).

This implies that it may be interesting during this research to gain an understanding of how frontline employees view their behaviors in situations in which they are caught between different expectations from the company and their customers. Does it make a difference if the conflict concerns in- or extra-role behaviors? If employees are aware that their perceptions of what is part of their job and what is not differs from their employers, does this affect how they deal with role conflict? These questions are not yet sufficiently answered by research.

One of the main research areas for which organizational role theory is used in business research is to better understand how to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of employees and organizations. Organizational role theory assumes that for an organization to function successfully, the network of roles within them functions effectively (Kahn et al. 1964). The focus of this research lies on role stressors, factors related to roles that can induce stress and impact organizational success.

The two role stressors of particular relevance for this research are role conflict and role ambiguity. Role conflict refers to situations in which an individual is confronted with two or more sets of pressure related to role expectations (Kahn et al. 1964). Depending on the sources of these pressures, the following four forms of role conflict can be differentiated: intrasender, intersender, interrole and person-role conflict (Katz and Kahn 1966). The scale most commonly used in marketing and management research was developed by Rizzo and colleagues (1970). The 8-item scale measures role conflict globally and does not differentiate between the different forms. Additionally, many authors use only some of the eight items (often only three or four), further reducing the scope of role conflict that is actually covered. However, as all of these role conflict facets result from conflict in different sources, it is possible that they have different impacts on employees. At the very least, it influences the recommendations for management on how to address role conflict.

For this research project, it could be interesting to try to understand what forms of role conflict are relevant from the perspective of employees when dealing with situations in which the perceived expectations from customers and managers or the company differ. For example, it could be simply a form of intersender conflict, where the conflict clearly results from the customer and the company voicing different expectations. It could also be intrasender, such as when management wants employees to deliver the best service, but also to spend only very little time on each customer. It is unclear whether these different types of role conflict would affect how employees deal with the situation.

Role ambiguity relates to uncertainty regarding role expectations. This can refer to doubts concerning the actual tasks and activities. King and King (1990) differentiate between ambiguity about the scope of responsibility of a particular role, that is how much it entails, ambiguity about the role behaviors needed to fulfill ones responsibilities, and ambiguity regarding role senders. A fourth form of role ambiguity relates to the consequences of carrying out a role (King and King 1990; Singh and Rhoads 1991). As with role conflict, the scale developed by Rizzo, House and Lirtzman (1970) is the most common scale used in marketing and management research, despite considerable criticism (King and King 1990; Tracy and Johnson 1981). The 6-item scale by Rizzo and colleagues (1970) again measures the construct globally and does not differentiate between different types of role conflict. A much more comprehensive scale later developed by Singh and Rhoads (1991) captures seven different facets of role ambiguity. Although this scale includes sources of ambiguity outside of the organization, such as family, ambiguity regarding the customer expectations is not included.

In the context of this research project, it would be interesting to explore frontline employee ambiguity regarding the role expectations put to them by customers and the effect this may have on their decisions regarding how to deal with conflicting expectations.

Role ambiguity and role conflict are generally believed to have a negative impact on employee wellbeing, attitudes and behaviors, and efficiency as well as on organizational success (Churchill et al. 1985; Singh 2000). Although some researchers believe that a moderate amount of role stress may improve performance (Bhuian, Menguc, and Borsboom 2005; Nygaard and Dahlstrom 2002; Singh 1998), there is very little empirical evidence that supports this (Onyemah 2008).

Because of the relevance of role stressors to important organizational outcomes, a lot of research looks at important influence factors. These have been found on the individual level as well as the organizational level. Individual factors include empathy (Varca 2009), self-efficacy (Mulki, Lassk, and Jaramillo 2008) as well as tenure (Onyemah 2008) and the perceived legitimacy of expectations (O'Brien, Hill, and Autry 2009). On the organizational level, climate and culture as well as management styles appear to have the most impact (Jackson and Schuler 1992; Jaramillo, Mulki, and Solomon 2006; Schuler 1977; van der Velde and Class 1996). It will be interesting to see if these factors also play a role in how frontline employees perceive and deal with conflicting expectations from customers and management or their organization.

Five different ways in which employees cope with role conflict are discussed in the literature. These include choosing between conflicting role demands, avoiding the situation in which conflict arises, or finding a compromise (Kahn et al. 1964), trying to voice concerns and change the situation (Hirschman 1970) and using lies and deceit to solve conflict (Grover 1993). Options for role ambiguity would essentially be similar.

In this research project, it would be interesting to see which if any of these strategies frontline employees employ to deal with the conflicting expectations. It would be also possible that entirely different techniques are used to deal with these situations.

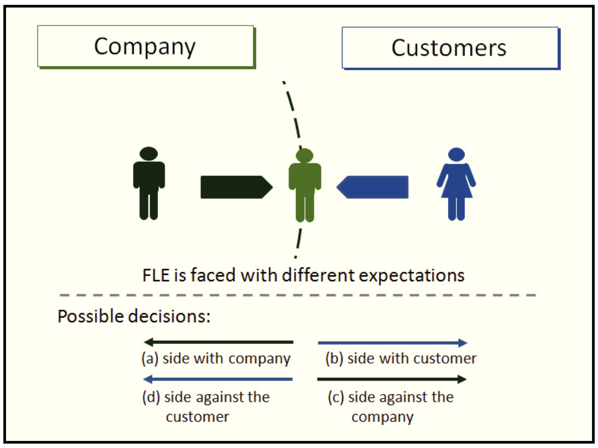
In conclusion, the literature and research on role theory offers a valuable basis for understanding the behavior of employees in the situations that I want to look at during my research. As well as giving possible answers and explanations, however, the research also poses new questions and leaves the field wide open for the empirical part of this research.

4. The Taking Sides Decision – Insights from Extant Research

In chapter 3 the first research question concerning the frontline employee in situations of conflicting expectations by the organization and customers was looked at in the context of role theory. However, insights from research using other theories and perspectives can also offer valuable information for understanding how employees react and feel in such situations.

Consider again the basic dilemma that is at the heart of this research – what happens in situations where a frontline employee is faced with different and possible incompatible expectations by customers and the company he or she works for. In such a situation, the frontline employee can decide to (a) *side with the company* or (b) *side with the customer*. But the decision to take a side does not have to be a decision *for* a side – it can also be *against* one or the other. So the frontline employee may (c) take the side of the customer because he or she wants to go *against the company* or (d) take the side of the company to go *against the customer* (see figure 13). Although the outcome of (a) and (d) as well as (b) and (c) would be similar, the underlying motivation could be very different. Of course, there could also be a combination of motivations, such as a desire to side with the customer as well as a wish to go against the company.

Figure 13: Possible decisions by FLE when faced with conflicting expectations



In this chapter I will look at each of these possibilities in turn and use insights from extant research that could offer possible explanations. I will begin by looking at reasons that may compel frontline employees to side with the company (chapter 4.1), then look at why they may side with the customer (chapter 4.2). Insights from literature on why frontline employees may decide to go against their company and the customer will be looked at in chapter 4.3 and chapter 4.4 respectively. Chapter 4.5 will give a brief summary.

4.1. Taking the Side of the Company

There is a lot of research available in the marketing and management literature that seeks to explore and understand why employees show favorable attitudes and benevolent behaviors towards their organization. Examples for such attitudes and behaviors are organizational commitment and loyalty (Allen and Meyer 1990; Hart and Thompson 2007; Moorman, Niehof, and Organ 1993), showing increased effort in work (e.g. Brown and Peterson 1994; Fu, Bolander, and Jones 2009), the willingness to work overtime (Lambooij et al. 2007), and to carry out discretionary extra-role behaviors (e.g. Bettencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie 2005; Organ 1988; Podsakoff et al. 2000).

Although taking the side of the company in a situation of role conflict is not explicitly explored in the research, there are concepts which go in a similar direction and may therefore have similar drivers and underlying explanations. One example for such a concept is organizational commitment. Meyer and Allen (1991) conceptualize organizational commitment as a three-component construct. Affective organizational commitment refers to employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Continuance commitment relates to employees being linked to organizations through the cost involved in leaving, and normative (also sometimes called moral) commitment captures a feeling of duty and obligation to stay with the organization. While organizational commitment both in its conceptualization and operationalizations is focused very much on whether employees intend to stay with an organization or not, affective commitment also includes feelings of solidarity. This is reflected in both the definition "attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization" (Meyer and Allen 1991, p.67) and items such as "I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own" (Allen and Meyer 1990, p.6).

Organizational citizenship behaviors and other forms of discretionary, extra-role behaviors also have some aspects in common with taking the side of the organization. Organizational citizenship behaviors (Organ 1988, p. 4) can be defined as behaviors that are "discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization." Siding with the organization in a role conflict situation that is open to interpretation can be seen as one such behavior.

In the literature on different forms of benevolent, pro-organizational attitudes and behaviors, three underlying theoretical explanations are particularly salient: social exchange theory, organizational identification based on social identity theory and self-categorization theory as well as theories more rooted in instrumental motivations such as impression management theory. In the following, I will give a short outline of these theories and of how they might help to shed light on the "taking sides" decision.

4.1.1. Social Exchange Theory – To Give and to Get

Social exchange theory is based on the premise that any interaction between individuals involves the exchange of resources (Blau 1964; Homans 1958). These resources can be of a tangible nature, such as goods or money, but also intangible, such as friendship, courtesy, approval or other social amenities. According to social exchange theory, individuals will enter and maintain relationships in the expectation that doing so will be rewarding (Blau 1964; Thibaut and Kelley 1959). Within the relationship, people try to balance the tangible and intangible relationship rewards received by giving resources of similar value.

Lambe, Wittman, and Spekman (2001) give a very good overview of social exchange theory. They identify four basic premises of social exchange theory:

- Exchange Interactions Result in Economic and Social Outcomes

  People enter into and maintain existing relationships because they expect that doing so will be rewarding. These rewards can be economic in nature, such as money or goods, but also social. In fact, Blau (1968) posits that often the social rewards are valued more, such as emotional satisfaction, social approval and respect.

- Social and Economic Exchange Outcomes Are Compared to Alternatives

  Being in a relationship involves costs to the involved parties, which include opportunity costs incurred for not being able to be in other relationships. These costs are compared to the rewards of the relationship. This includes not only the past outcomes, but also the anticipated future relationship outcomes. The net benefit of the relationship, that is the relationship outcomes minus the costs, is then compared to the benefits that other relationships may offer.

  If an individual believes the alternative relationships to provide greater social and economic rewards in the long run, they are likely to switch (Lambe, Wittmann, and Spekman 2001; Thibaut and Kelley 1959).

- Positive Outcomes over Time Increase Trust and Commitment

  Social Exchange is in large part governed by social "obligations". When providing another with a benefit, an individual must be able to trust that the other will reciprocate (Blau 1964; Homans 1958). Over time, a series of reciprocal relationship episodes fosters the growth of trust. Put simply, if over time an individual sees that the other member of the relationship gives back resources in at least a similar value as those given, he or she will increasingly trust the other person to reciprocate in future (Lambe, Wittmann, and Spekman 2001).

  This also means that receiving resources in a relationship creates an obligation to reciprocate. Blau (1968, p. 453) explains this by citing Aristotle: the benefits offered within a relationship are compared to a gift that is given "as to a friend, although the giver expects to receive an equivalent or greater return, as though it had not been a free gift but a loan."

  Social exchange theory posits that social exchanges in relationships begin with relatively minor transactions and that as the value of the rewards increases, so does the obligation to give more valuable rewards in return. The trust built through these transaction increases the commitment to the relationship, provided both parties are happy with the exchanges and no other, significantly more favorable alternatives are available.

- Positive Outcomes over Time Produce Relational Exchange Norms

  Social exchange is governed by norms, which are explicit or tacit mutually agreed upon rules for behavior (Homans 1958; Thibaut and Kelley 1959). These norms are developed over time as the parties in the relationship interact with each other. Because they guide the manner in which interactions take place and define acceptable behaviors, they help to reduce uncertainty (Thibaut and Kelley 1959).

  Norms can for example regulate how long each party in a relationship has for fulfilling an obligation created through receiving a reward from another or what types of behaviors or resources can be considered as valuable enough to discharge an obligation. Parties in a relationship adhere to such norms because they believe that doing so will be rewarded (Blau 1964; Emerson 1962)., for example by receiving more rewards and interaction from others (Homans 1958).

The four premises described above form the basis of social exchange theory. They are reflected in Homans's (1958p. 606) concise summary of social exchange theory, which captures the essence of the theory in just a few lines:

> *"Social behavior is an exchange of goods, material goods but also non-material ones, such as the symbols of approval or prestige. Persons that give much to others try to get much from them, and persons that get much from others are under pressure to give much to them. This process of influence tends to work out at equilibrium to a balance in the exchanges. For a person in an exchange, what he gives may be a cost to him, just as what he gets may be a reward, and his behavior changes less as the difference of the two, profit, tends to a maximum."*

Social exchange theory is commonly used to explain benevolent, pro-organizational employee behaviors such as citizenship behaviors (Bettencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie 2005; Konovsky and Pugh 1994), the willingness to work overtime (Lambooij et al. 2007) or exerting effort when fulfilling job tasks (Fu, Bolander, and Jones 2009). These behaviors may be ways in which employees want to fulfill an obligation created by having received a reward or to create an obligation for which a reward is expected (Korsgaard et al. 2010).

In a similar way, the decision to side with the company in a situation of role conflict may represent a social exchange offering in the employee's relationship with the company. This implies that similar causes may be responsible for the decision. In the following I therefore want to give a short overview over three of the most commonly discussed antecedents of pro-organizational behavior using social exchange theory.

Organizational Justice

Organizational justice relates to employees' perceived fairness in the workplace (Folger and Cropanzano 1998). It is usually understood to consist of three dimensions (Colquitt et al. 2001; Cropanzano, Bowen, and Gilliland 2007): distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. Cropanzano, Bowen and Gilliland (Colquitt et al. 2001; 2007, p. 36) offer a very useful overview of the content of these three justice dimensions, shown in table 8.

Table 8: Components of organizational justice
(Cropanzano, Bowen and Gilliland 2007, p. 36)

Components or Organizational Justice

Distributive Justice: Appropriateness of outcomes.

- **Equity:** Rewarding employees based on their contributions.
- **Equality:** Providing each employee roughly the same compensation.
- **Need:** Providing a benefit based on one's personal requirements.

Procedural Justice: Appropriateness of the allocation process.

- **Consistency:** All employees are treated the same.
- **Lack of Bias:** No person or group is singled out for discrimination or ill-treatment.
- **Accuracy:** Decisions are based on accurate information.
- **Representation of All Concerned:** Appropriate stakeholders have input into a decision.
- **Correction:** There is an appeals process or other mechanism for fixing mistakes.
- **Ethics:** Norms of professional conduct are not violated.

Interactional Justice: Appropriateness of the treatment one receives from authority figures.

- **Interpersonal Justice:** Treating an employee with dignity, courtesy and respect.
- **Informational Justice:** Sharing relevant information with employees.

Organizational justice perceptions can be seen as an evaluation of the exchange norms that have developed in a relationship (Bettencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie 2005) as well as an evaluation of relationship outcomes. For example, respect and courtesy, which are an aspect of interactional justice (Folger and Cropanzano 1998), would be an important social reward in a relationship (Blau 1964). Organizational justice has been identified as an important antecedent of pro-organizational behaviors, either directly or indirectly through other variables such as job satisfaction (Bettencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie 2005; Colquitt et al. 2001; De Coninck 2010; Korsgaard et al. 2010; Moorman, Niehof, and Organ 1993; Tepper, Lockhart, and Hoobler 2001).

Following the logic of social exchange theory, organizational justice could be a possible driver of employees' decision to side with their company. This behavior may be a way for employees to fulfill obligations or offer social rewards in a relationship where the perceived exchange norms are believed to be fair.

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support is defined as the „extent to which employees perceive that their contributions are valued by their organization and that the firm cares about their well-being“ (Eisenberger et al. 1986, p. 501). When perceived organizational support is high, employees feel valued and believe that their company looks out for them. Typical measurement items include “the organization really cares about my well-being”, “the organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work” and “help is available from the organization when I have a problem” (Eisenberger et al. 1986, p. 502).

The perceived organizational support is an exchange resource given to employees as part of social exchange episodes (Blau 1968; De Coninck and Johnson 2009). Following social exchange theory, these resources are seen as being more valuable if they are given voluntarily rather than due to compulsory rules (Blau 1964; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). For example, being allowed to go home five minutes early because of a personal matter should be valued more than a five-minute break enforced by labor regulations. This is because voluntary aid is seen as a sign of genuine respect and appreciation (Blau 1964; Cotterell, Eisenberger, and Speicher 1992).

Because perceived organizational support can be seen as a relationship reward given by the organization, it should lead to employees being more likely to want to “give back” to the organization in the form of pro-organizational behaviors, such as effort and citizenship and increase the commitment to the relationship. And indeed, there is strong evidence in the literature for such a connection (Aselage and Eisenberger 2003; De Coninck and Johnson 2009; Eisenberger, Fasolo, and Davis-LaMastro 1990; Fu, Bolander, and Jones 2009; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). Perceived organizational support may therefore also be an antecedent of employees’ willingness to take the side of the organization in a role conflict situation.

Job Satisfaction

Job Satisfaction can be defined as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (Locke 1976, p. 1300). In the context of social exchange theory it can also be understood as employees' “evaluation of the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards received from the firm” (Bettencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie 2005, p. 144). In other words, job satisfaction can be seen as reflecting whether or not an employee believes the exchange of resources between themselves and the organization to be positive or not. High job satisfaction should thus indicate satisfaction with the exchange relationship and lead to a greater readiness in offering benefits to the company. There is a lot of evidence that shows that job satisfaction leads to better job performance, citizenship and other pro-organizational behaviors (Anton 2009; Bettencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie 2005; Fu, Bolander, and Jones 2009; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne 1998; Podsakoff et al. 2000; Williams and

Anderson 1991). Again, using the social exchange logic, job satisfaction is a possible antecedent of employee willingness to take the company's side during situations of role conflict.

4.1.2. Organizational Identification – We Are in This Together

Organizational identification has a prominent place in the marketing and management literature in explaining employee attitudes and behaviors. The construct was developed by Ashforth and Mael (1989), who define organizational identification as "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) of which he or she is a member" (Mael and Ashforth 1992, p. 104). It is sometimes also defined as "the degree to which a member defines him- or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization" (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994, p. 239). In other words, organizational identification refers to a common identity that an employee shares with his or her organization.

Organizational identification is built on Henri Tajfel and John Turner's work on social identity and self-categorization theory (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Tajfel 1982; Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner 1984; Turner et al. 1987). According to these theories, individuals have not only one identity or self, but several selves that related to the perceived membership in different social groups (Haslam 2004; Tajfel 1982).

So what is a social identity?

A basic assumption of social identity theory is that people tend to classify others and themselves into various social categories. These categories can for example be based on age, gender, or organizational membership (Tajfel and Turner 1985). This social classification enables the individual to define his or her position in relation to the social environment. Social categories or groups with which an individual feels a oneness, a sense of belonging, lead to a social identity. The self is then defined in terms of the groups the person feels kinship with (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Turner 1984). These social identities are part of a person's self-concept and exist alongside a personal identity rooted in specific idiosyncratic characteristics, such as personality characteristics, abilities or interests. For example, I have a personal identity built on my unique perception of myself as well as social identities based on the groups I belong to – I am a woman, I am German, I am a doctoral student, I am a marketer. As such, social identification offers a partial answer to the question: "Who am I?" (Mael and Ashforth 1992; Turner 1984).

Different social cues and contexts can make different identities particularly salient (Haslam 2004; Tajfel and Turner 1985)[5]. This means that sometimes people think of themselves as independent individuals, as “I” (personal identity), and sometime they see themselves and others primarily in terms of membership in a particular group, as part of “we” and “us” (social identity; Ellemers, de Gilder, and Haslam 2004; Turner et al. 1994). Whatever identity is dominant at a particular moment, will strongly influence individual motivations, behaviors and social perceptions (Ellemers, de Gilder, and Haslam 2004; Knight and Haslam 2010).

As said at the beginning of this chapter, individuals can also identify themselves with an organization, so that being a member of that organization defines their self-concept (Ashforth and Mael 1989). The literature on organizational identification shows that people who strongly identify with their organization experience the organization’s successes and failures as their own (Mael and Ashforth 1992) and are more likely to adhere to organizational norms and values (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Haslam 2004; Mael and Ashforth 1995).[6]

As a strong and salient organizational identification makes an individual more likely to adopt organizational goals as their own and to want the organization to succeed (Haslam, Powell, and Turner 2000; Mael and Ashforth 1992; van Knippenberg, van Dick, and Tavares 2007), it also increases pro-organizational attitudes and behaviors. Research found that organizational identification positively influences job performance, citizenship behaviors and loyalty (Ellemers, de Gilder, and Haslam 2004; Haslam, Powell, and Turner 2000; Knight and Haslam 2010) and decreases turnover intentions (De Coninck 2011; Mael and Ashforth 1995; Wan-Huggins, Riordan, and Griffeth 1998). Organizational identification has also been shown to increase internal work motivation, defined as the willingness to exert effort to perform well (van Knippenberg 2000, p. 363). Millward and Postmes (2010) give empirical evidence for a relationship between organizational identification and the financial success of organizations. Their study of a business team in a global consumer goods company found that organizational identification lead to an increase in sales.

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[5] Some very good discussions and overviews of the conditions under which different definitions of the self become salient can be found in Spears et al. (2007), Ellemers et al. (1997) , Haslam, Powell, and Turner (2003) and Haslam (2000).

[6] The definition of organizational identification is similar to that of organizational commitment, particularly affective commitment. This has lead to some confusion regarding the independence of the constructs (Haslam 2004). However, the constructs, while related, refer to different mindsets. Organizational identification is part of the employee’s self-concept; it is part of who he or she sees him- or herself as. The fate of the organization and the employee become intertwined (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Ertürk 2010). Organizational commitment is more an attitude towards the organization, external to the self. The organization is an other, with whom one can engage in social exchange (Mael and Ashforth 1992). A more detailed discussion of this issue can be found in Riketta (2005), Ertürk (2010), and Meyer, Becker and van Dick (2005).

Organizational identification, however, can also have negative effects for the company. Turner, Pratkanis and Samuels' (2003) case study on Intel implied that organizational identification can lead to employees resisting changes to cherished aspects of the identity and thus hindering necessary organizational changes.

With regards to behaviors towards customers, results in research are mixed. There is empirical evidence that organizational identification increases employee's customer orientation (Homburg, Wieseke, and Hoyer 2009; Wieseke et al. 2007). This would imply that the employee tries to find the best solution for a customer and has the customer's best interests at heart (Saxe and Weitz 1982). However, a recent study by Umphress, Bingham and Mitchell (2010) has shown that organizational identification also increases employees' willingness to engage in unethical pro-organizational behaviors, which include behaviors that harm the customer. Three of the six items of Umphress and colleagues' (2010, p. 771) scale for measuring unethical pro-organizational behaviors address this issue in particular:

- If it would help my organization, I would exaggerate the truth about my company's products or services to customers and clients.
- If it would benefit my organization, I would withhold negative information about my company or its products from customers and clients.
- If my organization needed me to, I would withhold issuing a refund to a customer or client accidentally overcharged.

While these findings seem to contradict each other, the rationale behind each is similar. In the first case it is argued that employees engage in customer oriented behaviors because these are seen as one way to further the interests and aims of the organization. In other words, employees are customer oriented because they believe it to be in the organization's best interests to be so (Homburg, Wieseke, and Hoyer 2009). In the second case, again, employees' behavior is motivated by what they believe to be important to the organization: "In a sense, strong organizational identification may compel employees to disregard ethical standards (e.g., personal values, norms, and cognitive processes) in favor of behaviors that ostensibly aid the organization" (Umphress, Bingham, and Mitchell 2010, p. 770). In each case, what motivates the employee is his or her belief of what is in the organization's interest.

What does this imply for the research questions of this dissertation project? In situations of role conflict between expectations of the organization and the customer, employees with high levels of organizational identification would be expected to side with the organization. However, as shown by Turner, Pratkanis and Samuels' (2003) case study, employees' perception of what is in the organizations' interests may not be the same as management's perceptions. In this case, organizational identification may lead to employees acting customer-oriented and siding with the customer, as this furthers the organization's interests as the employee perceives them.

4.1.3. Instrumental Motives – In It for the Money

The motives for pro-organizational behaviors, and thus for taking the side of the organization in situations of role conflict, discussed so far can be described as altruistic or pro-social (Grant and Mayer 2009; Rioux and Penner 2001), in that the employees' aim is to help the organization. This can be because they wish to engage in social exchange and fulfill or create an obligation (chapter 4.1.1) or because they identify with the organization and adopt the perceived organizational aims as their own (see chapter 4.1.2). As well as these motives, however, employees may also engage in pro-organizational behaviors to further personal goals.

In the marketing and management literature, impression management motives are seen as relatively more selfish or self-oriented motives for pro-organizational behaviors (Bolino 1999; Grant and Mayer 2009). Impression management concerns the manner in which people attempt to influence the perception others have of them, the ways in which they attempt to manage others' impression (Rosenfeld, Giacalone, and Riordan 1995). This can include working harder and engaging in behaviors that are seen as helpful, valuable and loyal to impress others (Yun, Liu, and Takeuchi 2007).

Bolino (1999) was among the first to point out that organizational citizenship behaviors, discretionary pro-organizational behaviors which are not recognized by an organizations' formal reward system (Organ 1988), can be motivated by impression management motives as well as pro-social motives. In his eloquently named article "Citizenship and Impression Management: Good Soldiers or Good Actors?" (Bolino 1999) he points to the similarity between pro-socially motivated organizational citizenship behaviors (good soldier) and impression management behaviors (good actors).

Some empirical studies support the link between impression management motives and citizenship behaviors. Rioux and Penner (2001) developed a scale to measure impression management motive (see table 9) and received mixed results. They found that impression management motives explained incremental variance in sportsmanship (tolerating difficult circumstances on the job without complaint), but not other facets of citizenship behaviors (Rioux and Penner 2001, p. 1312). This may, however, be due to the scale they developed, which includes a desire for more recognition and rewards as well as more self-protective items (Rioux and Penner 2001).

Table 9: Impression Management Motive (Rioux and Penner 2001, p.1308)

Impression Management Motive Scale

1. To avoid looking bad in front of others.
2. To avoid looking lazy.
3. To look better than my coworkers.
4. To avoid a reprimand from my boss.
5. Because I fear appearing irresponsible.
6. To look like I'm busy.
7. To stay out of trouble.
8. Because rewards are important to me.
9. Because I want a raise.
10. To impress my co-workers.

Grant and Mayer (2009) found that impression management motives strengthen the relationship between pro-social motives and affiliative citizenship behaviors, that is citizenship behaviors that promote existing work processes and relationships (Van Dyne, Cummings, and Parks 1995). In other words, employees with pro-social motives are more likely to engage in pro-organizational behaviors if they also have impression management motives. They are also more likely to engage in citizenship behaviors that satisfy both motives, that both “do good and look good” (Grant 2008; Grant and Mayer 2009, p.902).

Yun, Liu, and Takeuchi (2007) also investigate the link between impression management motives and pro-organizational behavior. They do not use the scale by Rioux and Penner (2001) and instead capture the impression management aspect using what they call “self-enhancement motive”. They define this as “an individual employee’s sensitivity to other people’s perception of him or her and the employee’s level of motivation to adapt his or her behavior in order to project a good self-image to others” (Yun, Liu, and Takeuchi 2007, p.749, see table 10). They found that employees’ self-enhancement motive was positively related to organizational citizenship behaviors towards the organization.

Table 10: Self-Enhancement Motive (Yun, Liu and Takeuchi 2007, p.756)

Self-Enhancement Motive Scale

1. I intend to change my behaviors to create a good impression to others.
2. I try to modify my behaviors to give good images to others.
3. It is important to me to give a good impression to others.
4. I like to present myself to others as being a friendly and polite person.
5. I am sensitive to the impression about me that others have.
6. I try to create the impression that I am a “good” person to others.

There is also some support in the sales literature that impression management motives and other self-oriented motives may lead to employees engaging in pro-organizational behaviors. Le Bon and Merunka (2006) find that sales people’s desire for upward-mobility, their wish to further their career, positively influences their effort towards gathering market information. A study by Miao, Evans and Shaoming (2007) shows that employees’ recognition and compensation seeking motive positively impacts their performance.

Empirical evidence in the literature shows that engaging in organizational citizenship behaviors can result in better management perceptions and the evaluation of employee performance (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Fetter 1993; Podsakoff et al. 2000). Yun, Liu, and Takeuchi (2007) found that management was more likely to award rewards (such as a salary increase, promotion, or a high-profile project) to employees who engage in organizational citizenship behaviors.

In summary, it can be said that self-oriented motives such as impression management motives can cause employees to engage in pro-organizational behaviors, even if these are not directly recognized by formal reward systems in the organization (as is the case with citizenship behaviors). Doing so may also lead to actual rewards from the organization.

Regarding this research project, the findings discussed in this chapter imply that employees may choose to side with the organization for self-oriented or selfish reasons. Siding with the organization may be a form of impression management, with which the employee wants to project a good image of him- or herself in the organization. As is the case of organizational citizenship behaviors, these self-oriented motives may be held alongside other, more altruistic and social motives (Bolino 1999; Grant and Mayer 2009).

4.2. Taking the Side of the Customer

In this chapter I will explore possible motives of frontline employees for siding with the customer. What could cause them to feel close to the customer and to decide in favor of the customer rather than their own organization? In the marketing and management literature, two possible explanations appear particularly relevant. The first is customer orientation, the second concerns feelings of rapport and even friendship between employees and customers. In the following, a short outline of these areas will be given. I will also address how they might help to further our understanding of why employees may take the side of the customer.

4.2.1. Customer Orientation – The Customer's Best Interests at Heart

Customer orientation refers to a focus on identifying and fulfilling customer needs and keeping their best interests in mind (Knight, Kim, and Crutsinger 2007; Saxe and Weitz 1982).The customer orientation construct as a behavior of salespeople was first introduced in the seminal paper by Saxe and Weitz (1982). They describe customer orientation as "the degree to which salespeople practice the marketing concept by trying to help their customers make purchase decisions that will satisfy customer needs." (1982, p. 344). Customer-oriented employees aim to increase long-term customer satisfaction and avoid behaviors which are likely to decrease satisfaction. Customer-oriented behaviors are contrasted by selling-oriented behaviors, which are focused on short-term results and an increase in sales, even if this leads to customer dissatisfaction. Examples for typical measurement items for both orientations are given in table 11.

In 2002, Brown and colleagues developed a different concept of customer orientation with frontline service employees in mind. They defined customer orientation as an "employee's tendency or predisposition to meet customer needs in an on-the-job context" (2002, p. 111). Unlike Saxe and Wirtz (1982), they see customer-orientation not as a behavioral construct, but as a surface-level personality trait in a hierarchical personality model.

The hierarchical personality model posits that personality traits exist at various levels of abstraction (Allport 1961; Brown et al. 2002; Mowen and Spears 1999). Basic personality traits, such as introversion, agreeability, and conscientiousness, combine with a specific context,

Table 11: Scale for Customer and Selling Orientation (SOCO, Saxe and Weitz 1982, p.345-6)

Customer Orientation *(consists of 12 items)*	**Selling Orientation** *(consists of 12 items)*
1. I try to help customers achieve their goals.	1. I try to sell as much as I can rather than to satisfy a customer.
2. A good salesperson has to have the customer's best interest in mind.	2. If I am not sure a product is right for a customer. I will still apply pressure to get him to buy.
3. I offer the product of mine that is best suited to the customer's problem.	3. It is necessary to stretch the truth in describing a product to a customer.
4. I answer a customer's questions about products as correctly as I can.	4. I pretend to agree with customers to please them,
5. I try to figure out what a customer's needs are.	5. I imply to a customer that something is beyond my control when it is not.

such as being a frontline service employee, to produce surface traits. These surface traits in turn are an enduring disposition to behave in a certain way within the context. They are closer to the behaviors needed in the service context than the basic personality traits, and so are more reliable predictors of behavior (Brown et al. 2002; Donavan, Brown, and Mowen 2004; Mowen and Spears 1999). Brown and colleagues (2002) differentiate between two components of customer orientation: a needs dimension which relates to employees belief in their ability to satisfy customers and an enjoyment dimension which reflects the extent to which employees enjoy interacting with customers. The first of these dimensions, need, is based on Saxe and Weitz's (1982) definition of customer orientation, the second was developed by Brown and colleagues (2002). For a better understanding of these dimensions, the measurement items are given in table 12.

Table 12: Scale for Customer Orientation (Brown et al. 2002, p.118)

Customer Orientation - Need	**Customer Orientation - Enjoyment**
1. I try to help customers achieve their goals.	1. I find it easy to smile at each of my customers.
2. I achieve my own goals by satisfying customers.	2. I enjoy remembering my customers' names.
3. I get customers to talk about their service needs with me.	3. It comes naturally to have empathy for my customers.
4. I take a problem-solving approach with my customers.	4. I enjoy responding quickly to my customers' requests.
5. I keep the best interests of the customer in mind.	5. I get satisfaction from making my customers happy.
6. I am able to answer a customer's questions correctly.	6. I really enjoy serving my customers.

Customer orientation measured as a behavior has been found to lead to greater customer satisfaction (Reynierse and Harker 1992) and better job performance (Boles et al. 2001; Jaramillo et al. 2008; Saxe and Weitz 1982). Brown and colleagues (2002) show that customer orientation as a personality trait can strengthen the positive relationship of other, basic personality traits and job performance. A study by Donavan, Brown and Mowen (2004) found that this type of customer orientation can also lead to pro-organizational behaviors and attitudes, such as organizational citizenship and commitment.[7]

What does this mean in the context of this research project? In situations where frontline employees are faced by conflicting expectations and interests of customers and organizations, customer-oriented employees may be more likely to side with the customer. Two possible explanations come to mind.

1. According to the definition by Saxe and Weitz (1982), customer-oriented selling means increasing long-term customer satisfaction and avoiding behaviors which might lead to dissatisfied customers, even if this means losing a sale in the short-term. It is therefore possible, that customer oriented frontline employees choose to side with the customer to increase customer satisfaction and ensure possible long-term benefits for the company. In this case, the employee would be siding with the customer because he or she believed it to be in the long-term interests of the organization.

2. A second possibility is that highly customer-oriented frontline employees decide to side with the customer without regard to whether this is in the long-term interests of the company. While studies on customer-orientation find that it promotes the interests of an organization, as it improves employee performance, customer satisfaction and can even lead to citizenship behaviors, the concept itself is not explicitly pro-organization, but pro-customer. This is illustrated well in the definitions of customer orientation:

   Saxon and Weitz (1982, p. 344):

   > *"the degree to which salespeople practice the marketing concept by trying to help their customers make purchase decisions that will satisfy customer needs."*

   and Brown and colleagues (2002, p. 111)

   > *An "employee's tendency or predisposition to meet customer needs in an on-the-job context."*

   Both implicitly address the organizations interests. The first by stressing that the aim is to help the customer make a purchase decision and thus to promote sales, the second by referring to the on-the-job context which would include that the employee is working for the organization. Both, however, focus on the customer's needs. This is even more evident in the operationalizations of these constructs (see tables 11 and 12). The items clearly focus

[7] Other conceptualizations of customer orientation have also been developed. Hennig-Thurau (2006) developed a customer orientation construct with the four dimensions technical skills, social skills, motivation and decision making authority. He showed that this customer orientation was linked to customer satisfaction and commitment. It is excluded here because it measures consumers' perceptions of employee customer orientation. Customer orientation has also been conceptualized at the organizational level (2004).

on the customer. An employee scoring highly on either of the measures of customer orientation could decide to side with the customer, with his or her "best interests in mind" (Brown et al. 2002; Saxe and Weitz 1982), even if this is against the company's interests or orders.

Customer orientation could therefore lead frontline employees to side with the customers, either in an effort to promote long-term interests of the company or because the customers' interests are given a high priority.

4.2.2. Commercial Friendship – Helping Out a Friend

The nature of the relationship between frontline employees and customers has received much attention in the marketing literature (Beatty et al. 1996; Bendapudi and Berry 1997; Crosby, Evans, and Cowles 1990). One finding of this research is that customers receive not only functional benefits from this relationship, such as having a service performed, but also social and relational benefits (Beatty et al. 1996; Goulter and Ligas 2004). Rosenbaum (2006; 2009) shows that employees can offer customers social support, such as companionship, emotional support, for example by listening to personal problems, and instrumental support (such as helping customers with tasks outside of the employee's normal job tasks, for example carrying a heavy bag).

The close interaction between frontline employees and customers and the nature of the interaction between them, such as offering and receiving social and relational support and disclosing personal information, can encourage the formation of strong, personal bonds (Price and Arnould 1999; Rosenbaum 2009). Price and Arnould (1999) illustrate how these bonds can develop into commercial friendships. Commercial friendships share many characteristics of their private counterparts, but they are bound to a specific commercial context. Within this context, the employee and the customer meet as friends, although the friendship is not pursued outside of the particular commercial context. For example, an employee in a hair salon and a customer having his or her hair cut by the employee treat each other as friends during the time the customer is in the salon. They may use their first names, tell each other personal information out of their private lives, show genuine concern and interest in each other and even exchange gifts and tokes of affection (Price and Arnould 1999). However, this behavior is then limited to the customer's appointments in the salon and does not take place outside the salon.

If friendship or elements of friendship develop in employee-customer relationships, then this can impact the attitudes and behaviors of both parties (Grayson 2007; Price and Arnould 1999). The impact of friendship on business relationships has been studied in a range of different fields and industries. These include business-to-consumer settings, such as hair styling (Price and Arnould 1999), direct selling and network marketing (Frenzen and Davis 1990;

Grayson 2007), and retailing (Beatty et al. 1996), as well as business-to-business settings such as advertising agencies and their clients (Haytko 2004). Geiger and Turley (2003) and Swan and colleagues (2001) looked at the relationship between sales people and their business clients in a variety of industries, ranging from advertising and media to telecommunications and real estate.

Overall, these studies find that the effect of feelings of friendship in employee-customer relationships is positive. It has been shown to lead to greater customer satisfaction, loyalty and positive word-of-mouth (Beatty et al. 1996; Bendapudi and Berry 1997; Price and Arnould 1999) and greater profitability of relationships (Grayson 2007). Close personal relationships in business-to-business settings can also positively impact job satisfaction (Haytko 2004) and increase the efficiency and openness of interactions, and positively influence the relationship outcomes (Geiger and Turley 2003; Grayson 2007; Haytko 2004).

However, as well as positive effects many of the above studies point to inherent conflicts in relationships that have both economic and friendship elements (see also Heide and Wathne 2006; Price, Arnould, and Tierney 1995). The fact that an employee and a customer are friends can lead to expectations that are opposed to expectations grounded in the business part of the relationship (Grayson 2007). This conflict could also potentially be reflected in situations of role conflict and impact employees' decision on whose side to stand on.

For a better understanding of this conflict and of how friendship can influence expectations in the employee-customer relationship, it is important to define what is meant by friendship. Researchers on commercial friendships and friendship in business settings identify four elementary properties of friendship (Grayson 2007):

1. **Intimate self-disclosure**: within friendships, individuals are expected to share personal information with each other (Grayson 2007; Swan et al. 2001). In fact, self-disclosure, the sharing of personal thoughts, ideas, wishes, problems, and fears, can be an important element in friendship formation (Fischer 1982; Hays 1985; Price and Arnould 1999). The quality and level of self-disclosure can differentiate friends from acquaintances (Cozby 1973; Hays 1985), and sharing information that is perceived to be intimate and personal can define a relationship as friendship (Haytko 2004).

2. **Voluntary social interaction**: regular and frequent social interaction is seen as central to the formation and maintenance of friendship (Allan 1979; Hays 1985; Price and Arnould 1999). This interaction should be based on a desire of seeing or interacting with each other, rather than in outside demands or because of convenience (Allan 1989; Fischer 1982; Haytko 2004). A study by Hays (1989) found that close friends meet more frequently and in a more deliberate manner and that interactions were more likely to take place in a personal setting, such as at home, than interactions with casual friends.

3. **Communal orientation:** this aspect concerns the level of expected reciprocity in relationships. Friendships can vary along a continuum from agentic to communal (Price and Arnould 1999). More agentic relationships are characterized by relatively explicit rules for reciprocity and closer to a "tit for tat" mentality. There is less emotional attachment, and the relationship is likely to be maintained only as long as the benefits exceed the costs (Rawlins 1992). Communal oriented relationships on the other hand are characterized by more flexible and generous rules for reciprocity, and more likely to involve deep emotional attachment and commitment (Rawlins 1992). Benefits given in these relationships are meant to be given freely and not to create a feeling of obligation (Grayson 2007).

   This is echoed by the results of a study by Hays (1985). He found that the exchange of resources between two individuals was monitored much more closely in casual friendships than in close ones. He also found that the cost of interaction (such as boredom, irritation and time) was more important in evaluating casual friendships than close ones. In close friendships, the costs were less important and the benefits received were valued more strongly.

4. **Intrinsic orientation:** this means that the friendship should be important to the parties involved for its own sake. Friends are expected to be friends because they want to, because they enjoy being friends (Carrier 1999; Hays 1989), rather than because of any extrinsic benefit the relationship may offer (Grayson 2007; Price and Arnould 1999). The perception that one of the partners has an instrumental motive to sustain the friendship, is likely to damage the relationship (Allan 1979; Carrier 1999).

Friendships are characterized by all four of these aspects, although the extent to which they are present can vary (Price and Arnould 1999). For example, people who see each other as close friends may see each other only rarely (Allan 1989). The presence of one or more of these aspects fosters friendship, but it does not necessarily lead to friendship and therefore the appearance of the other aspects. Work colleagues may meet and interact frequently without feelings of friendship developing. A similar example given by Grayson (2007) is that of a patient disclosing intimate information to a therapist. This need not lead to friendship, as this relationship is not likely to be inherently enjoyable and both the patient and the therapist have instrumental motives for the relationship.

Business relationships differ from friendships in that they are inherently instrumental. The parties interact to achieve aims and receive benefits that have value outside of the relationship (Grayson 2007; Mandel 2006). It is this contrast between the intrinsically oriented friendship and extrinsically oriented business relationship that leads to considerable tension when both are combined (Heide and Wathne 2006; Price and Arnould 1999; Rawlins 1992; Swan et al. 2001). Tension can also arise regarding other aspects of friendship. For example, sales people in commercial friendship may feel that their work requires them to limit the amount of information they share (Geiger and Turley 2003; Swan et al. 2001), which conflicts with the expectation of openness and honesty in friendships (Cozby 1973; Fischer 1982).

Because of the possible benefits to each party in being friends, there is also an incentive to both employees and customers to build a friendship, or at least to be perceived as a friend (Haytko 2004; Price and Arnould 1999; Rosenbaum 2009). Studies on friendships developing in a commercial setting find that asymmetrical friendships exist, situations in which only one party sees the relationship as a friendship, while the other just plays along. As both parties are usually aware that there are at least also instrumental motives for a friendship, this aspect can also influence the parties' evaluation of the relationship.

The conflict between the expectations arising from friendship and the inherent needs of a business relationship may also be a reason why some people strictly divide between the two types of relationship. Several studies on commercial friendships have found a significant minority who did not want to be friends with someone with whom they were also in a business relationship with (Geiger and Turley 2003; Goulter and Ligas 2004; Price and Arnould 1999).

In summary, it can be said that friendship can develop between employees and customers. These commercial friendships are usually bound to the context in which they develop – within this context, the employee and the customer treat each other as friends, but the friendship is not carried to other social areas. Commercial friendships offer benefits to both employees and customers. These can be social and relational benefits, such as emotional support and trust, as well as more business related outcomes, such as customer satisfaction and loyalty.

However, commercial friendships also inherently involve tension due to the different expectations and orientations of friendship and business. Friendship is associated with openness and self-disclosure, of a communal orientation and voluntary interaction and in particular of an intrinsic orientation. This clashes with the instrumental and extrinsic orientation of a business relationship. The potential benefits of a commercial friendship can also offer incentives to fake feelings of friendship. The conflict between disinterested friendship and instrumental business motives can create difficulties in a relationship (Swan et al. 2001) and may be an explanation why some people avoid mixing the two.

What does this mean for the research question of this project? In cases where a frontline employee feels friendship for a customer or perceives that the customer has feelings of friendship, the intrinsic and disinterested expectations of friendship are likely to be a cause of tension. In situations where a frontline employee then stands between the expectations of the company and a customer and friend, he is or she is likely to feel an even higher level of conflict. As a friend, the frontline employee may feel obliged to forgo chances for profit either for him- or herself or his or her company in favor of helping a friend.

4.2.3. Rapport and Empathy – Feeling a Natural Connection

Table 13: Scale for Rapport (Gremler and Gwinner, 2000)

Rapport
1. In thinking about my relationship with this employee, I enjoy interacting with this employee.
2. This employee creates a feeling of "warmth" in our relationship.
3. The employee relates to me well.
4. In thinking about my relationship, I have a harmonious relationship with this person.
5. This employee has a good sense of humor
6. I do look forward to seeing this person.
7. I strongly care about this employee.
8. This person has taken a personal interest in me.
9. I have a close relationship with this person.

In the marketing literature rapport has been studied mostly in the context of personal selling (e.g. Campbell, Davis, and Skinner 2006; Weitz, Castleberry, and Tanner 1999), although there is a growing body of research in the service literature since Gremler and Gwinner's (2000) study on customer-employee rapport in services.

Gremler and Gwinner (2000) define rapport as resulting from a customer's perception of the interaction with the employee and a personal connection between employee and customer. This personal connection reflects a bond between the two individuals, a feeling of affiliation and the ability to relate to each other (Macintosh 2009). To illustrate the concept of rapport, the measurement items are given in table 13.

Rapport has been shown to be positively related to customer satisfaction, positive word-of-mouth and loyalty (Gremler and Gwinner 2000; Macintosh 2009). In a study on service recovery, DeWitt and Brady (2003) found that customers who felt rapport with the employee are less likely to complain, less likely to spread negative word-of-mouth and show greater repurchase intention.

Interestingly, rapport in these cases is conceptualized and measured from the customer's viewpoint. Rapport, however, could also be felt by the employee, in that he or she finds the interaction with the customer to be enjoyable and senses a feeling of communality and kinship between them. This could then lead to greater loyalty of the employee towards the customer. A study by Varca (2009) has shown that feelings of empathy towards a customer, of putting oneself in the other's situation and trying to understand how that other person feels, increases role conflict. As rapport is associated with empathy (Coan 1984; Smyth and Mitchell 2008), it is likely that it would increase the empathy towards a customer.

Rosenbaum and Walsh (2011) found that employees offer considerable benefits to customers if they perceive that they have something in common, such as sexual orientation or ethnicity, and this communality is also based on being a distinct and marginalized minority. They refer to this as service nepotism, and looked at qualitative evidence from American gay men and ethnic Turks residing in Germany. Benefits offered to customers included monetary discounts, complimentary products and a measurable service improvement. While this form of personal bond is extreme, similar though less pronounced behaviors could also be found in other cases in which a personal bond founded on perceived similarities develops between customers and employees.

Feelings of rapport, of enjoyable interactions and a personal connection, could thus lead employees to take the customer side in cases of role conflict.

4.3. Siding Against the Company

As pointed out at the beginning of chapter 4, frontline employees may decide to support the customer's side in a situation of role conflict not as an act of siding with the customer, but to side against the company. The decision to support the customer when there are contradictory expectations may thus not be pro-customer, but contra-organization.

This chapter will explore possible motives and rationales behind the decision to stand against the company. Why might employees go against the expectations of their company and decide to act in a different manner? In the marketing and management literature, this question is addressed by research on employee deviance. In the following, a short outline of this research will be given. A particular focus will be placed on possible explanations for such deviant behaviors. At the end of the chapter, I will also look at how the insights from this research may help us understand why employees may side against their company in a situation of conflict between organizational and customer expectations.

Workplace Deviance

There is a growing body of research that looks at employee behaviors that contravene important organizational norms and expectations. These behaviors have been looked at under a variety of names, such as anticitizenship behavior (Ball, Klebe Trevino, and Sims 1994), counterproductive work behaviors (Fox and Spector 1999; Spector and Fox 2002), organizational misbehavior (Vardi and Weitz 2002; Vardi and Wiener 1996), non-compliant behavior (Puff 1987) and workplace deviance (Robinson and Bennett 1995). Of these concepts, workplace deviance has received the greatest share of research attention (Ferris, Brown, and Heller 2009; Jelinek and Ahearne 2006).

Robinson and Bennett (1995, p. 556) define workplace deviance as "voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both". This definition addresses several important issues.

Firstly, the behaviors are voluntary in that employees choose to behave in a deviant way. Employees engage in this behavior because they choose to and are either motivated to do so or lack the motivation to behave in a more conforming manner (Bordia, Restubog, and Lang 2008; Robinson and Bennett 1995).

Secondly, the behavior is deviant because it departs from the norms generally accepted within a certain social group, in this case an organization. Robinson and Bennett (1995, p. 556) specify the norms as those of the "dominant administrative coalitions of organizations". The norms, in other words, are those of the organization in general rather than of specific subgroups within the organization.

As the violated norms are organizational rather than general societal and moral norms, this differentiates deviant behaviors from unethical ones (Robinson and Bennett 1997). While many deviant behaviors would also be considered unethical, such as theft or verbal or physical abuse, deviance is not in and of itself unethical. Robinson and Bennett (1995, p. 557) give the example of an employee reporting his company for dumping toxic waste. This behavior may be considered highly ethical, but presumably violates a norm of that employee's organization and as such is deviant. Dumping the toxic waste in the first place is surely unethical, but if it is within company guidelines, the behavior is not deviant.

It is important to underline this distinction between deviant and unethical behavior, as examples for deviant behaviors in the literature are generally unethical as well (see for example Aquino, Lewis, and Bradfield 1999; Bennett and Robinson 2000; Bordia, Restubog, and Lang 2008; Darrat, Amyx, and Bennett 2010; Jelinek and Ahearne 2006; Robinson and Bennett 1995).

Thirdly, the definition states that workplace deviance behaviors threatens "the well-being of

Table 14: Scale for Workplace Deviance (Bennett and Robinson 2000, p. 360)

Interpersonal Deviance	Organizational Deviance
1. Made fun of someone at work.	1. Taken property from work without permission.
2. Said something hurtful to someone at work.	2. Spent too much time fantasizing or daydreaming instead of working.
3. Made an ethnic, religious or racial remark at work.	3. Falsified a receipt to get reimbursed for more money than you spent on business expenses
4. Cursed at someone at work.	4. Take an additional or longer break than is acceptable at your workplace.
5. Played a mean prank on someone at work.	5. Come in late to work without permission.
6. Acted rudely toward someone at work.	6. Littered your work environment.
7. Publicly embarrassed someone at work.	7. Neglected to follow your boss's instructions.
	8. Intentionally worked slower than you could have worked.
	9. Discussed confidential company information with an unauthorized person.
	10. Used an illegal drug or consumed alcohol on the job.
	11. Put little effort into your work.
	12. Dragged out work in order to get overtime.

an organization, its members, or both" (Robinson and Bennett 1995, p. 556). Deviant behaviors may thus be directed at individuals within the organization or the organization as a whole. Robinson and Bennett (1995; Bennett and Robinson 2000) distinguish between interpersonal deviance and organizational deviance, depending on who was affected by the behavior. The measurement scale they developed captures both these dimensions (see table 14).

The differentiation between interpersonal and organizational deviance has been discussed critically in the literature, as most studies using the Bennett and Robinson (2000) scale have found very high correlations between the two constructs (Berry, Ones, and Sackett 2007; Dalal 2005). However, although both constructs are highly interrelated, they have significantly different relationships with key variables (Berry, Ones, and Sackett 2007) and are generally treated as different constructs.

The fourth point made by the definition of deviant behaviors as threatening "the well-being of an organization, its members, or both" (Robinson and Bennett 1995, p. 556) is that the behavior is potentially harmful. Robinson and Bennett (1995) argue that this means that minor departures from organizational norms, such as dressing slightly differently, are not seen as workplace deviance. To be included, the behavior must be at least potentially harmful to the organization or its members.

However, as well as minor infractions of social norms, it also implicitly excludes behaviors that benefit the organization. As several researchers have pointed out, deviance from organizational norms can also be a constructive or pro-social behavior (Morrison 2006; Warren 2003). It could be argued that prosocial organizational behaviors, such as organizational citizenship, are deviant in that employees do more than is expected of them (which is also a deviation from the organizational norm). Warren (2003) differentiates these behaviors into constructive and destructive behaviors.

This issue also raises the question of motive. Some behaviors may threaten the well-being of an individual or the organization and be a deviation from the organizational norm, but without the intent to harm (Bordia, Restubog, and Lang 2008). An example for this is whistle-blowing (Near and Miceli 1995), a behavior where employees draw attention to illegal, immoral or illegitimate behaviors despite organizational norms demanding silence or refraining from accusing others. In fact, the example given by Robinson and Bennett (1995) of the employee who reports his company for illegal toxic waste disposal is just such a case of whistle blowing. The intention of the employee may not be to harm the organization, he may even wish to save the organization, although the disclosure of this information is very likely to harm the company's reputation and also likely to negatively impact members of the organization. So while this behavior is by Robinson and Bennett's (1995) definition deviant, it is likely to be motivated by very different factors than for example the theft of company materials.

Causes of deviant behaviors

Because of the potential for harm inherent to deviant behaviors, a lot of research looks at the possible causes of workplace deviance. Various theoretical perspectives have been used to understand why employees engage in deviant behaviors, including equity and justice theories (e.g. Aquino, Lewis, and Bradfield 1999; Greenberg 1990), social exchange theory (e.g. Ambrose, Seabright, and Schminke 2002; Colbert et al. 2004; El Akremi, Vandenberghe, and Camerman 2010) and dispositional employee characteristics (e.g. Colbert et al. 2004; Ferris, Brown, and Heller 2009; Judge, Scott, and Ilies 2006).

Robinson and Bennett's (1997) proposed model of workplace deviance seems a good way to structure the research on causes and influence factors. In this model, deviance is a reaction to perceived provocations in the workplace. Examples could be poor working conditions or injustice. These lead to cognitions of disparity and feelings of outrage and anger, which in turn foster the motivation to restore parity and equity (instrumental motivation) and to vent negative feelings (expressive motivation). These motives both encourage deviant behaviors. However, the impulse for deviant behavior may be checked by constraining thoughts and feelings, for example fear of being found out and punished or personal norms and characteristics that oppose deviant behaviors.

Looking at the possible provocations, among the most commonly examined factors are various forms of organizational justice (Berry, Ones, and Sackett 2007) and psychological contract breach (Bordia, Restubog, and Lang 2008). Organizational justice relates to the perceived fairness within the workplace (Folger and Cropanzano 1998) and has already been addressed in chapter 4.1.1.

A psychological contract consists of an individual's beliefs about the terms and reciprocal obligations of an exchange relationship in which he or she participates (Morrison and Robinson 1997; Rousseau 1989). In the case of the employment relationship, it represents an employee's beliefs of the reciprocal obligations between him- or herself and the organization. The psychological contract is inherently informal and is held by only the employee (Morrison and Robinson 1997). It exists only "in the eye of the beholder" (Rousseau 1995, p. 6). In other words, it represents an employee's personal and individual understanding of the rights and obligations within an employment relationship.

Psychological contracts can have transactional and relational elements. Transactional aspects are usually more inflexible and short term, and include monetary rewards, competitive wages and similar organizational benefits. The relational dimension is more long term-oriented and can include aspects such as career development, support and emotional benefits (Morrison and Robinson 1997; Rousseau 1995). Psychological contracts are based on perceived promises about the employment relationship (Morrison and Robinson 1997; Rousseau 1989), whereby the organization and its agents, such as management, are not necessarily aware of or recognize these promises. A breach[8] of the psychological contract occurs when an employee feels that the other party has failed to fulfill what was promised (Rousseau 1995).

Both perceived organizational injustice and breach of psychological contract have been found to be significant predictors of work deviance (Berry, Ones, and Sackett 2007; Bordia, Restubog, and Lang 2008; Jensen, Opland, and Ryan 2010). This can be explained by using equity theory (Adams 1965), in that employees want to restore equity by deviant behaviors, and by social exchange theory (Blau 1964), in that employees measure the input-output relation of the exchange relationship and reduce their input. As social exchange theory would predict, positive perception of the organization, such as job satisfaction and perceived organizational support lower the likelihood that employees will display work deviant behaviors (Colbert et al. 2004; El Akremi, Vandenberghe, and Camerman 2010). Conversely, a negative perception of the organization, such as perceived organizational obstruction (Gibney, Zagenczyk, and Masters 2009, an employee's belief that the organization hinders the acchievement of personal goals and is detrimental to his or her well-being), may increase the likelihood of deviant behaviors. While this has not been tested for workplace deviance, Gibney and colleagues (2009) found that perceived organizational obstruction increased behaviors of neglect. This includes caring less about the job and decreasing the amount of effort put into work.

In the literature on deviance, dispositional factors are also often discussed as influencing factors. Certain personality factors, such as agreeableness, conscientiousness and emotional stability as well as individual characteristics such as self-esteem, decrease the likelihood of workplace deviance behaviors (Berry, Ones, and Sackett 2007; Ferris, Brown, and Heller 2009). These factors may serve to suppress feelings of revenge or similar motives for deviant behaviors. Other personality traits, such as hostility, may increase the likelihood for workplace deviance behaviors (Judge, Scott, and Ilies 2006).

Siding with the customer as deviant behavior

Siding with the customer in a situation of role conflict can be seen as a form of workplace deviance, in that the employee goes against an organizational norm. Similar to other forms of work deviance behaviors, such as theft or reduced effort, the motive here may be to balance a perceived injustice, slight or broken promise by the organization. Choosing the customer may therefore be a way of getting back at the organization or settling a score.

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[8] In earlier research, the term violation of a psychological contract was often used interchangeably with the term breach to denote that the promises underlying the psychological contract had been broken. In their article, Robinson and Morrison (e.g. Kohli and Jaworski 1990; Narver and Slater 1990) point out that the term violation "conveys a strong emotional experience" (p. 230) and is connected with feelings of betrayal, anger, resentment and injustice. They differentiate between employees perceiving that they did not receive what was promised (a cognitive calculation) and resulting feelings of violation. They also point out that the breach of a psychological contract does not necessarily result in the emotional response of feeling violated.

However, as mentioned above, deviant behaviors can also be motivated by a desire to do something positive for the organization (Warren 2003). In such cases, influencing factors are more likely to be in line with those that might motivate an employee to choose the organizations side in cases of role conflict (discussed in chapter 4.1.1.). If the employee feels that standing against the organizations norms is in the interest of the company, he might decide to take the customers side in a situation of role conflict.

4.4. Siding Against the Customer

In the same way that employees may decide to side *against* the organization in a situation of role conflict (as opposed to deciding to side *with* the customer), employees may choose to side *against* the customer. As in the chapter above, the driving motive here is not to support the organization, but to go against the customer.

A frontline employee deciding to act against customers can be understood as a form of workplace deviance. Several authors researching deviant behaviors have pointed out that workplace deviance may not only be directed against the organization (organizational deviance) and members of the organization (individual deviance) but also against people outside of the organization, primarily against customers. These researchers have been looking at employees working in sales (Darrat, Amyx, and Bennett 2010; Jelinek and Ahearne 2006; 2010) and in frontline service positions (Harris and Ogbonna 2002; 2006; 2009; Scott 2003; Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, and Walker 2008).

The research looking specifically at deviant behaviors of sales representatives towards customers does not differentiate between behavior intended to negatively impact the customer and behavior that is not. The focus lies more on the deviance from organizational norms regarding the expected behavior towards customers. Deviance towards customers is understood as an additional facet of workplace deviance, alongside organizational and interpersonal deviance. Jelinek and Ahearne (2006) speak of frontline deviance, Darrat and colleagues (2010) of customer-directed deviance. The measurement scale developed by Jelinek and Ahearne (2006, p. 329) for frontline deviance in particular underlines that the core of the construct lies in deviance from organizational norms. Only three of the seven measurement items can be said to be harmful to customers:

- Used deceptive selling tactics when selling to prospects or customers.
- Acted out work-related frustrations in front of a customer.
- Did not follow specific customer rules or etiquette.

In the case of the last two of these items it is not even clear that the customer would be harmed. The other items, on the other hand, do not describe behaviors where intent to harm the customer can be easily inferred:

- Made the sales organization look bad to people who do not work at the organization.
- Told customers some of the things that are bothersome about the sales organization.
- Complained to family/ friends about the sales organization.
- Said rude things about the sales organization or manager.

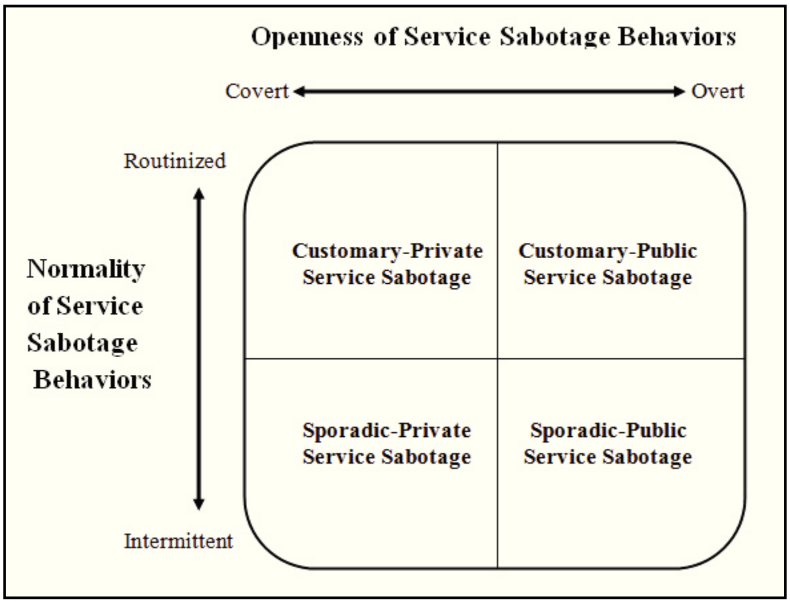
Again, this indicates that the deviant behaviors described in this research are directed more against the organization than against the customer.

Other researchers on deviant behaviors in relation to customers focus more on behaviors that, while also deviating against organizational norms, are intended to negatively impact customers. Harris and Ogbonna (2002; 2006) refer to these behaviors as service sabotage. Their work has led to several more studies examining this kind of behavior (e.g. Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, and Walker 2008; Wallace and De Chernatony 2008; 2009), all finding that service sabotage is a common frontline phenomenon. To help understand situations in which employees side against customers, in the following I will take a closer look at the concept of service sabotage and its antecedents.

Types of Service Sabotage

Harris and Ogbonna (2006, p. 546) define service sabotage as "employees' conscious actions that are designed to affect negatively customer service". They point out that "this view emphasizes saboteur intention and relegates victim perception" (2002, p. 168). This means that the focus lies on the employee's intent to harm. Sabotage can occur even when customers and management are unaware of it.

Figure 14: Dimensions and Types of Service Sabotage, Harris and Ogbonna (2002, p. 169)



Harris and Ogbonna (2002) interviewed over 180 people working in hotels and restaurants. Their sample included frontline staff as well as management. They found that service sabotage behaviors could be differentiated along two dimensions. The first dimension relates to the normality of service sabotage behaviors, and pertains to how frequently these behaviors are carried out. The second dimension refers to the openness of the behavior, whether employees try to hide the behavior (covert) or openly sabotage service (overt). These findings are illustrated in figure 14.

Customary-private service sabotage

These behaviors are carried out privately, i.e. not in front of others, and have become so normal that they may even be part of the informal culture and norms of the organization. Typical behaviors include ignoring or violating rules and regulations regarding behavior towards customers. This category also includes a lot of revenge-motivated behavior, illustrated very well by a quote from a waiter in Harris and Ogbonna's (2002, p. 169) study:

> *Many customers are rude or difficult, not polite like you or I. Getting your own back evens the score. There are lots of things that you do that no one but you will ever know—smaller portions, dodgy wine, a bad beer—all that and you serve it with a smile! Sweet revenge!*

Customary-public service sabotage

This type of behavior is also routinized and "normal" to the point where it may be part of the informal culture in an organization. However, unlike the first type of behavior these acts of service sabotage are carried out in front of an audience, usually co-workers. The aim is generally to entertain colleagues and improve one's social standing. Again, this is very aptly illustrated by a quote in Harris and Ogbonna's (2002, p. 170) study:

> *You can put on a real old show. You know—if the guest is in a hurry, you slow it right down and drag it right out and if they want to chat, you can do the monosyllabic stuff. And all the time you know that your mates are round the corner laughing their heads off!*

Sporadic-private service sabotage

This type of behavior is private and concealed. Unlike the previous types of behaviors, however, it is not considered every day and normal and is not part of the company's informal norms. Harris and Ogbonna (2002) distinguish three different forms of sporadic-covert service sabotage behavior. The first form covers behaviors that center on particular customers. These customers may be chosen for a reason or, frequently, at random. Common examples found by the study were hygiene issues, such as spitting in food. The second form included behaviors aimed at colleagues that would also sabotage a customer service experience, such as hindering other employees from serving customers. The third form was aimed at no one in particular, and seemed to be more expressions of frustration. An example is a quote by a hotel employee (Harris and Ogbonna 2002, p. 171):

I don't know why I do it. Sometimes it's simply a bad day, a lousy week, I dunno—but kicking someone's bags down the back stairs is not that unusual—not every day—I guess a couple of times a month.

<u>Sporadic-public service sabotage</u>

This type of behavior is also considered unusual by the service employees, but unlike the sporadic-private behaviors it is explicitly and deliberately carried out in the open. This type of behavior is described by Harris and Ogbonna (2002, p.171) as "by far the most sophisticated variety of deviant employee behavior, requiring careful planning and execution". They identified two main forms. The first would involve an employee deliberately and openly disrupting service or harming a customer or private property, and then immediately apologizing. Here is an example given by an restaurant employee (Harris and Ogbonna 2002, p. 171):

The trick is to get them and then straight away launch into the apologies. I've seen it done thousands of times—burning hot plates into someone's hands, gravy dripped on sleeves, drinks spilt on backs, wigs knocked off—that was funny, soups spilt in laps, you get the idea!

The second form would involve multiple employees and generally be a form of practical joke played on a customer.

Types of Service Saboteurs

Harris and Ogbonna (2009) identify four main types of service saboteurs. They point out that these types do not cover all types of service sabotage and saboteurs and that frequently employees will fit more than one category. However, as the types of saboteurs described by Harris and Ogbonna (2009) appear to classify motives for sabotage, they could be useful in understanding why employees engage in these behaviors.

<u>Thrill Seekers</u>

These employees engage in service sabotage to relieve boredom and monotony and create excitement. Thrill seekers may play practical jokes on customers or risk being discovered. They put their own entertainment before customer satisfaction. These acts can increase the employee's social status among coworkers or increase self-esteem. While some thrill seekers carry out these acts of sabotage in secret, they will frequently use them to entertain an audience of co-workers.

Apathetics

Apathetics' main motivation for service sabotage is to reduce effort and "cut corners" during customer service. They generally view both management and customers as over-demanding and unreasonable.

Customer Revengers

These employees react to a perceived slight or affront by a customer with service sabotage behaviors aimed at that customer. This can be in response to a negative experience the employee had him- or herself with the customer, or to avenge co-workers who were perceived to have been mistreated by the customer.

Money Grabbers

The aim of these employees is to increase their income, often by acts that range to the criminal. Examples include theft, charging customers for more than they consumed or short-changing customers. A slightly different approach was what Harris and Ogbonna (2009) referred to as sweethearting – offering friends and family free service and gifts (such as a free drink with a meal) and receiving large tips in return.

A different form of money grabbing is carried out by time thieves. These employees will try to get through their shift earlier by reducing customer service, turning customers away before closing time or similar behaviors.

Antecedents of Service Sabotage

Deviance towards customers is less well researched than organizational and interpersonal deviance within organizations. There is, however, some empirical evidence regarding possible antecedents. Harris and Ogbonna (2002) identified several influencing factors using insights from previous literature and their interviews. They classified these into four groups:

- **Individual factors** such as attitude towards risk taking, career orientation, personality traits and demographic factors.
- **Group and role factors** such as the nature for the work, specialization and sub-cultural prevalence.
- **Firm factors** such as surveillance techniques and culture control initiatives.
- **Environmental factors** such as labor market conditions (a fluid labor market makes it more likely that an employee will switch jobs and easily find new work elsewhere, reducing the possible penalty for service sabotage).

Later research by Harris and Ogbonna (2006) and others have found support for these factors as well as others using quantitative research. Harris and Ogbonna (2006) found that employees' risk-taking proclivity, need for social approval from colleagues and their perceptions of the fluidity of the labor market increase the likelihood of service sabotage. The desire to stay within the firm and perceptions of surveillance and cultural control on the other hand reduce the likelihood of such behaviors. Jelinek and Ahearne (2006) found that distributional and procedural justice reduced the likelihood of frontline deviance (however, not all frontline deviance behaviors are directed against the customer, see the beginning of chapter 4.4). However, they found no significant impact of future orientation and management role modeling. In their 2010 study, they found that working long hours also increased the likelihood of frontline deviance and that person-organization fit reduced it. Darrat and colleagues (2010) showed that work-family conflict, i.e. conflict resulting from demands by the job and those of family, increased the likelihood of frontline deviance.

These influence factors would also fit the general model for workplace deviance by Robinson and Bennett (1997) discussed in chapter 4.3. Deviance towards customers would be a reaction to a perceived provocation in the workplace (which would include a perceived provocation by customers). The resulting motives for deviance could be checked by constraining thoughts and feelings. Surveillance and cultural control make it more likely to be found out, whereas labor market fluidity reduces the penalty of being found out.

What does this mean in the context of this research project?

Many of the examples given for service sabotage given in the discussion above, such as stealing from customers or purposely giving bad service, may seem more extreme and malicious than choosing not to side with the customer in a situation of role conflict. However, the reasoning behind such behaviors can help to understand why employees would choose to do so.

In a situation of role conflict between organizational or managerial and customer expectations, an employee could for example choose to rigidly stick to the organizational rules to get back at an unfriendly customer (customer revenge), to avoid the emotional and cognitive effort of looking for a better solution (apathetic), to gain a bonus payment (money grabber), or to simply bring the transaction to a quick end to be able to get off work earlier (time grabber). If this is done to annoy or hinder a customer in an entertaining way, it could also be a form of thrill seeking.

What is important is that the decision to prioritize the company's expectations over those of the customer need not be a decision for the organization, but against the customer. The antecedents to this behavior may be similar to other forms of anti-customer behavior such as service sabotage.

4.5. Summary

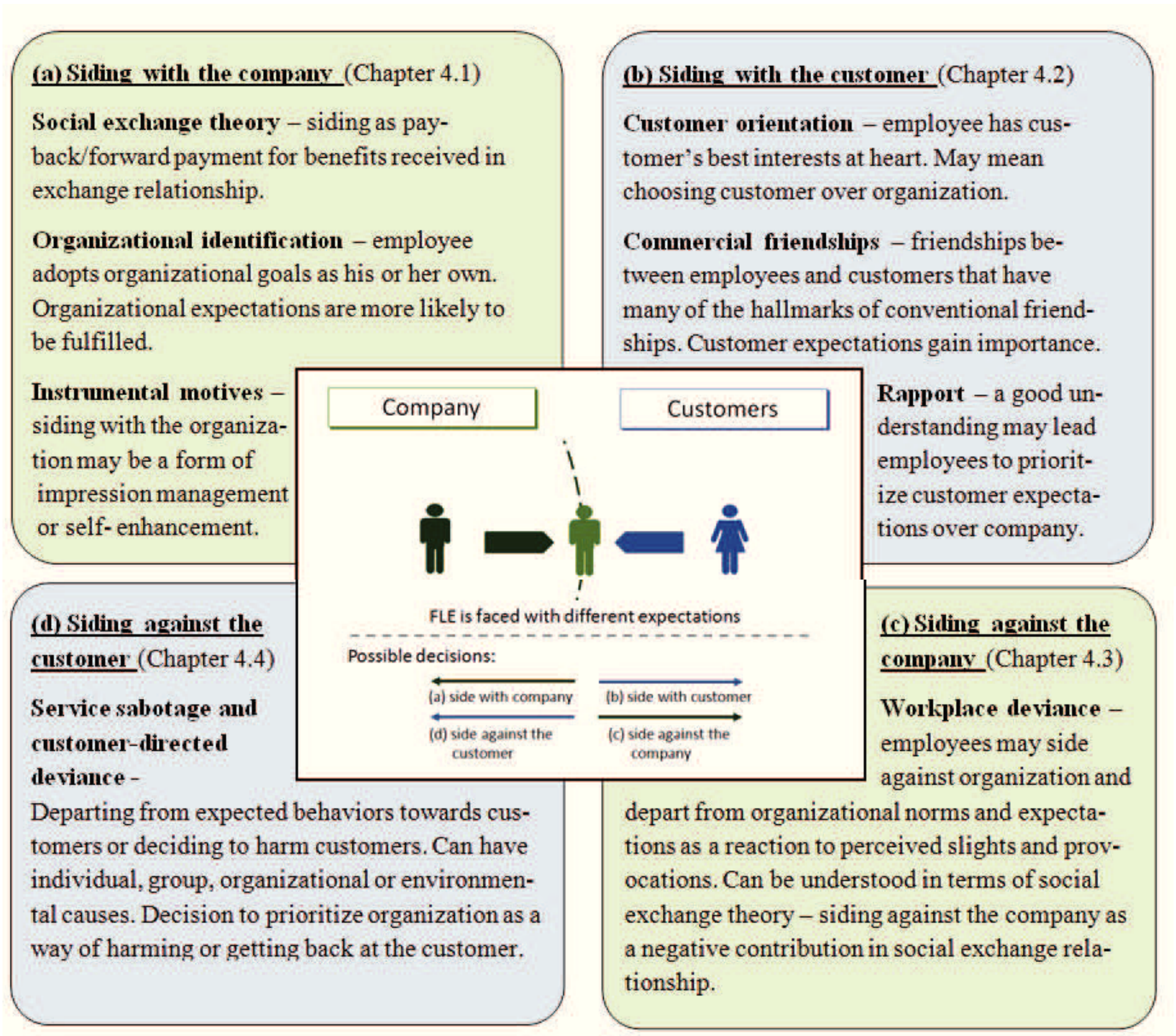
Chapter 4 looks at different options available to an employee faced with a situation of role conflict. Insights and concepts from empirical studies in the marketing and management literature are used to explore these different possibilities.

In a situation of role conflict an employee can choose to (a) side with the company or (b) side with the customer. He may side with the company in exchange for or in expectation of benefits within a social exchange relationship. Positive experiences and perceived benefits within the work relationship, such as perceived organizational support, perceived organizational justice and job satisfaction are liable to increase the likelihood of choosing the company's side (see chapter 4.1.1). A strong organizational identification can also be a reason for choosing the company's side in a situation of role conflict. Employees with a level of high organizational identification are likely to adopt their organization's aims as their own and share the beliefs and expectations held within the organization (see chapter 4.1.2). Finally, as well as these altruistic or pro-social motives, the employee may have more instrumental or self-oriented motives for choosing the company's side. This may for example be a form of impression management or self enhancement, providing the employee with an opportunity to look good in front of the organization (see chapter 4.1.3).

Employees may choose to side with the customer due to high customer orientation. This may be either because they believe this to be more in line with the company's long term interests than following the company's expectations would be. A second possibility is that a strong customer orientation may lead employees to put the customer before the company (see chapter 4.2.1). Commercial friendships between employees and customers may be a further reason why employee choose to side with customers. These friendships share many of the characteristics of conventional friendships, although they are usually tied to a business context. They usually offer benefits to both customer and employee, although they come with an inherent conflict between the instrumental motives of a business relationship and the intrinsic and communal orientation of friendship. Being friends with a customer is likely to increase the pressure to choose that customer's side in situations of role conflict (see chapter 4.2.2). Finally, rapport between employees and customers and an increased level of empathy may also increase the likelihood of the employee deciding to side with the customer (see chapter 4.2.3).

As discussed in chapters 4.3 and 4.4, the employee's decision need not be *for* a side – it can also be *against* one of the two sides. An employee may choose to side against his or her organization in a situation of role conflict for similar reasons as an employee choosing to deviate from organizational norms and expectations. Such behaviors are commonly referred to as work deviance behaviors. The deviant behavior is seen to be a reaction to a perceived slight or provocation on the side of the organization and the deviance is a way for the employee to balance the exchange relationship with the organization and vent feelings of frustration and violation (see chapter 4.3). In a similar manner, employees can choose to side against the customer in a situation of role conflict. Behaviors that aim to be harmful against customers in a service setting are referred to as service sabotage. The motives may be similar to other forms

Figure 15: Possible Decisions by FLE when Faced with Conflicting Expectations – Summary of Chapter 4



of workplace deviance in that service sabotage offers a way of getting even with perceived slights from customers or the organization and venting feelings of frustration and anger (see chapter 4.4). These points are summed up in figure 15.

It is of course possible that a combination of these motives influence an employee's decision on how to deal with conflicting expectations by his or her company and customers. For example, an employee may be loyal to his or her company, be very satisfied with her job and have a high level of organizational identification. At the same time, she may have a long and good relationship with a particular customer, to the point of being friends, and feel a high level of empathy. This is likely to lead to high levels of role conflict for the employee. On the other hand, it is possible that an employee is dissatisfied with his company and feels he or she is treated unfairly. This employee may also be friends with a customer. This would make the choice to support the customer's expectations easier. Other combinations are of course also possible.

It becomes clear that it is very important to understand the "why" and "why not" of an employee's decision regarding role conflict situations. There may be factors that push or pull him or her in either direction. While the insights gained from the research discussed in chapter 4 offer valuable information on possible reasons for employee decisions, it is unclear how exactly employees decide who to favor and whether, aside from the factors discussed, other aspects influence the decision.

The stage therefore is set for the empirical part of this research project. The next chapters will provide insight into the methodology adopted for this study and the results gained.

5. Methodology – Design of the Empirical Study

In this chapter I will outline the methodology of the empirical study carried out to address the first set of research questions. This included the following questions (see also page 3):

> How do frontline employees decide whose demands to give precedence to when expectations from customers and their own organization collide? How do they explain their decision? What factors influence their choice? And how do they feel about such situations?

I will begin by explaining why a qualitative approach was chosen for the study (chapter 5.1) and describing the grounded theory methodology, which my research was based on (chapter 5.2). Chapter 5.3 will then describe the steps taken for the empirical study in detail.

5.1. A Qualitative Approach – Diving Into the Deep End

Why approach the research question of this project using qualitative methodology? I believe that there are several very good reasons for this decision and will outline these in this section.

Firstly, qualitative methods lend themselves well to exploratory research (Holzmüller and Buber 2007; Mariampolski 2001). Their openness and flexibility allow for hypotheses and theory to emerge from the collected data, the data to point to appropriate concepts and the research design to evolve according to the needs of the project (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005; Patton 2002).

This is important as this research is exploratory in nature: despite the wealth of research available on role conflict and ambiguity and their impact on frontline employees (see chapter 3) and additional insights from theories and perspectives other than role theory and role concepts (see chapter 4), our understanding of how frontline employees decide in a role conflict situation is still far from complete. In particular, the interest lies in how frontline employees deal with these situations, under what circumstances they choose one side over the other and how they experience these situations.

A qualitative approach frees the researcher from the necessity of defining hypotheses and restricting the possible answers, themes and topics beforehand (Miles and Huberman 1994; Rubin and Rubin 2005). In qualitative interviews, the respondents are able to introduce new ideas and influence the focal points of the interview much more than would be possible with a standardized method of data collection. For this project, frontline employees will be able to talk about the aspects that they feel to be important in their decision on how to deal with role conflict.

Secondly, this project aims to develop a rich and detailed understanding of how frontline employees react to conflicting demands by their company and their customers. To understand their reactions and behavior, it is important to look at how they experience such situations and what meanings they attach to their behavior (Liamputtong Rice and Ezzy 1999). It is crucial to leave room for possible ambiguities in the feelings of the employees, to explore the ifs and maybes and conditions that they feel apply to certain situations. Qualitative research methods support these aims by facilitating an in-depth and holistic view of the research object, focusing on "the why and how in addition to what" (Carson et al. 2001, p. 65). They allow room for context, taking into account the situations, backgrounds and environments of people. "*In summary, qualitative approaches (...) entail efforts to address complexity accepting that the object of study can be confusing and ambiguous. They can further be used to put variables and categories in a context*." (Gummesson 2006, p.173)

A qualitative approach is well suited to collecting data on intuitive associations as well as habitual and seemingly self-evident behaviors and attitudes (Holzmüller and Buber 2007; Patton 2002). Qualitative interviews give people time to develop their ideas, structure their thoughts and find ways to articulate their feelings. Conversations, and interviews as a special form of conversation, not only allow information to be transferred between people, but can also be seen as a process during which ideas and knowledge are created (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Lundkvist and Yakhlef 2004; Mengis and Eppler 2008). This aspect is illustrated very well in a quote given by Rubin and Rubin (2005) at the beginning of their book on qualitative interviewing:

> *"I'll tell you one thing. It has been a very interesting conversation with you because I think in the course of conversation it's given me the time ... to reflect ... on what we are doing and how we are doing it."*

(Rubin and Rubin 2005, p.1, quote from an interviewee)

The frontline employees interviewed may not have systematically and explicitly reflected on why they behave in a certain way in certain situations. It is possible that they decide intuitively, that implicit reasoning they aren't consciously aware of play an important role in their behavior. By talking about these behaviors and reasoning behind them, the interviewed frontline employees have time to develop their ideas, structure their thoughts and find ways of articulating their ideas.

Finally, the topic of this research project is somewhat delicate. If employees are faced with conflicting expectations from different parties, they will not be able to fulfill all of these expectations. Dealing with role conflict situations may lead to behavior that frontline employees may not want to openly acknowledge to the involved parties. To take an extreme situation, a frontline employee may put the customer's interests above those of the company to the point of betraying the latter as in the example of an employee helping a customer file a non-justified insurance claim or neglecting to charge a customer for a rendered service. Of course, the opposite behavior, putting the company's interests over those of the customer, can also be questionable and not something the employee may readily advertise. Examples would be offering a customer a service the frontline employee believes is not what the customer would need, or spending less time and effort on a customer not attractive to the company.

Qualitative interviews offer room for a trusting relationship to develop between interviewer and interviewee (Rubin and Rubin 2005). An interviewer that is seen as being open, accepting and actively listening encourages interviewees to be open and honest in their answers. This openness and honesty, however, comes with a moral responsibility that the researcher has towards the participants in the study (Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden 2000; Patton 2002; Rubin and Rubin 2005). Orb, Eisenhauser and Wynaden (2000, p. 95-96) recommend the adherence to the following three ethical principles:

- **Autonomy:** respecting the participants' right to be informed, to freely decide whether or not to take part in the study or withdraw from it at any point. An important aspect here is informed consent (Mason 2002, p.80-82). Participants should be openly and honestly informed about the study, the study's intent and what happens with the data. This recommendation is also stressed by many other researchers (Munhall 1988; Patton 2002; Silverman 2004). In this study, all participants were informed in detail about the purpose of the study and how the data would be handled (see also chapter 5.3). This was both part of the interview guide (see Appendix A) and a written confidentiality agreement.

- **Beneficence:** this refers to a benevolent attitude towards the research participants – "doing good for others and preventing harm" (Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden 2000, p. 95). An important aspect of this is confidentiality and guarding the anonymity of participants. This requirement holds for all qualitative research (Miles and Huberman 1994; Patton 2002) but is particularly important when dealing with sensitive issues (Munhall 1988). In this research project all interviewee data has been carefully anonymised to ensure that both the interviewee and the interviewee's company remain confidential. All participants have been given a pseudonym and their company is only identified by the industry it belongs to.

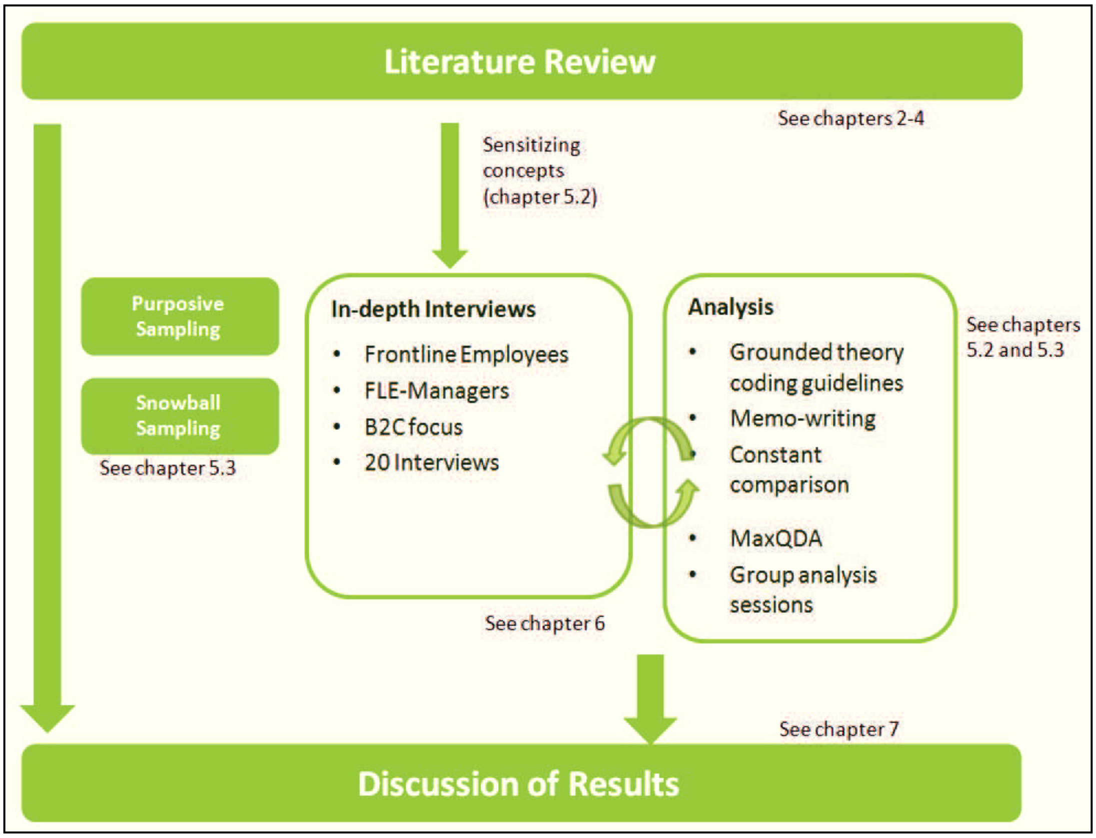
- **Justice**: this refers to fairness and avoiding exploitation and abuse of participants. The well-being of the participants should always be valued above the needs of the study and the researcher (Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden 2000). In the case of this project, the interview participants are usually in dependent situations – they are employed by an organization. It is important that they remain anonymous to avoid repercussions by their employers.

In summary, the reasons for choosing a qualitative approach is that the project is of an exploratory nature, that the aim is to capture both complexity and context and that the participants may not be able to readily explain their behaviors and decisions without time and opportunity to think and talk about it first. These needs are met by the strengths of qualitative research methods, condensed by Holzmüller and Buber (2007, p.7-8) into suitability for exploration, suitability for complexity, and ability to access difficult topics[9].

The following sections will describe the qualitative study on frontline employees in more detail. Reporting on what exactly was done and the rationale behind the decision to do so is of particular relevance for qualitative studies (Golden-Biddle and Locke 2006; Neumann and Holzmüller 2007). It is precisely their flexibility, openness and adaptability that make it so crucial to disclose the individual steps taken in the study (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 298-299): "*However analysis is done, analysts have an obligation to monitor and report their own analytical procedures as fully and truthfully as possible.*" (Patton 2002, p. 434). This allows the reader to judge the trustworthiness, plausibility and applicability of the results and is seen as an important indicator of quality (Choudhuri, Glauser, and Peregoy 2004; Rocco 2003).

The general design of the study can be seen in figure 16:

Figure 16: General design of study



[9] The authors have put this more elegantly in German: „*Die qualitative Marktforschung bietet erfolgreiche Wege zur Erschließung von Gegebenheiten und Prozessen die unter der vermeintlich sichtbaren ‚Oberfläche' liegen. Stark komprimiert sind es drei zentrale Leistungsmerkmale – Erkundungs-, Zugänglichkeits- und Komplexitäts-eignung.*" (Holzmüller and Buber, 2007, p. 7).

This research project began with an extensive literature review, which is described in detail in chapters 2, 3 and 4. The knowledge, ideas and aspects drawn from it serve as sensitizing concepts, suggesting initial ideas to pursue, questions to ask participants and where to look for data (Blumer 1969; Corbin and Strauss 2008). This, however, carries the inherent risk of forcing preconceived ideas onto the data (Glaser 1992), seeing only what one expects to see and thus limiting the possible outcomes. Because of this risk, there has been an ongoing debate in qualitative research, particularly by grounded theory researchers, whether qualitative research should carry out literature reviews prior to field work or go into the field without having looked at the literature with a mind as open and free of preconceived ideas as possible.

Interestingly, the two founding authors Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss are on opposite sides of the debate. In their seminal work "The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research" (1967) they recommend starting field work without looking at literature first to avoid manipulating data by looking at the available research first: "*An effective strategy is, at first, literally to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study, in order to assure that the emergence of categories will not be contaminated by concepts more suited to different areas. Similarities and convergences with the literature can be established after the analytic core of categories has emerged.*" (Glaser and Strauss 1967, p. 37).

In his later publications with Juliet Corbin, Strauss recanted and pointed out the importance of being aware of existing concepts and views and making this explicit (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Reviewing the literature is important in offering insights into what may be meaningful and significant in the data (Birks and Mills 2011). Glaser (1992; 1998) on the other hand emphasized the importance of not going into the literature prior to data collection and analysis and category development. The dangers he sees are contaminating the data with concepts from the literature that and forcing the data to fit existing ideas (1998, p.67-68). On the other hand, researchers are people and as such cannot approach a field as a tabula rasa, a blank slate, as both Glaser and Strauss point out (1967, p. 3). There will therefore always be ideas and theories that the researcher brings into the study, whether they are based on literature, previous experiences or other sources: "*In short, there is a difference between an open mind and an empty head. To analyze data researchers draw on accumulated knowledge. They don't dispense with it. The issue is not whether to use existing knowledge, but how*" (Dey 1993, p. 63).

It is therefore important to be continuously aware of this element of subjectivity and to make the sensitizing concepts explicit (Corbin and Strauss 2008).[10] As Ezzy (2002, p.11) points out "*The main point of grounded theory is not to avoid these preconceptions, but to actively work to prevent preconceptions from narrowing what is observed*".

[10] This issue will be explored further in chapter 5.2.2 on theoretical sensitivity.

Reviewing the literature prior to fieldwork is seen by many researchers as useful, promoting the quality of the research and even essential (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Srnka 2007). It helps to orient the researcher to the field of study and is an indicator of the current level of understanding in the field (Birks and Mills 2011). As pointed out above, this study uses research on role theory and other relevant fields to help develop a first understanding of the topic. Propositions based on the available empirical data, important theories and concepts as well as open questions have been made explicit and also summarized at the end of chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Chapter 5.2 will look at the basics of grounded theory and point out how these have been applied to this project. Chapter 5.3 will deal in detail with the planning, sampling, data collection and analysis carried out in the project and Chapter 5.4 will look at criteria evaluating the quality of the study.

5.2. Grounded Theory

> *"What are grounded theory methods? Stated simply, grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves."*
>
> (Charmaz 2006, p. 2)

This research project uses a grounded theory approach. As mentioned in the above chapter 5.1 during the discussion on the use of literature in a qualitative research project, the term "grounded theory" can refer to some very different research approaches, with different underlying philosophies, methodologies and methods (Birks and Mills 2011)[11]. When reporting a grounded theory project it is therefore essential to address which form of grounded theory is being followed and to describe the methodology and methods used in detail. In this project, I will be following the grounded theory approach as described by Kathy Charmaz (2006). Charmaz has developed grounded theory further from its more positivist roots in the original version (Glaser and Strauss 1967) as well as the later works of Glaser (1992,1998) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) into a constructivist grounded theory (2006, p. 9).[12]

However, despite the differences regarding philosophy, methodology and methods in different versions of grounded theory, there is a set of methods that can be seen as essential to the practice of grounded theory (Bryant and Charmaz 2007). These include initial coding and catego-

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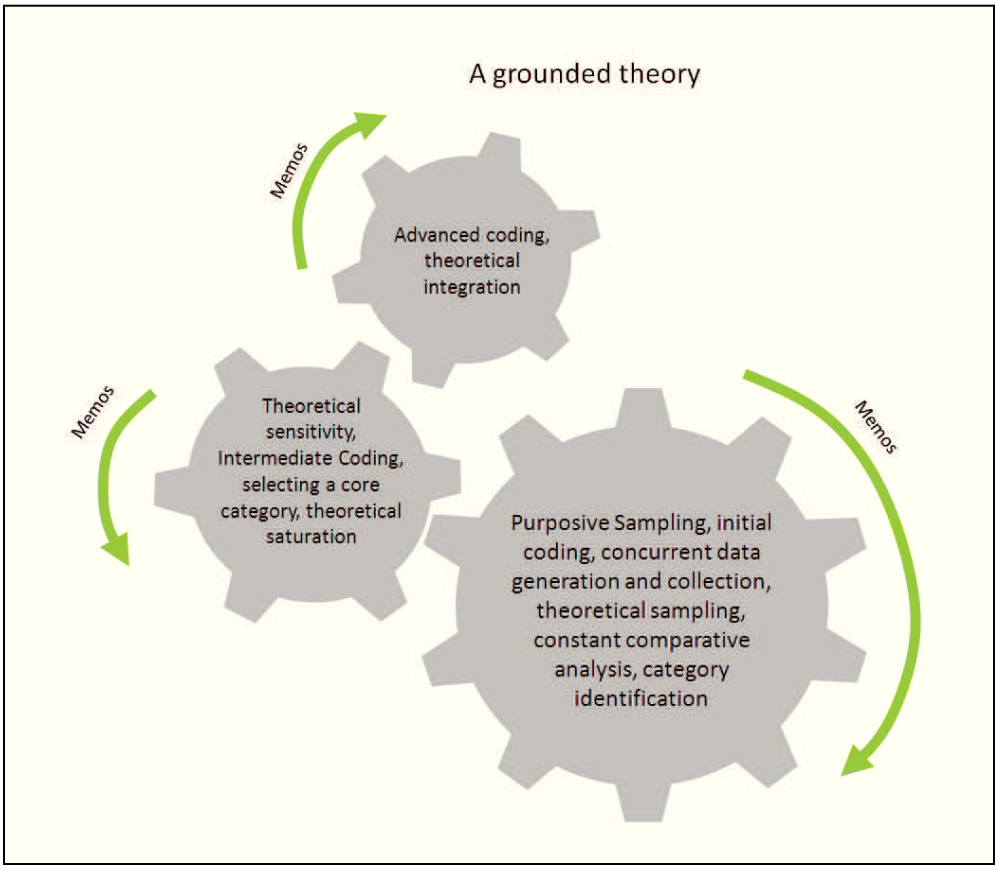
[11] Birks and Mills (2011) offer an excellent discussion on the different philosophical and methodological backgrounds of different versions of grounded theory and different waves of development of the theory (see pages 2-8).

[12] In the third edition of their book "Basics of Qualitative Research", Corbin and Strauss (2008) discuss pragmatism and symbolic interactionism as the philosophical orientations underpinning their version of grounded theory (see pages 5 to 12). This edition is the first one to explicitly discuss the philosophical background of their grounded theory approach; earlier versions centered more on the methods (see also Birks and Mills, 2011).

rization of data, concurrent data collection and analysis, constant comparative analysis, use of memos, theoretical sampling, theoretical sensitivity, intermediate coding, identification of a core category, advanced coding, and theoretical integration. These steps lead to a theory "grounded in the data themselves" (Charmaz 2006, p.2).

Figure 17 gives an overview of these grounded theory elements:

Figure 17: Essential grounded theory methods (Birks and Mills 2011, p.13)



The above figure is a visualization by Birks and Mills (2011, p. 13). The three cogs work together to develop a grounded theory. The method elements in the largest cog describe the most straightforward of the methods and the basis for theory; the smaller cogs refine the process and help to develop the results beyond qualitative description. Memos help the wheels turn – in other words, help to develop categories, help coding and so on.

In the following sections I will describe the elements most relevant for this project briefly and outline how they were realized in this research project. I will begin with taking a closer look at theoretical sensitivity, then theoretical sampling as well as purposive sampling, various forms of coding and the use of memos.

5.2.1. Theoretical Sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity, or simply sensitivity, is an essential element of constructing a grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Charmaz 2006; Birks and Mills 2011).

Theoretical sensitivity relates to the researchers sensitivity, his or her receptiveness or ability and readiness to respond to ideas, patterns or concepts in the data. It has to do with the researcher's ability to find theoretically meaningful concepts, see relevant data and develop pertinent categories (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Birks and Mills 2011). Corbin and Strauss (2008, p.19) define it as follows:

> **Sensitivity:** The ability to pick up on subtle nuances and cues in the data that infer or point to meaning.

Loosely put, it refers to the researcher's sensitivity to theory and elements of theory that can be developed from the data. This statement however needs to be amended to reflect a less positivistic philosophy – as Kathy Charmaz (1990, p. 1169) puts it, it is the researcher's actions and approach to the data that creates an "*explication, organization and presentation of the data rather than discovering order within the data*". The more theoretically sensitive a researcher is, the more he or she will be able to generate a meaningful theory from the data and move beyond a mere description of the data (Charmaz 1990; 2006).

How is theoretical sensitivity developed? What does it consist of? It relates to the researchers experiences, insights and knowledge both into themselves and the area that they are researching as well as the ideas and theories on how the world operates, the ideas they have internalized from previous reading and experiences and now use in everyday thought to make sense of the world (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Corbin and Strauss 2008; Charmaz 2006).

Theoretical sensitivity can be increased by a number of different methods and approaches. Charmaz (2006, p. 136) advises using gerunds (nouns derived from verbs) when coding and writing memos, to help concentrate on what is happening, on actions and processes, rather than descriptive or topical coding. "*If you can focus your coding on actions, you have ready grist for seeing sequences and making connections. If your gerunds quickly give way to coding for topics, you may synthesize and summarize data but connections between them will remain more implicit"* (Charmaz 2006, p. 136).

As discussed above, literature can also be used in developing theoretical sensitivity. Glaser (1978) strongly advocates not using literature within the field of research, but does advise to read in other fields in order to raise theoretical awareness. Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Charmaz (2006, p. 165-166) see literature reviews within and without the field of research as a valuable way of increasing theoretical sensitivity. In this project I followed the latter approach.

Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 69) also offer analytic tools, that can be used to increase theoretical sensitivity (Birks and Mills, 2011). These consist of a list of questions and methods that can assist in analyzing the data (listed below in table 15)[13].

Table 15: Analytical tools to increase theoretical sensitivity (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 69; see also Birks and Mills 2011, p. 61-62)

Analytical Tools for Increasing Theoretical Sensitivity

- The use of questioning
- Making comparisons
- Thinking about the various meanings of a word
- Using the flip-flop technique
- Drawing upon personal experience
- Waving the red flag
- Looking at language
- Looking at emotions that are expressed and the situations that aroused them.
- Looking for words that indicate time
- Thinking in terms of metaphors and similes
- Looking for the negative case
- "So what?" and "what if?"
- Looking at the structure of the narrative and how it is organized in terms of time or some other variable

These questions and approaches were used in this project during coding (see also chapters 5.2.3 and 5.3). Particular emphasis was also placed on looking for actions and processes, using verbs and gerunds for coding, as recommended by Charmaz (2006, p.49 and p. 136).

To sum up, theoretical sensitivity is important in helping researchers develop their grounded theory. Its core characteristics are summarized well by Birks and Mills (2011, p. 59):

- "It reflects the sum of your personal, professional and experiential history"
- "It can be increased by various techniques, tools and strategies"
- "It increases as [the] research progresses."

5.2.2. Purposive and Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling is a sampling technique specific to grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss 2008, Charmaz 2006). It describes a specific method of data collection in which sampling decisions are made based on ideas, concepts and themes from data analysis. It plays a central role in making the grounded theory process emergent, meaning that grounded theory emerges through an iterative process and the interplay of data collection and analysis (Birks and Mills

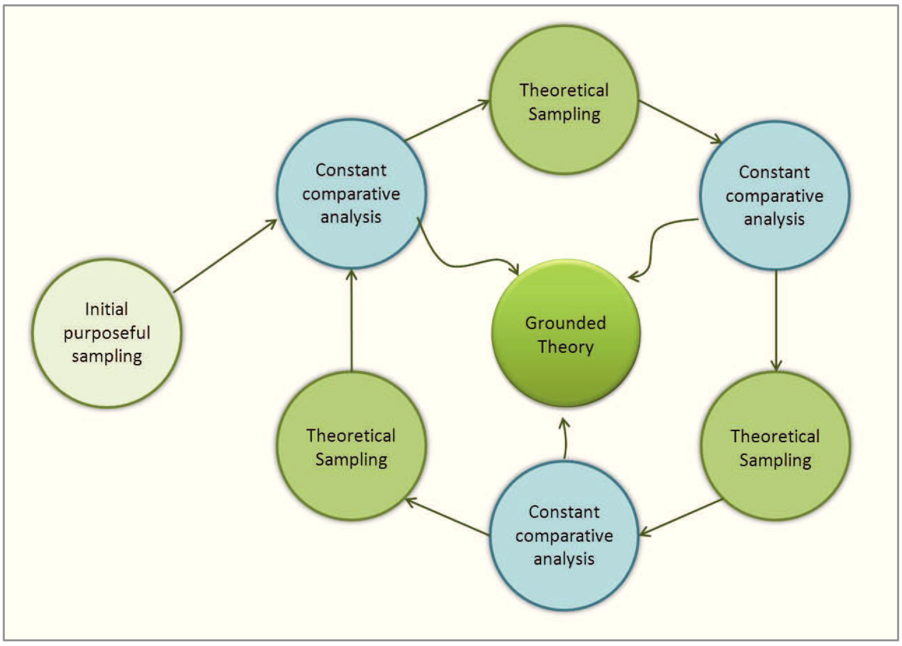
[13] The individual points are also described in great detail by Corbin and Strauss (2008, p.69-85).

2011). In practice, this means that after the initial sampling phase, in which the first data is collected, later sampling depends on what the researcher has found in or developed from this data. It is therefore not possible to specify in advance who will be interviewed for data collection (or what other sources will be used), how many people will be interviewed, etc.

The aim of theoretical sampling is to ensure that the researcher can collect data that will enhance the development of concepts, by ensuring that there is sufficient and suitable data available for developing the properties and dimensions of concepts and their relationships to each other (Corbin and Strauss 2008).

The theoretical sampling process is illustrated very well by the following figure taken from Birks and Mills (2011, p. 71):

Figure 18: Theoretical Sampling (Birks and Mills 2011, p.71)



The data collection begins with the initial purposive sampling. Purposive sampling, sometimes also referred to as strategic sampling (Mason 2002, p. 123) or judgment sampling (Patton 2002, p. 230), means that the researcher has a strategic aim or purpose in mind when selecting interview partners or other sources of data (Patton 2002, Mason 2002). In other words, he or she thinks about who or what will be best able to offer insights into the research project and then purposively selects his or her sample accordingly. There are many different forms of purposive sampling approaches. Patton (2002, p. 230) distinguishes nine different types of purposive samples, whereas Palys (2008, pp. 697-698) lists eleven forms. Examples are typical case sampling (participants' experiences represent the norm), criterion samples (all participants meet a certain criterion, e.g. are all frontline employees), maximum variation sampling (looking for very different participants to cover a wide spectrum of positions, backgrounds and so on) and extreme or deviant case sampling (participants have had extreme or unusual experiences, or differ greatly from the norm; Patton 2002, p. 230; Palys 2008, pp. 697-698).

After this initial phase, the collected data is then analyzed using constant comparison methods (Charmaz 2006, Birks and Mills 2008). Constant comparisons or constant comparative analysis refers to the continuous comparison of elements of data and the developing codes and concepts. As Birks and Mills put it: "... the constant comparison of incident to incident, incidents to codes, codes to codes, codes to categories and categories to categories" (Birks and Mills 2008, p. 11).

Charmaz (2006, pp. 97-99) gives a very good example for how questions arising from data analyses affect sampling decisions and thus lead to theoretical sampling. She recounts an interview with Jane Hood, who published a grounded theory study on families of married couples in which both husband and wife were working (1983). Hood interviewed working class parents in which both had full-time jobs. She began with a small purposive sample of working wives and found that whether the women went back after having children because they wanted to or because they had to for financial reasons made a difference in how much help they got from their husbands. In her initial sample, Hood had asked for volunteers, so her sample included mostly women who had wanted to go back to work, were excited about it and eager to talk about it. She then took a second sample looking specifically for women who had had to go back to work to gather data and develop the difference in this category. Further analysis lead to new insights, which meant second interviews with the previously interviewed women and interviews with the husbands. Questions and concepts arising in Hood's analysis of her data informed her choices on where to look for new data to further develop her grounded theory. This is a clear example of theoretical sampling[14].

An example of such theoretical sampling arising in this research is that the concept of frontline employees relying on customers' satisfaction and good will for their future success became clear during earlier stages of analysis (see chapter 6.3.3). This led to a search for interview partners whose future success would not rely on customers' attitudes and in which the customers were more dependent on the frontline employee than vice versa.

Several iterations of this process lead the formation of a grounded theory. The theoretical sampling process ensures that there is sufficient data available to develop the aspects, dimensions and relationships of the categories within the theory (Corbin and Strauss 1990, Charmaz 2006).

Sampling ends when a point of theoretical saturation is reached (Birks and Mills 2011). This is the case when no new codes or aspects for the categories or relationships within the grounded theory are found in data collection. Also, categories should be conceptually developed to the point where dimensions and subcategories are well articulated and integrated in the category (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Corbin and Strauss 1998). Some authors define theo-

[14] For a fuller account of this example see Charmaz (2006, pp. 97-99).

retical saturation slightly differently (Charmaz 2006). Morse puts it as follows: "*researchers cease data collection when they have enough data to build a comprehensive and convincing theory. That is, saturation occurs*" (2011, p. 148).

Details on the sample used in this study and the sampling strategies employed will be given in chapter 5.3.

5.2.3. Coding in Grounded Theory

Coding refers to an analytical method common to most forms of qualitative data analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994, pp. 54ff.; Patton 2002; Richards 2005; Spiggle 1994). It involves going through the data and categorizing it by assigning it to codes – names or labels that are descriptive of the information contained in them. The amount of data coded, or assigned to a particular code, can vary from single words to whole paragraphs (Charmaz 2006; Miles and Huberman 1994). Table 16 shows some examples from this research project. The interview excerpts have been assigned to the codes on the left-hand side of the table.

Table 16: Examples for Codes

Code	Quotes
Finding a compromise	*You can't keep avoiding everything so you have to pick out those things where you say I can just about live with this and sort of put other stuff to the back of the line and then try and make your profits with those things (Charles 338-347)* *Thankfully, you generally don't have just the one product that you have to sell, but several, so that you can choose and the products that we offer are all gut. Well, I don't know about all, but the ideas behind them are gut and therefore you've always got something that fits. (Andrew 98-101)* Interviewer: Do you then find a strategy for dealing with this? *Yes, you look for alternatives. They may not be the ones that are currently focused on, but that you can sort of push yourself (Andrew 104-106)*
Importance of customer satisfaction for future success	*If I knowingly recommend something, where I, that then, that I am certain will later fail and go pear-shaped, I would be shooting myself in the foot. Because, if that goes wrong and the customer then comes to me, what do I get for recommending such a product? An unhappy and dissatisfied customer who will not do anything of the sort again, no products that even sound similar or anything, he's just not going to do it. At that moment he just doesn't trust me anymore. I can always say that such things can happen, but if I do that two or three times, no customer is going to believe me again. And because of this, I wouldn't do that for reasons of self-preservation, not if I think that the product is going to go awry. (Charles 585-593)* *.. but if a customer is happy, he is much more likely to go tell his friends, look, I solved that with this guy, and I was super happy with him, you should go there and talk to him. That is sort of my long-term strategy. (Fred 62-64)*

While coding is a fundamental analysis tool in most forms of qualitative research, how the coding is done differs. Grounded theory has its own approach of coding, which is typically divided into three coding stages (Birks and Mills 2011, Charmaz 2006). While different grounded theory authors use different terms for these stages[15] and differ somewhat in their recommendations for each stage, the stages can be divided into initial, intermediate and advanced coding. These coding strategies are adapted to suit the phase of the research project that they are used in – at the beginning of analysis, during later stages of conceptual analysis when concepts and categories have been developed and finally during the later stages when concepts and categories are integrated into theory.

Charmaz (2006, p 46) refers to these stages as initial, focused and theoretical coding. She sees grounded theory as consisting of at least two main phases:

> *"1) an initial phase involving name each word, line or segment of data followed by*
>
> *2) a focused, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate and organize large amounts of data."*

She also discusses axial coding (p. 60ff.), a specific type of coding introduced as intermediate form of coding by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998, Strauss 1987) and theoretical coding (p.63ff.). This chapter will describe these coding stages and relate how they have been applied in this project.

Initial Coding

This is a very open form of coding[16] in which the researcher should stay close to the data and not try to find preconceived categories, whether these stem from existing theories or personal beliefs (Charmaz 2006). "Open" means to continuously be receptive to new ideas and thoughts connected with the data and not to hold oneself too close to the initial research questions. This stage is highly reflexive, meaning that the researcher constantly hast to question him- or herself about their coding decisions (Birks and Mills 2011). However, while initial coding should be open ended, Charmaz (2006) acknowledges that researchers will be influenced by their prior experiences, ideas and skills and that which codes and ideas resonate with the researcher and thus emerge from the data will depend on this.[17]

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[15] See Birks and Mills (2011, p. 116) for an overview of the terms used in prominent texts on grounded theory.

[16] Both Glaser (1978) and Strauss and Corbin (1990,1998, Corbin and Strauss 2008) refer to the initial coding stage as open coding.

[17] This tension between coding very openly and inductively from the data, where the codes emerge solely from the data, and more deductive coding, where codes stem from the interpretation of data as made by the researcher is one of the core points of contention between the founding fathers of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss, and is addressed in their works (Glaser 1978, Strauss and Corbin 1990, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 136-137)

Several grounded theory authors recommend asking questions to aid data analysis (Birks and Mills 2011, p. 98; Glaser 1978, 57; Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 89ff.). Charmaz (2006, p.47) gives the following four questions, which have been adopted in part from Glaser (1978) and Glaser and Strauss (1967):

- What is this data a study of?
- What does the data suggest? Pronounce?
- From whose point of view?
- What theoretical category does this specific datum indicate?

Charmaz (2006, p. 48) also recommends using codes that reflect action rather than using descriptive codes as this can aid understanding processes.[18]

These initial codes are "provisional, comparative, and grounded in data" (Charmaz 2006, p.48). This means that they can later be renamed or reorganized, breaking up codes into different codes or coalescing several codes into one. Comparative means that they are formed by constant comparisons between data (see also chapter 5.2.2). Finally, they are grounded in data because they were developed from the data, not other theories (whether because they were created inductively or reflectively through interpretation).

In this project, initial coding was done in two steps. First phase began by printing copies of the interview transcripts and penciling codes in. This was done for all interviews, moving between line-by-line and sentence-by-sentence coding. The interviews were then coded again, developing ideas and looking at the interviews section by section. This was done by using tables in which there was a column for the interview, for coding ideas and memo writing respectively. The type of coding was oriented on the coding work presented by Charmaz (2006, p. 52). An example is shown below in table 17.

Intermediate Coding - Focused and Axial Coding

Focused coding follows initial coding and is the second major coding phase in grounded theory as described by Charmaz (2006, p.57). In this stage, the researcher selects the most significant and/or frequent codes from the initial coding phase. Further coding then centers around these codes. Focused coding remains close to the data and draws comparisons between data to develop codes. This can involve looking for the impacts of situations, comparing intensities, causes, contexts and other elements (Charmaz 2006). The researcher also looks for links and relationships between codes.

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address this point eloquently in their book on grounded theory. In this context authors also frequently cite Ian Dey (1999, p. 251) who said: "There is a difference between an open mind and an empty head", meaning that a researcher will always be influenced by his prior knowledge and experiences. This point is also related to the discussion on theoretical sensitivity (see chapter 5.2.1).

[18] Charmaz (2006), p.47-57) gives detailed advice on initial coding in her book *Constructing Grounded Theory.*

Table 17: Example for Initial Coding

IP	Transcript	Memos, Notes, Thoughts	Codes
Eric 264-270	*I even notice that myself. If they come across as nice and likeable, you just develop a stronger interest in the case, in a manner of speaking, and you handle the case … you don't work more intensely on it, but in a way you indirectly invest more care. More than if the people come across as unfriendly and disagreeable. Then you just sort of deal with the case the way you've got to it. Or just the way it must be done. Just as much as is necessary, so that you can't be reproached for it.*	Engages more with case if customers are likeable. Expresses himself carefully – in a manner of speaking, not more intensely, but in a way, indirectly, Says he invests more care into a case for a likeable customer, but at the same time seems to be wary of saying this. His emotional reaction to customers changes his behaviour, but he feels it shouldn't? Unfriendly customers – doing only what must be done, doing no more than necessary, bare minimum. So that he won't be reproached, doesn't get into trouble. Keep yourself safe from reproach, consequences. Covering oneself. He isn't risking anything by doing less than necessary, but for some customers he does more.	Caring more for likeable customers Caring depends on liking a customer Doing more than must be done Doing only what must be done Covering oneself from possibility of reproach

Charmaz addresses axial coding as well, which is the intermediate coding phase described by Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998; Corbin and Strauss 2008). Axial coding revolves around specific categories, defining their properties, dimensions and subcategories. It is called axial coding, as coding is seen to "occur around the axis of a category" (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 123). Its aim is to find links between and within categories (Birks and Mills 2011). Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.127) offer guidelines for axial coding involving questioning the data regarding conditions, actions and interactions, as well as consequences. The techniques used to heighten theoretical sensibility (see Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 69; also chapter 5.2.1) can also be useful (Birks and Mills 2011). Focused coding and axial coding are similar, though axial coding focuses more on the links between categories and also follows slightly more detailed and rigid rules (Charmaz 2006. p. 61).

In this project I followed Charmaz' recommendations on focused coding (2006, p. 57ff.). Focused coding was done using qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA©[19] and again using

[19] MAXQDA is a qualitative data analysis (QDA) software that supports the coding of data. It also offers a variety of retrieval functions that can aid analysis. An overview of the software's functions can be found on the website of the program www.maxqda.com. Corbin and Strauss (2008) also give examples of using MAXQDA for coding and grounded theory analysis (p. 161, pp.190-193 and p.248). A discussion on the use of various QDA software can for example be found in Flick (2009, pp. 358-372) and Bringer, Johnston and Brackenridge (2006).

tables for specific codes. A depiction of the code tree developed using MAXQDA© can be found in appendix C.

Advanced Coding – Theoretical Coding

Advanced Coding follows the other forms of coding in the more final stages of data analysis. It is through this coding that the concepts emerging from the data are shaped into a theory (Birks and Mills 2011). Charmaz (2006, p. 63) calls this stage theoretical coding. During this stage the focus lies on the relationships between the codes, to integrate the individual codes and the concepts they denote into a theory. "*Theoretical codes specify possible relationship between categories you have developed in your focused coding*" (Charmaz 2006, p.63).

Charmaz follows many of Glaser's (1978, 1998) recommendations on theoretical coding. He describes several types of theoretical codes, including such categories as causes, contexts, consequences, conditions, degrees, types and dimensions. Birks and Mills (2011, p. 116ff.) discuss the technique of developing a storyline to aid advance coding, a method also advocated by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998).

In this project, the advanced coding stages involved recoding and refining the codes using MAXQDA©, again using tables to refine the relationships between codes and working on the storyline. In this project, writing up the results for the report proved a final stage of analysis as pinning down the results for presentation revealed gaps, ambiguities and open questions that meant going back into the data. Writing as a form of qualitative analysis is discussed by several authors on qualitative research such as Ezzy (2002, p. 140ff.), Richards (2006, p.183ff.), Gibbs (2010) and Golden-Biddle and Locke (2007).

5.2.4. Using Memos and Diagrams

Memos are a fundamental part of grounded theory analysis (Charmaz 2006, Birks and Mills 2011, Strauss and Corbin 1998). Memo-writing means writing down ideas, thoughts and questions during the analysis. It is also a way of enabling and supporting thinking about codes and the analytical steps made. Memos allow the researcher to facilitate a conversation between him- or herself, the data and the emerging theory (Charmaz 2006). Because of this central position of memos in developing grounded theory, authors on grounded theory give detailed accounts on their use of memos as well as tips and guidelines for using memos (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 117ff.; Charmaz 2006, p. 72ff.; Birks and Mills 2011, p. 40ff). Corbin and Strauss depict long series of memos to illustrate analytical steps taken in research projects in their book Basics of Qualitative Research (2008, p. 164ff; p. 200ff.).

Developing diagrams of ideas, concepts and relationships between codes can have a similar effect of aiding analysis (Birks and Mills 2011, p. 103-106.; Charmaz 2006, p. 117-119; Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 117ff.). Diagrams allow for a visualization of ideas and of categories and their concepts (Charmaz 2006). They can aid in developing dimensions for a concept or in understanding the relationships between concepts.

In this project memos were written in tables during coding (see for example table 17 in chapter 5.2.3). Also, memos and diagrams were written in a notebook that was used during analysis. Diagrams consisted mostly of little mind-maps, but also of visualizations of various concepts. Examples of the end versions of such diagrams can be seen in the chapter on the results (see for example p. 158).

5.3. The Empirical Study – Step by Step

Chapter 5.2 gave an outline of grounded theory as well as describing some of its central elements in more detail. It also illustrated how these methods were used in this research.

In the following chapter, I will describe the main empirical study carried out for this research project. In particular, the next sections will describe the steps taken during the planning and preparation, the data collection and data analysis phase of the project.

5.3.1. Planning and Preparing the Empirical Research.

For this project, semi-standardized face-to-face interviews were carried out. The interview style can be described as a responsive interview[20]. Responsive "*interviewing is about obtaining interviewees' interpretations of their experiences and their understanding of the world in which they live and work*" (Rubin and Rubin 2005, p. 36). Further characteristics of such interviews include using open questions that give interviewees sufficient room to give and develop their own answers without limiting the possible responses. Questions should be modified and developed according to what the interviewee says and not according to what the interviewer thinks (and thought prior to the interview). Interviewers must not only be flexible and adaptive within an interview situation, but also with regard to further decisions on whom to interview or where to collect data. Responsive interviewing is seen as a conversation, a two-way communication in which the interaction between interviewer and interviewee influ-

[20] Responsive interviewing is a term coined and mostly used by Rubin and Rubin (2005). Their recommendations for planning responsive interviews, developing a rapport with the interviewees to facilitate open communication, and wording and asking main questions, follow-up questions and probes are similar to the advice given by other authors on qualitative methods such as Patton (2002, pp. 309ff), Mason (2002, pp. 62ff) and McCracken (1988, pp. 21ff.). They are also in line with Charmaz' suggestions for conducting interviews (2006, p. 29ff). In their book on "*Qualitative Interviewing. The Art of Hearing Data*" Rubin and Rubin (2005) provide a highly detailed guideline and advice for interviewing. For this reason I choose to follow their recommendations in particular and use their term responsive interviewing.

ences the outcome. This means that the interviewer must be aware of his or her own opinions, thoughts and prejudices[21].

Interview Guide

An interview guide was developed for the study[22]. It “lists the questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview” (Patton 2002, p. 343). Such a guide was used for several reasons. These include helping to structure interviews and ensuring that certain topics are breached in all interviews. It serves as a memory aid, freeing the researcher to concentrate on the interview situation and on what exactly the interviewer is saying (Rubin and Rubin 2005, Patton 2002, McCracken 1988). It is important to point out, however, that the interview guide is just that – a guide. Interviewers can and should deviate from the interview guideline in response to what happens in the interview and to what the respondents are saying. The openness of the interview and the freedom of the interviewee to pursue points that they deem relevant have priority over a strict adherence to previously formulated questions (Rubin and Rubin 2005, Charmaz 2006, Patton 2002). Thus, in the actual interview situations during this project, I often strayed from the path set out by the interview guide. However, it did serve as a useful reminder of which topics to address during the course of the interview.

The interview guide was developed on the basis of the project’s research questions. Potential questions for the interview were generated both by using mind-mapping techniques (Buzan and Buzan 2006) and in two brainstorming sessions. The first of these brain storming sessions was carried out with four colleagues, all researchers in business studies. The second session was carried out with four persons working in front line positions. The questions elicited in this way were then sorted and evaluated and used to create the interview guide. I involved other persons, both academic researchers and practitioners, in the development of the interview guide to ensure a broader view on the subject.

The interviews began with easy to answer questions designed to put interviewees at their ease and to get the conversation flowing. The questions were phrased according to the advice given by Rubin and Rubin (2005, p. 117): “begin the questioning by asking matters that provide the interviewee with a comfort level. Choose questions that are central to your research but not threatening and that deal with matters the interviewee almost certainly knows about, and ideally, feels good about.” Interviewees were asked to talk about their jobs and positions and what they did in their company.

[21] In this Rubin and Rubin concur with advice given by grounded theory authors such as Charmaz (2006, for example p. 15 and p.17) and Strauss and Corbin (1998, pp. 48ff.) for researchers to be aware of their prior knowledge and ideas.

[22] Interview guides are sometimes also referred to as interview protocol (Patton 2002). Rubin and Rubin speak of conversational guides (2005, pp. 146ff.) and describe an interview guide as a highly detailed and formal type of conversational guides.

The next section of the interview guide focused on typical customer contact situations and what interviewees believed their companies and customers expected of a good frontline employee. They were also asked about what they themselves feel makes a good employee.

Then, the interview guide focuses on situation in which the frontline employees were faced by different expectations from customers and their company and how they dealt with these situations. The questions were based on the critical incident technique[23]. The interviewees were also asked about the situations and customers that made such contrasting expectations easier or harder to deal with.

Table 18: Interview Guide for Frontline Employees

Interview-guide used during interviews with frontline employees (translated from German)

First Questions, Identification of Interviewees

1. Please tell me a little about your job and what you do.

Description of Customer Contact Situations

2. Please describe the sort of situations in which you have contact to customers. What are typical customer contact situations like?
   - How free are you in your behavior when interacting with customers?
   - Does your company offer you any guidelines or similar as to how you should behave towards customers?
3. In your opinion, what makes a good frontline employee (sales representative/ bank assistant/ insurance representative…adjust to respondent's job)? What is important?
4. What do you think your company expects from you during customer contact situations?
   - How is this communicated?
5. What do you think your company would see as a good frontline employee?
   - What aspects would be important for you company when naming the employee of the month?
6. What do you believe your customers expect from you?

Situations with role conflict

7. Have you experienced situations, in which it was difficult for you to fulfill both the expectations of your customers and your company?
   - Can you describe an example of such a situation?
   - How did you feel during that situation?
   - What made fulfilling both expectations difficult?
   - How did you deal with the differing expectations?

[23] The critical incident technique looks at incidents, situations in which human behavior can be observed to such a point that conclusions can be drawn from it, that were perceived by the interviewee to be critical, i.e. central in causing a specific outcome. Interviewees are asked about positive and negative critical incidents and how they experienced these situations, acted in these situations and what elements caused their behavior. It was developed in by Flanagan (1954) and has since been used frequently in studying human behavior in job roles, particularly in services marketing (e.g. Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault 1985; Gremler 2004; Lee, Singh, and Chan 2011) and in organizational and industrial psychology (Butterfield et al. 2005; Thomas and Bostrom 2010).

Table 18: Interview Guide for Frontline Employees (cont.)

8. Can you think of such a situation, where you felt yourself to stand in between the expectations of your customers and those of you company, and you decided to do more for the customer?
   - Can you describe that situation to me?
   - Can you remember what you felt during the situation?
   - Can you explain your decision? Why did you decide to do more for the customer?
9. Can you remember a situation in which you decided to favor the company's expectations?
   - Can you describe that situation to me?
   - Can you remember what you felt during the situation?
   - Can you explain your decision? Why did you decide to go with the expectations from the company?

Further questions

10. Are such standing in-between situations common or more of a rare exception?
    - Do you have a rule of thumb whether you go more with the customers' expectations or the company's?
    - How do you usually decide to handle such situations?
11. Have you experienced situations in which you felt emotionally closer to the customer than your company?

    If yes
    - What are such situations like? What might be important aspects?
    - When do you feel closer to the customer?

    If no
    - Why do you believe that that is the case?
12. What should customers do, or be like, to make it more likely that you would favor their wishes and expectations over those of your company?
13. What might companies do to ensure that you favor their expectations over those of the customers in situations where they conflict?

A translated version of the interview guide, which was composed in German, can be seen in table 18. The original version can be seen in the appendix (appendix A).

Selection and Recruitment of the Sample

The first participants were recruited using purposive sampling (Patton 2002, see also chapter 5.2.2.). Potential interviewees were required to have worked in frontline positions for a minimum of three years and at least one year in their current position and company. This was to ensure that there would have been sufficient time for role conflict between their company and customers to have arisen and for frontline employees to have developed strategies for dealing with these situations. In selecting the interview partners, care was also taken to ensure that there was some variance in regard to age, hierarchical position within the company and sex.

As the research question was judged to be sensitive, where respondents would be asked to talk openly about situations where they may have left their employer at a disadvantage, the first respondents were identified using personal contacts and networks, including contacts to frontline employees from previous projects. The researcher (and interviewer) has no personal relationship with any of the respondents, but many were found over mutual acquaintances. This helped establish a certain level of trust between interviewer and interviewee and in encouraging participants to be more open.

From these first contacts, further participants were identified using snowball sampling strategies (Patton 2002, p. 237). Also some participants were recruited according to insights gained from the preliminary data analysis. It became clear early in the analysis process that many frontline employees spoke of their dependence on the goodwill of customers for future success. So some frontline employees were recruited who were less dependent on customers' satisfaction or where the customer was more dependent on the goodwill of the frontline employee to see how this changed the employees handling of situations with role conflict.

In total, 20 people were recruited for interviews. However, as one respondent later asked that his interview record be deleted and no direct quotes used from the interview, only 19 interviews were part of the analysis. Notes made during the 20th interview and ideas from it were however useful in guiding analysis.

Table 19 gives an overview of the sample.

Table 19: Overview of Sample

	Name*	Sex	Age**	Job	Company/ Industry	Interview place
1	Andrew	male	31-35	Customer consultant	Financial services, large company	Home
2	Brian	male	36-40	Customer consultant, freelance principal insurance agent (but working exclusively for one company)	Insurance company, large company	Place of work (private office)
3	Charles	male	56-60	Customer consultant, investment, looks after private customers with substantial private assets	Financial services, large company	Home
4	David	male	61-65	Customer consultant, freelance insurance agent (but working exclusively for one company)	Insurance company, large company	Place of work (private office)
5	Eric	male	25-29	Call centre agent handling adjustment of insurance	Insurance company,	Home

				claims	large company	
6	Fred	male	31-35	Consultant, financial advisor Free-lance, but works exclusively for one company.	Financial services, independent financial advisory services Medium-sized company	Café
7	George	male	61-65	Branch manager, later district office manager, Retired due to health issues	Health insurance company, Large company	Home
8	Harry	male	36-40	Managing director Previously consultant in advertising agency (B2B)	Media agency Small to medium-sized enterprise	Place of work (private office)
9	Ian	male	26-30	Auditor	Auditing firm Large company	Café
10	John	male	31-35	Trainer, fitness instructor	Gymnasium, fitness centre Small to medium-sized enterprise	Café
11	Karl***	male	56-60	Customer consultant, free-lance insurance agent (but working exclusively for one company)	Insurance company, large company	Place of work (private office)
12	Lewis	male	26-30	Sales trainee	Insurance company, large company	Café
13	Matthew	male	36-40	Customer consultant Inhouse consultant (B2B)	Energy industry, Large company	Café
14	Nicolas	male	36-40	Manager Looks after stores and branch offices	Telecommunication industry, Large company	Café
15	Olivia	female	36-40	Administrative officer in charge of granting customer loans (B2C and B2B)	Financial services, large company	Home
16	Phoebe	female	36-40	Customer consultant	Government agency	Home
17	Quinn	female	26-30	Call centre agent	Mail order company, home shopping	Café
18	Rebecca	female	26-30	Psychotherapist	Health centre affiliat-	Café

					ed with university Small to medium-sized enterprise	
19	Sarah	female	26-30	Psychotherapist	Health centre affiliated with university Small to medium-sized enterprise	Café
20	Thomas	male	31-35	Customer consultant	Logistics industry Large company	Café

* **Note:** All names were changed to protect the identities of the interviewees.

** **Note:** Ages are given in 5-year brackets to protect the identities of the interviewees.

*** **Note:** Karl later asked that his interview record be deleted and no direct quotes used.

In total, five female and fifteen male frontline employees were interviewed. Their positions within their company ranged from a lower range to leading management positions. Four interviewees were self-employed, although all only worked with one company. Three of these were working in an industry were working freelance for one insurance company is the norm for customer consultants. The age of the interview partners ranged from the late twenties to early sixties, capturing employees at the beginning and end of their careers. One interview partner, Nicolas, stopped working directly with customers but looks after and manages frontline employees and their supervisors. Most interviewees work with consumers as customers, but some, Harry, Matthew, Olivia and Thomas, work with business customers.

The names of all interview partners have been changed to protect their identity.

5.3.2. Data Collection

Potential interview participants were first contacted by e-mail and given a short description of the research project. They were told that the focus of the research was about how frontline employees were sometimes confronted by contradictory expectations from customers and their companies and that the researcher was interested in how frontline employees deal with such situations. If the contacted persons agreed to take part in the study, a meeting time and place was agreed on.

The interviews took place in either the interviewee's home, their place of work or in a public space, such as a café. Before the interview began, participants were again told about the research project in general terms and about how the collected data would be used. All participants were given the opportunity to ask questions before and after the interview. Interviewees were also given a written confidentiality agreement, stating that both their identity and that of their company would be treated confidentially.

All interviews were recorded and took between 30 and 90 minutes. Field notes were made after the interview, documenting thoughts about the interview, ideas and a short account about the interview situations. These notes were not coded, but did influence future interviews and were reviewed several times during data analysis.

5.3.3. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis was carried out according to the grounded theory data analysis procedures outlined in chapter 5.2.3. To avoid repetition, in this chapter I will not detail the procedures themselves and instead focus on the actual steps taken in data analysis.

Data analysis and interpretation are closely linked in qualitative research (Spiggle 1994, Patton 2002). They are not two distinctive steps that are taken separately and subsequently, but rather interweave with each other. Analysis of data involves taking apart, restructuring and reorganizing data, whereas interpretation relates to the forming of meaning and relationships in the data. Patton (2002, p. 268) describes these two processes eloquently:

> *"Analysis is the process of bringing order to the data, organizing what is there into patterns, categories, and basic descriptive units. [...] Interpretation involves attaching meaning and significance to the analysis, explaining descriptive patterns, and looking for relationships and linkages among descriptive units."*

In grounded theory, these two processes also intermingle with data collection (see chapter 5.2.2).

The steps taken for analysis can be described clearly and easily, whereas interpretation is a much more elusive process. The first involves describing what was done, the second making thoughts and moments of understanding transparent. Because of this, the analytical steps taken will be detailed here. Documenting interpretation is easiest in conjunction with the results and insights it led to. Chapter 6 will focus on the result, aiming to make the interpretations made to reach the results as transparent as possible.

Before the analysis began, the interview transcripts were read several times over. First impressions and insights gained from this were jotted down in short memos on each participant.

Next began a phase of initial coding (see chapter 5.2.3.). First, each interview transcript was printed and then coded in detail. This involved going through the transcripts line by line or sentence by sentence and penciling codes in. The interviews were then coded again using open or initial coding procedures (Charmaz 2006, p. 48). Coding was done using tables with columns for the transcript, memos and coding ideas. An example for this can be seen above in table 17 (see chapter 5.2.3.). During this phase, the interviews were also listened to again while coding, to help understand meaning by hearing the intonation and pronunciation of the interviewees.

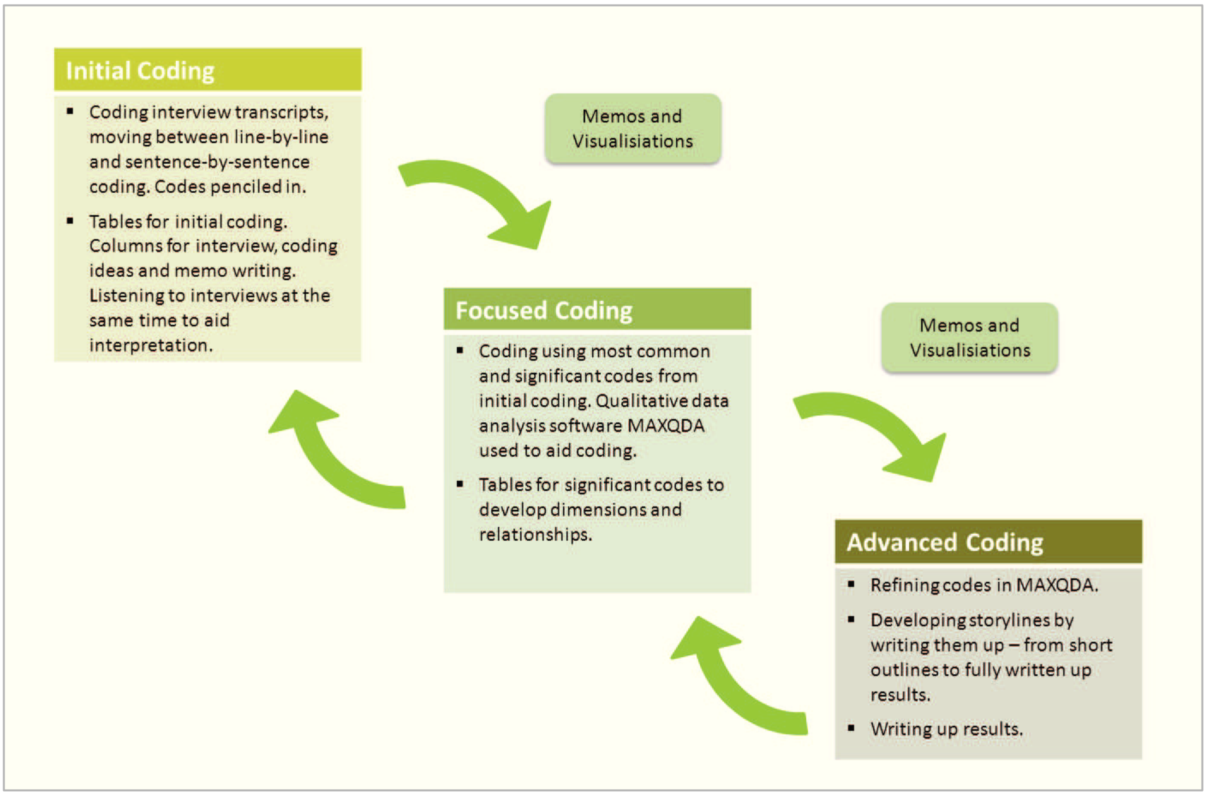
The next coding phase, focused coding (Charmaz 2006, pp. 57ff.), was done with the aid of qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA©. As well as coding the transcripts in MAXQDA©, additional tables were used to help understand the relationships and dimensions of specific codes. As mentioned in chapter 5.2.3., the code tree can be found in appendix C.

Advanced coding focused on developing and refining the codes using MAXQDA©, again with the help of tables. Writing up the results was a further step in analysis (see also Ezzy 2002, pp. 140ff.; Richards 2006, p. 183ff; Gibbs 2010; Golden-Biddle and Locke 2007). Writing enabled working on the storylines of the individual codes and concepts as well as the overall results. It showed where there were still gaps in reasoning and understanding and helped the cohesion within and between codes. Writing began with short outlines and notes, that became more elaborate, were evaluated and rewritten until they reached their final form as can be seen in chapter 6. Diagrams and visualizations of concepts and relationships were also used; both in developing ideas and in aiding reporting (see also chapter 5.2.4.).

During this entire process, memos were used. This ranged from short questions and ideas that arose during analysis to outlines of storylines. The three phases outlined overlapped and were interconnected, although the focus shifted as analysis advanced. Analysis of course began with initial and open coding, and then moved on to primarily focused and later advanced coding. However, insights and ideas gained in the later coding stages often resulted in going back to earlier stages, and looking over material again with more open coding.

The analytical process is outlined in figure 19:

Figure 19: Outline of Data Analysis Process



The results of data analysis will be discussed in the following chapter.

6. Between Company and Customer Expectations

In this chapter I will present the results of the interviews with frontline employees or people closely connected to frontline employees as described in chapter 5.3.

All interviewees reported situations where there was a clear conflict of interests between the customer and the company. In several cases, these situations involved not only promoting one side's interests above the other but actually doing something that the interviewees felt harmed the other side. However, although all interviewees had experienced situations of role conflict, the way they approached and dealt with these, whether they reported it as stressful and the reasons they gave for their actions differed a great deal across the interviews. This chapter will explore the different responses to situations of conflicting expectations, the different perceptions of interviewees and explanations given for their choices.

The interviews were conducted in German with German native speakers. They are translated to English, but as at least some meaning and connotations are almost always lost in translation the original quotes are presented in the footnotes.

In presenting qualitative data, there is always a balance to be found between description and interpretation (Richards 2005, Patton 2002, p. 503). This report will begin with the focus a little more on the description side, laying out the findings according to the different themes found in the study as one would spread out the pieces of a puzzle. These individual parts will then be brought together as the chapter progresses, shifting the focus more strongly to the interpretation of the results and the relationship between the findings.

6.1. Situations of Role Conflict

This chapter looks at the types of role conflict situations described in the interviews. It will concentrate on situations that were particularly salient in the descriptions of the interviewees, either because they were a dilemma that frontline employees faced frequently in their work or because it was a situation that stood out as especially difficult and distressing. The aim of this chapter is to help develop a feel for what exactly is meant by "role conflict situations" – a generic term that is applicable to a wide range of situations.

When looking at the types of situations described, they can be grouped roughly into two loose categories:

- Situations in which the frontline employee feels pressure to act in the interests of the company and against those of the customer.
- Situations in which the frontline employee feels pressure to act in the interests of the customer and against those of the company.

These situations will be looked at in more detail below.

Pressure felt to act in the interests of the company and against those of the customer.

The first type of commonly described situation refers to frontline employees feeling that their company expected them to offer customers products and services that the employees felt were not in the customers' interests. In some cases this was because they believed that the offering goes beyond what the customer needs and requires higher spending on the customer's part than is necessary. In other cases, the frontline employees felt that the product or service they felt required to push was not what the customer wanted, but that they felt under pressure to try and sell it none the less. Andrew, a customer consultant for a large financial institution, describes such a situation.

> Andrew: *"Many people can't handle the situation because there is a lot of pressure on you. Especially right now, at this time, when things aren't going so well, see? Products get developed that do fit the situation, no doubt, but they just don't suit every customer. Then you feel pressure from behind or from above that a certain product has to be focused on somehow. You have to introduce it to a customer, even though you know it doesn't really fit. In those situations I think it depends very much on who you are, whether you continue to promote the product or you say 'no, that is not for you. But I do have something else'."*[24]

He talks of pressure from behind or above, from his company and his superiors to push a product, to continue to promote it, even if he feels that it does not suit the customer's needs. Charles, an investment manager also working for a large financial company, describes a similar situation:

> Charles: *"I had a product on my desk, for example, all real estate prices had been in free fall and then last year there are these people from London and talk about real estate products in England that had been making 15 to 20%. (...) And I said to myself, you can't do that with your customers. It stinks to high heaven, they just want to get rid of it. So I didn't even tell my customers about it. But that product had to be placed, it was in a letter from the boss, we have to place so and so many*

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[24] Andrew: *Es gibt unheimlich viele, die können mit der Situation nicht umgehen, weil man sehr viel Druck bekommt. Gerade jetzt in der, in der Phase, wo es ja nicht gerade so toll aussieht, ne? Da werden schon Produkte entwickelt, die auch in die Situation reinpassen, gar keine Frage, aber es nicht unbedingt bei jedem Kunden auch gut passt und, wenn man dann so den Druck von hinten verspürt oder von oben verspürt, dann, man muss jetzt dieses Produkt irgendwie in den Fokus stellen. Man muss es jetzt einem Kunden vorstellen, obwohl man jetzt selber weiß 'passt eigentlich nicht', dann glaube ich, dann kommt es auf jeden selber an, ob man das jetzt weiter anpreist oder ob man sagt: "Nee, zu Ihnen passt das nicht. Ich habe hier aber noch was anderes". (80-88)*

million of this. (...) And so and so many have to be sold by us and you're stuck with them. So, the question isn't do I do this, but which customer do I sell it to.[25]

Again, the frontline employee is describing a role conflict situation in which he feels pressured to sell products against what he believes are the customers' interests. Even more strongly than in the case of Andrew, Charles believes the products to not just be wrong for the customer, but to be actually harmful – they stink to high heaven, implying that he believes them to be bad quality, risky products.

Feeling required to push the company's interests against the interests of the customer does not necessarily involve selling products or services. For example, Rebecca's company expects her to support research in her company by forwarding her customers, or patients, questionnaires or involving them in research projects. She feels that complying with this expectation is often not in the interests of her customers and can even be detrimental to their wellbeing.

> Rebecca: *"And in a research project the contact is more superficial [edit: than in a therapy situation] (...) and I do think that you do sort of do things with them that are good for research but not good for the clients. They have to spend ages filling in questionnaires, which can be annoying, but for some it is also emotionally stressful, as they are asked a lot about sad or low moments, and some of the research requires them to be put into a sad and dejected mood, to find out how it impacts their spirits. And this includes people with depressions, who won't be able to find their way out of that mood again easily".*[26]
>
> *"I feel that there are a lot of situations where there is conflict with research, even though I am working on my doctorate myself and think research is really important, it is taxing for the patients. And some of the time the questions are just intolerable, not just the amount of time required, but it is also the content. For example, I had given a questionnaire to a client with an eating disorder and she had to fill in her weight and things. And it showed that she was a little overweight, which she was, but we spend all our time working on this point, that she accepts*

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[25] Charles: *... weil ich habe ja ein Produkt auf dem Tisch liegen zum Beispiel, alle Immobilienpreise sind extrem gefallen und dann kommen im letzten Jahr welche aus London an und erzählen von Immobilien in England und die hätten über 15 bis 20% gebracht, (...) und da habe ich schon gesagt, das kannst du mit deinen Kunden nicht machen, weil das stinkt schon zum Himmel, die wollen das nur los werden und da habe ich den Kunden erst mal gar nicht drauf angesprochen. Nur das muss platziert werden, da stand dann drin, in einem Schreiben vom Chef, wir müssen noch so und so viele Millionen davon platzieren. (...) ja dann kommen da in unsere Stadt so und so viele Millionen an und die haben Sie dann an der Backe. Das heißt, da ist nicht die Frage, mache ich das überhaupt, sondern welchem Kunden verkaufe ich das jetzt.* (632-647)

[26] Rebecca: *Und in dem Forschungsprojekt sind die Kontakte halt schon ein bisschen oberflächlicher (...) ich find halt schon, dann macht man auch ein bisschen Sachen mit denen, die für die Forschung gut sind, nicht für die Patienten. Die müssen dann halt ewig Fragebögen ausfüllen, was schon mal nervig ist, für manche ist das auch belastend, weil die ja schon immer auch nach traurigen Momenten fragen, dann haben wir halt auch noch einen Teil, da werden die extra in so traurige Stimmung versetzt, um zu gucken, welchen Einfluss das auf die Stimmung hat , das sind dann auch Leute mit Depressionen, die halt nicht unbedingt, die sich da nicht so schnell wieder raus holen können. (73-80)*

her weight and doesn't throw up. And then she gets 20 pages of questionnaire with 'how happy are you with your weight' and that really set her back. From a therapy point of view it was totally awful and I don't give that to my patients any more. (...) and you do get asked, 'why don't you do that' and have to defend yourself".[27]

In all of these situations, front line employees feel conflicted because they feel that complying with their company's expectations goes against the customer' interests. In these cases, the customer does not explicitly express an expectation towards the frontline employee but the employees feel a responsibility towards the customers to protect their interests. The frontline employees often described themselves as customer oriented, feeling their job responsibilities included looking after customer interests. This issue will be explored more fully in chapter 6.3.1.

Pressure felt to act in the interests of the customer and against those of the company

The other type of situation that was frequently described involved the customer wanting the frontline employee to do more for him or her than the employee felt was acceptable to their company.

Quinn is a call center agent working for a mail order company and her customers frequently ask for favors that are against company rules. For example, special offers of the day can only be ordered on that day, beginning at midnight. Many customers call Quinn late at night to ask for next day's special offer.

> Quinn: *"We have special offers of the day, so on that day that product is on special offer and costs less. And orders are closed at midnight, so that you can add to your order from midnight to midnight, after that it is closed and you need to place a new order. The 5.95€ charge for packaging and postage are added per day, so that's really important to our customers. So if a customer calls at half eleven at night and wants to order tomorrow's special offer, in theory we are not allowed to add that to the order, because it is not the next day yet."*[28]

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[27] Rebecca: *Also ich finde an vielen Stellen gibt es einen Konflikt mit Forschung, obwohl ich hier selbst auch promoviere und eigentlich Forschung sehr wichtig finde, es ist halt 'ne Belastung für die Patienten. Und zum Teil sind auch die Fragebögen unmöglich, also erst mal ist es ein Zeitaufwand, aber es ist auch inhaltlich eine Belastung. Zum Beispiel hatte ich ein Fragebogen einer essgestörten Patientin gegeben, wo man das Gewicht und so eingeben muss, und dann kam raus dass sie leicht übergewichtig ist. Ist sie ja auch, aber wir arbeiten die ganze Zeit da dran, dass sie es akzeptiert und nicht anfängt zu brechen und dann kriegt sie da irgendwie 20 Seiten Fragebogen wo immer steht ,ja wie zufrieden sind sie mit ihrem Übergewicht?'. Das hat sie total zurückgeworfen und voll irritiert und ich fand es auch therapeutisch voll blöd. Und das hab ich jetzt meinen Patienten nicht mehr gegeben, (...)man wir auch schon gefragt warum man das nicht macht und muss sich dann verteidigen. (253-274)*

[28] Quinn: *also wir haben immer so Tagesangebote, das heißt also dieses Produkt ist an dem Tag besonders günstig und das ist ja immer so, dass die Bestellung um null Uhr werden die quasi geschlossen, das heißt man kann*

Similar experiences are described by Brian, David and Eric, who were asked directly by customers to do something that is against the company rules or expectations. They work for large insurance companies and are frequently faced by customers expecting greater insurance cover or a larger insurance sum than the company is willing to pay.

David describes how customers sometimes approach him with claims he believes to be fraudulent.

> *David: "And I like it when customers are honest when filing an insurance claim. That is not always the case. Some of the stuff I get is just ludicrous. I pass them on of course. Because it is the customer's decision, if he wants to try and defraud the company, let him try. But I am not helping him."*[29]

Brian tells of customers that want the company to pay for things that the customer has not insured himself against or for things that cannot be insured for.

> Brian: *"The customer just demands and demands, 'I want', 'I want'. We try to explain that we can't, that it is something that you cannot insure against anywhere in Germany and he still expects us to. And then he starts being unfair and says, here, humph, 20 years insured with you and you won't pay. And because it isn't insured, we cannot pay."*[30]

Such customers expect the frontline employee, in this case Brian, to solve their issues regardless of whether company regulations or the contract terms between the company and the customer allow for this.

In these cases, the frontline employees were directly approached by a customer to go beyond what the employee felt was acceptable to the company. In some of these cases, the frontline employee sided with the company. David refuses to assist a customer in what he feels is an attempt to defraud the company, and Brian tries to explain why the company is not at fault and describes the customer's demands as unfair. Quinn, however, sides with the customer:

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quasi von null Uhr bis null Uhr eine Bestellung ergänzen, dann ist die geschlossen und dann muss man eine neue Bestellung aufnehmen, und für Kunden ist immer wichtig, diese 5.95 Euro Porto und Verpackungskosten kommen ja pro Tag hinzu. Wenn jetzt ein Kunde um halb 12 abends anruft und möchte schon gerne das Tagesangebot für morgen bestellen, dürften wir das theoretisch noch nicht aufnehmen, weil es ist ja noch nicht der neue Tag (185-200)

[29] David: *Und ich finde es gut, wenn also ein Kunde zunächst mal mit der Schadenmeldung ehrlich ist. Das ist nicht immer der Fall. Wenn ich manchmal einige kriege, da sträuben sich mir die Nackenhaare. Ich gebe sie trotzdem weiter, natürlich. Weil das ist die Entscheidung des Kunden, wenn er, ich sag das mal in Anführungsstrichen, etwas betrügen möchte, dann soll er das tun. Dann helfe ich ihm dabei nicht mit. 312-330*

[30] Brian: *Wenn man nicht ungerecht wird, sag ich es mal, der Kunde fordert, fordert, ich möchte, ich möchte, und wir erklären ihm, es geht aber nicht, es ist ein Punkt der in ganz Deutschland nicht versicherbar ist und er besteht trotzdem drauf. Und wird dann unfair und sagt, ähh, 20 Jahre versichert hier und ihr zahlt nicht, und weil es einfach nicht versichert ist, können wir es nicht zahlen. 205-208*

Quinn: *"if I see that we already have the item for the cheaper price, then I sometimes add that for the customer, so that he can save on his next order or on packaging. So that is something where you try to help the customer a little, that he can get the cheaper offer. That would be the sort of thing where you try to accommodate the customer and that might not be in the interest of the company."*[31]

In other situations the demands or expectations were not explicitly made by the customers, but the frontline employees tried to act in their interests, even though these went against company wishes or policy.

For example, Brian was trying to win a customer as a business customer for his company, whom he believed would be very profitable for the company in future. He wanted to offer this customer a special deal, available only to customers who already had a relationship with the company. Because the customer only had private contracts with the company, but none with his business, the company did not offer the special terms.

Brian: "*...that was the case with a big logistics company. I had three contracts with this man, private contracts, and the customer wanted to insure his whole company, that was 25 lorries, so it would have been a really big volume, regarding the insurance premium, for us. We were in direct competition with [name of competitor] I think it was, and I needed special terms. And [name of Brian's company] just said, because we don't have an already existing customer relationship with that customer, we won't offer the terms. And then I was just put on the spot with the customer, whom I had to tell, sorry, I can't help you in the way I want to because my back-office, the [name of the company] won't support me. That was very infuriating*".[32]

Other examples of similar situations were described by Charles and Rebecca. After a promotion Charles worked in a different branch office of his company in a different city to his previous work place. Many customers wanted to follow him, even going so far as to relocate their account in order to be able to continue to have Charles as their consultant. The manage-

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[31] Quinn: *... aber wenn ich jetzt sehe, das ist schon für den günstigen Preis enthalten, dann füge ich ihm das schon mal hinzu, dass er sich quasi die nächste Bestellung, oder Verpackungskosten am nächsten Tag sparen kann im Prinzip. Also da versucht man schon dem Kunden so ein bisschen zu helfen, dass er dann auch so noch ein günstigeres Angebot bekommt, oder das wären jetzt so Sachen, wo man dann schon versucht, dem Kunden entgegen zu kommen und was jetzt auch nicht so im Sinn des Unternehmens wäre.195-199*

[32] Brian: *. bei einer großen Spedition war das so. Da hatte ich drei Verträge von dem Herrn, sprich also Privatverträge, und der Kunde wollte seine ganze Spedition, das waren 25 LKWS, wäre also ein richtig großes Volumen gewesen, also vom Beitrag her, ähm, zu uns holen. Wir standen mit der, die [Name des Konkurrenzunternehmens] war es, in direktem Vergleich, und ich brauchte Sonderkonditionen. Und [Name des Unternehmens] hat halt gesagt, aufgrund der fehlenden Kundenbeziehung, die schon bei uns ist, würden sie diese Sonderkonditionen nicht ermöglichen. Und dann stand ich auf dem Schlauch mit dem Kunden, dem ich erzählen muss, tut mir leid, ich kann mich nicht so wie ich möchte für dich einsetzen, weil mein Back-Office, sprich [das Unternehmen] da nicht mitzieht. Das war sehr ärgerlich. 93-115*

ment of Charles' company, however, quickly made it clear that he was no longer allowed to advise customers from his former work place.

> Charles: *"And very many customers followed me, because they trusted and knew me (...) which continued until I had to go up to the management and they said, from now on no more customers are allowed to come over, because the colleague here has complained. I said, that is not my fault. If the customers follow me, then that is just normal. No. They started taking roundabout routes then, closing their account in [city A] and going to another office and started sending their stuff over from there. But that was noticed eventually, too*."[33]

Rebecca wanted to continue treating a patient in need although further sessions had not yet been granted by the patient's insurance company. Rebecca had not applied for further sessions due to an error in her company's computer system which incorrectly showed a sufficient number of sessions still available. Her company, however, told Rebecca that no further therapy sessions were to be given to the patient until new sessions were granted. This would mean a longer break in therapy for a patient who Rebecca felt was in a vulnerable situation. This, and the fact that she felt that her company was at least partially to be blamed for the situation, left her feel very angry. The patient's expectation of and need for therapy from Rebecca and her company's strict rule to only give granted (and therefore paid for) sessions were at odds with each other, leaving Rebecca in the middle.

> Rebecca: "*In one case I had done about nine hours too many (...) and we have such a crappy computer program and that showed that we still had sessions and then it became clear that we didn't. And the patient had just gone through a break-up, and it was important to her that we continue. And then [my boss] said I shouldn't see her because we had already done too many sessions and even if she signs [note: an agreement to cover the cost privately if the insurance won't pay], as we had already used up so many sessions, if we get the approval, it'll seem strange. I thought that was really unfair, as the patient felt everything was fine."*[34]

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[33] Charles: *Und es sind auch sehr viele Kunden eben mir gefolgt, weil sie mir jetzt vertraut haben und mich kannten und (...) das ging dann so lange bis sogar der, bis ich oben zur Direktion musste und die gesagt haben, ab sofort darf kein Kunde mehr rüberkommen, weil der Kollege sich hier beschwert hatte. Ich sagte, da kann ich doch nichts zu. Wenn die Kunden mir hinterherlaufen, das ist doch ganz normal. Nein. Die haben dann teilweise Umwege gemacht, dass die dann zur, die haben da gekündigt in [Stadt A], sind zur [anderen Filiale in Stadt C] gegangen, und haben das von der [anderen Filiale in Stadt C] das dann da rüber geschickt. Aber fiel dann auch irgendwann auf. 122-132*

[34] Rebecca: *Zum Beispiel in dem einen Fall hatte ich dann irgendwie neun Stunden zu viel gemacht, (...) wir haben ja so ein scheiß Computerprogramm, das hat angezeigt, dass wir noch bewilligte Stunden hätten ähm und dann ist es halt rausgekommen, dass es nicht passte (....) Und die Patientin war frisch getrennt und der war schon wichtig, dass wir weiter machen und da hat [Chef] zum Beispiel schon gesagt, dass ich mich nicht mit ihr treffen soll, da wir schon so viele Stunden drüber gemacht haben auch wenn sie es unterschreibt, weil wir dann schon ungefähr alles aufgebraucht haben, wenn die Bewilligung kommt und das wirkt komisch, und das fand ich zum Beispiel schon total unfair, weil die Patientin sich voll in Sicherheit gewogen hat.*

Two types of role conflict situations

The types of role conflict situations described then can be roughly categorized in differing from which side the frontline employee felt pressure to put that side's interests above those of the other. In some cases this pressure was felt to be exacted by the company, in other cases it was felt to come more from the customer's side. The pressure from the customer side was often directly and explicitly made by the customer – such as a customer wanting to defraud the company or sidestep company rules on ordering products. In other cases, however, employees became advocates for the customer's interests without the customer directly asking for this. The pressure was therefore more to enforce the customers' interests even against those of the company than directly stemming from the customer.

Although the cases described above can all be roughly divided as belonging to either type of situation, they did differ widely in the way the frontline employees reacted to them – both in how the situation was perceived and in the action that ensued. Important influencing factors included aspects such as whether the employees felt the demands made by either side were justified, whether demands violated their concept of fairness and how much freedom the employees had in making a decision. These aspects will be explored in the following chapters.

In chapter 6.2, I will look at the different ways of handling role conflict situations. The various factors influencing these decisions will be looked at in chapters 6.3 to 6.6. After this, the different results will be brought together in chapter 6.7.

6.2. Ways of Dealing with Role Conflict

During the interviews the interviewees related several different ways of handling situations in which they were sandwiched between the interests or demands of their company and customers. No one way was described by every single person, and only one strategy was adopted by all interviewees - siding with the customer.

The strategies described in the interviews mostly mirror the strategies described in the literature (see chapter 3.3.5): choice (siding with either the company or the customer), compromise or avoidance as well as voice (addressing or voicing a role conflict situation) and deceit. An additional way of dealing with the situation was also identified – some frontline employees would fulfill both role demands by using their own, personal resources (such as their spare time or personal funds). This can be seen as a form of pro-customer citizenship behavior or a result of customer orientation (see also chapters 4.1.1 and 4.1.2).

In the following sections these strategies will be described in detail. The focus here will be placed on how the situations where handled. The reasoning behind these decisions and possible influencing factors will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

6.2.1. Choice - Siding with the Company

Choice is perhaps the most direct way of dealing with a role conflict situation. The interests and needs of one party are put above those of the other. This chapter looks at situations in which the frontline employees chose to side with their company. They did what their company expected of them, what they believed to be their job, at least in their company's eyes. It should be pointed out that this refers only to situations in which the employees felt that in following their company's expectations they were in some way harming the customer's interests.

It is difficult to separate entirely the accounts of how an employee dealt with a role conflict from the reasons given for their decision. Employees' reasoning for their behavior will therefore sometimes be touched upon in this chapter. Why an employee may have sided with the company or adopted another strategy for resolving the role conflict, however, will be the focus of later chapters (see 6.3 to 6.6).

Some employees stated that they generally put their company's interests above those of the customer. For example, Thomas states:

> Thomas: *"In general I would say that I look after the interests of my company more than those of the customer, for every customer. There are exceptions, as I have been saying, but generally that is the case with every customer."*[35]

Similar points were made by Brian (who points out that as a frontline employee one generally has to choose between the interests of the customer and the company[36]), Eric, Ian, Lewis, Nicolas, Phoebe and Sarah.

Taking the company's side can mean selling more than the employee believes the customer needs or benefits from in order to increase company profits. This is illustrated well in the following quotes.

> Interviewer: *"... Are there cases where one is more likely to act career oriented, company oriented?*
>
> Lewis: "*The financial background is important, that has to be said. As I said before, if someone has a huge amount of money then some things don't hurt, in a manner of speaking. (...) Sometimes you see people with really very, very, very,*

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[35] Thomas: *Also im Grunde genommen ist es, dass ich die Interessen meines Unternehmens vertrete eher als die des Kunden, bei jedem Kunden. Es gibt Ausnahmen, wie ich es gerade gesagt habe, aber eigentlich ist es bei allen Kunden. 160-163*

[36] Interviewerin: *Und kann man sich denn da immer genau in der Mitte halten oder muss man sich manchmal für den einen oder für den anderen entscheiden?*

Brian: *Sie müssen sich in der Regel entscheiden, ja. 160-163* *very much money and investing 20.000 Euros somewhere, wherever, is no bad thing after all, just maybe not exactly tailored to their needs."*[37]

***

Matthew: *"(...) And then you could go so far and say 'I'll sell them a little more'. Another Excel file. Sell that, that Excel file, as time management or some such thing for the project. As capacity management software or something, you can always frame it that way. I'll sell him a little more. In the end, it is like being on a bazaar, you're there and want to buy one T-shirt and then you go home with three shirts."*[38]

In other cases it involved following company guidelines or advocating offers the company wishes to focus on even though the frontline employee believes this to be against the interests of the customer. Charles speaks of sometimes feeling forced to represent the company's interests and sell products he believes to be wrong for the customer.

Charles: *"There are products, these days you just get given products that you had best sell. And then there is, what I just said, then you are in a tight spot, if I don't sell that, I might make less than the others. And that's when you start asking yourself, should I or shouldn't I. And I always tried to balance it in the last years, but nevertheless, sometimes you just had to, if it fitted, say 'alright'."*[39]

Charles here describes situations in which he bowed to the company expectations against what he felt to be right. However, in the long term he tried to balance the times he felt he had to follow company recommendations with times in which he did what he felt to be the right choice for customers. So in the long term he aimed to compromise (this will be discussed further in chapter 6.2.3), but in the short term there were several situations in which he put the company interests above those of the customer.

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[37] Interviewerin: *Gibt es Fälle, in denen man eher bereit ist, karriereorientiert, unternehmensorientiert zu handeln?*

Lewis: *(...) wenn jemand extrem viel Geld hat, dann tun manchen Sachen in Anführungsstrichen auch nicht weh, muss man auch mal ganz klar sagen. (...) Man sieht ja manchmal Leute, die extrem sehr, sehr, sehr, sehr viel Geld haben und ich mein', 20000 Euro irgendwo anlegen, naja welche Sachen auch immer, sind ja jetzt keine Nachteile, für die nur nicht vielleicht bedarfsgerecht. 235-244*

[38] Matthew: *Ja, gut dann wärst du ja auch schon dabei zu sagen, ich verkauf da noch mal ein bisschen was mehr. Also noch ne Excel-Datei. Also die verkaufen diese Excel-Datei dann als Zeitmanagement oder so für sein Projekt. Als Auslastungssoftware oder was, das kannst du ja immer so formulieren, ich verkauf ihm noch ein bisschen mehr. Im Endeffekt ist es ja wie so auf 'nem Basar, du stehst dann da, du willst ein T-Shirt kaufen und gehst danach mit drei Hemden weg. 273-277*

[39] Charles: *Es gibt eben Produkte, die man jetzt, heutzutage bekommt man eben Produkte benannt, die sollte man tunlichst dann auch verkaufen. Und da ist eben dieses, was ich vorhin gesagt habe, dann kommt man in Bedrängnis, wenn ich das nicht verkaufe, mache ich eventuell weniger Betrag als die anderen. Da geht es dann schon los, dass man sich die Frage stellt, soll ich das, soll ich das nicht und ich habe in den letzten Jahren immer versucht, da ein Gleichgewicht zu halten, aber trotzdem müsste man auch irgendwo mal, wo es dann eben reinpasst, auch sagen ‚okay'. 319-324*

David also speaks of the necessity of sometimes representing company guidelines against what he thinks is right or fair to the customer.

> Interviewer: *"You said before that you are an agent or a mediator for both sides, an agent for the customer and an agent for the company. Can you recall situations in which it was difficult for you to be both, were you felt yourself a little torn between both sides? (...)"*
>
> David: *"Of course, that is the case whenever the principles I spoke of before are not respected. That can be due to the customer, but also due to the company. That I think that due to, erm, perhaps ... out of ... political considerations, certain things are just not wanted and erm ... a stance is adopted that I don't really like. But I cannot change it. I can only offer what the company has on offer and may not be entirely happy with it, but I will represent it in front of the customer."*[40]

Phoebe, Rebecca and Sarah speak of needing to follow company guidelines even if those are not in the customers' best interest.

> Phoebe: *"One of the great ... challenges, to put it in a neutral or positive way, is that we are required to fully book courses that are on offer. So if there are 100 places with a certain agency, (...) then, not just me, but all my colleagues have to fill these places. (...) There is always this pressure to fulfill this requirement. There are often times when I think, I don't have anyone for this course, but I have to find people and place them there, come what may, even if I really think, this isn't really right for them. But it has to be done."*[41]

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> Phoebe*: "One expectation for example is to fill those lists for a course, so there was this requirement to find so and so many customers for these lists and, I only*

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[40] Interviewerin: *Sie haben vorhin gesagt, dass Sie so ein bisschen Vermittler sind für beide Seiten, Vermittler für den Kunden aber auch Vermittler fürs Unternehmen. Können Sie sich denn an eine Situation erinnern, in denen Sie so das Gefühl hatten, so ein bisschen zwischen den Stühlen zu sitzen? (...)*

David: *Natürlich ist das dann der Fall, wenn die Prinzipien, die ich Ihnen anfangs nannte, wenn die mal nicht eingehalten werden. Das kann sowohl mal durch den Kunden sein, das kann aber auch mal durch das Unternehmen sein. Dass ich einfach glaube, dass man äh vielleicht ... aus ... innenpolitischen Erwägungen, Dinge einfach nicht haben will und dann äh ... Stellung bezieht, die mir nicht so gut gefällt. Aber ich kann sie ja nicht verändern. Ich kann ja nur das anbieten, was das Unternehmen zur Verfügung stellt und bin dann möglicherweise nicht ganz glücklich, die das Unternehmen getroffen hat, aber ich werde sie dennoch den Kunden gegenüber vertreten.418-429*

[41] Phoebe: *Also eine große ... Herausforderung, um das mal neutral zu formulieren oder positiv zu formulieren, ist, dass man Auflagen hat, bestimmte Maßnahmen, die angeboten werden, oder die im Angebot sind, dass man die ausbuchen muss. Das heißt, wenn es 100 Plätze bei einem Träger gibt, (...) dann müssen nicht nur ich, sondern alle Kollegen, auch versuchen, diese Plätze zu besetzen. (...) Dass man immer auch diesem Druck ausgesetzt ist, diese Vorgaben zu erfüllen. Also es gibt nicht selten Situationen, wo ich denke, ich habe aber für diese Maßnahme gar keinen Kunden und muss aber dann mit Biegen und Brechen mir da Leute raussuchen und die da reinsetzen, obwohl ich eigentlich meine, so ideal ist das eigentlich nicht. Aber es muss halt erfüllt werden irgendwie. 76-85*

just managed to fish out some of my customers for this list. (...) And you cannot tell the customers, I can't tell the truth, and say I just had to fill this list, I agree with you that it makes no sense at all. I just cannot do that and there are many such situations." [42]

Rebecca tells of a situation where she sent a patient to a drug screening, even though this procedure is both expensive and very unpleasant for the patient and the patient had not used the drug in over five years. But Rebecca knew that her company expected her to adhere to the guidelines (Rebecca, 444-464). Sarah also gives several examples where she put the company guidelines above the wishes of the customer (Sarah 165-181; 255-264; 285-301).

In all of these cases the frontline employees decided to support their company's interests above those of their customers. However, in some situations the frontline employee did not so much side *with* the company as side *against* the customer. This was generally because the frontline employee felt that the customer had been rude or unfriendly, or had made unreasonable and unjustified claims. In these cases, some frontline employees spoke of doing only what they had to do, switching off or going by the book - adhering closely to company guidelines even if some flexibility would have been possible.

Eric*: "When people come across as really unfriendly, then you handle the case the way you have to handle it. The way you have to do it. What is necessary, without leaving yourself open to reproach."* [43]

Here, Eric does only what he must for the customer, as little as possible without leaving himself open to reproach, without having to fear consequences from his behavior. This goes beyond prioritizing the company's needs to aiming to do as little for the customer as he can. David follows a similar approach to customers he perceives as dishonest or unfair. If customers have offended him, he does only the minimum of what is required, keeps strictly to the company guidelines and does not put any additional effort into helping the customer.

David*: "If I find out a customer has been dishonest, cheated me, (...) then maybe one is more careful in future and not prepared to take that 60-40 position again [note: David remarked earlier that he is 60% customer oriented and 40% company oriented, 540-541]. Then maybe you'll just read what it says, and so it is en-*

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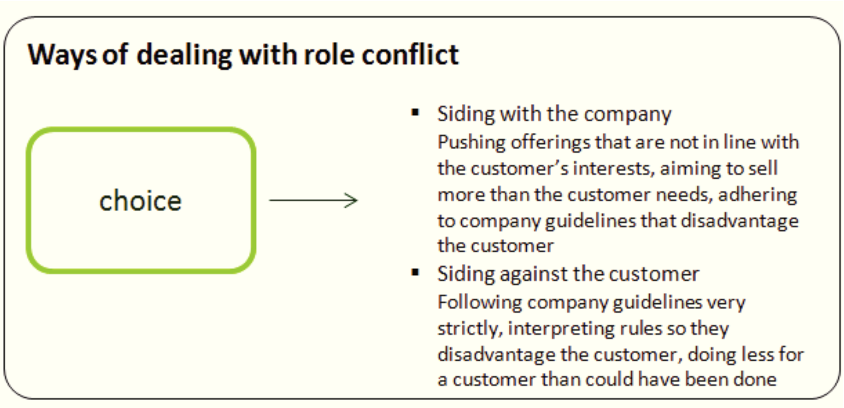
[42] Phoebe: *Also eine Erwartung war zum Beispiel mit diesem Füllen der Listen für diese Maßnahme, also da gab es halt wieder eine Vorgabe, du brauchst unbedingt noch so und so viele Kunden in diesen Listen und ich habe das dann auch mit Mühe und Not halt da irgendwelche aus meinem Bestand ausgefischt und drauf gesetzt. (...) Wobei man dem Kunden natürlich nicht sagen darf, ich könnte ihnen nicht die Wahrheit sagen, ich könnte nicht sagen, ich musste nur die Liste voll machen, ich finde auch, dass das eigentlich Schwachsinn ist. Das geht ja nicht und solche Situationen gibt es ganz viele. 223-260*

[43] Eric: *Also, auch als wenn Leute wirklich unfreundlich rüberkommen, dann bearbeitet man das so, wie man das bearbeiten muss. Oder wie man das machen muss, halt. Das was nötig ist, ohne dass man einem was Nachhalten kann. 239-242*

tirely possible that there is a clear refusal, even if maybe otherwise there would have been some room for goodwill."[44]

Olivia and George also describe how they will strictly abide by company rules when dealing with an unpleasant customer (Olivia 329-343; George 761 - 778). In cases where there had been some room for goodwill on the side of the company, they interpreted the company guidelines very strictly. Olivia declined credit applications for customers who, while not fulfilling all requirements for the credit, could have been eligible under other circumstances. George refused to help fund a medical treatment for an unpleasant customer, although he knew that he could try and get his company to approve the claim and had done so for others.

Figure 20: Dealing with Role Conflict: Choosing the Company



Siding with the company can thus be both the result of deciding to put the company's interests before those of the customer as well as the decision to side against the customer and to do as little as possible for him or her (see also figure 20). Although the end result may be similar - the company's needs are put first - the motivations behind this decision differ.

6.2.2. Choice - Siding with the Customer

The chapter above addresses frontline employees choosing their company's side in a situation of role conflict, putting the company's interests above those of the customer. In this chapter I will be discussing the opposite decision, in which frontline employees choose to side with the customer and against their company.

In some cases taking the customer's side meant that employees did not attempt to sell the products their company wanted them to focus on if they thought that these did not sufficiently benefit the customer. Charles, Andrew and Fred in particular reported that they often decided not to offer such products to their customers. They usually resorted to offering other products or service offerings to the customer and to try and make a sale with a product more suited to

[44] David: *Wenn also ich also gemerkt habe, dass mich ein Kunde mal gelinkt hat, (...) Und wenn man dann dahinter kommt, dann wird man natürlich beim zweiten Mal vorsichtiger sein und wird möglicherweise diese 60-40 Position nicht mehr einnehmen. Dann wird man also möglicherweise nur nachlesen, was steht dort, und dann kann es durchaus sein dass man also eine ganz klare Ablehnung erfolgt, wo sonst vielleicht so etwas Ähnliches wie eine Kulanz noch drin wäre.: 546-552*

the customer's needs and wishes. They sought a compromise, by trying to achieve a sale for the company but one more in line with the customer's interests. These cases will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6.2.3.However, the choice to not back a product advocated by their company did not always result in a compromise, leading to examples for choice in favor of the customer.

Fred, for example, explains how he will not offer certain products to his customers because he does not think they are right for them.

> Fred: *"I deliberately decide against that. Of course there is always a particular sales campaign by [name of Fred's company], do such and such a thing. For example, currently product A is all the rage, product A as a way of earning your living. And my personal opinion is that retirement provisions have to be planned. (...) [Note: Fred goes on to explain at length why he believes product is not suitable for this.] And therefore I have consciously said that I have no interest in that, I will not sell product A. (...) At the moment everyone is trying to get a piece of the action, because it sells really well."* [45]

He also points out that the company places a lot of importance on certain products and offers strong incentives for selling those products or generally increasing the sales volume.

> *Fred: "There are always incentives, along the lines of 'if you make special sales you can travel to Dubai with us'. There are some great things that you can get. But you always have to see how far you let yourself be pushed, so that you suddenly start treating customers differently from the way you normally would."*[46]

The decision not to bow to pressures and not selling certain products can thus be seen as positioning oneself against the company wishes. Fred also refers to the risk of treating customers differently because of pressures or incentives by the company. Letting oneself be pushed creates an image of allowing pressure to change a behavior, not actively deciding to do something. In deciding not to sell product A because he does not see it as an effective form of retirement provisions for customers, he decides not to let himself be pushed to treating customers according to the company wishes in this point.

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[45] Fred: *Ich wehre mich da ganz bewusst gegen, natürlich gibt es von [Name des Unternehmens] immer so nach dem Motto, das ist momentan eine Vertriebskampagne, mach das doch mal so und so. Zum Beispiel ist momentan in aller Munde Produkt A zu verkaufen als ein Mittel, womit man seine Brötchen finanzieren kann und meine persönliche Einstellung ist, Altersvorsorge wird sich nicht von allein regeln und (...) [erklärt ausführlich warum Produkt A nicht dafür geeignet ist]. Und deswegen bin ich halt ganz bewusst jemand, der gesagt hat, darauf habe ich keine Lust, ich werde nie Produkt A verkaufen. (...)Treiben momentan alle wie eine wilde Sau durchs Dorf. Weil sich das wirklich verkauft. 428-455*

[46] Fred*: Also es gibt immer Incentives, nach dem Motto, wer jetzt in den nächsten fünf Monaten besonderen Umsatz macht, fährt mit uns nach Dubai, also da gibt es schon tolle Sachen, die man da haben kann. Aber da muss man immer schauen, wie man sich dafür dann wieder drücken lässt und vielleicht dann Kunden auf einmal anders behandelt, als wenn man das normal machen würde. 259-262*

Lewis makes a similar point. He points out that he acts in his own interests in customer contact situations:

> *Interviewer: "And are there customer situations where you might direct the situation more in the interests of the company or more in the interests of the customer? Or do they not differ?"*
>
> *Lewis: "I'm sure it differs sometimes. But I'd say I direct it in my interests und not in the company's."*[47]

He does not mention the customer's interests, but points out that he sees himself as acting in his own interests rather than those of the company. He also speaks about how his success is evaluated by his company according to the sales he makes and this in turn affects his career chances and options (Lewis 70, 199-204, 225-228). He sees it as being in his own interests to adhere to company wishes and expectations. However, Lewis reports that he will not try to sell a product to a customer if he believes that this is harmful to the customer, that the customer cannot really afford the product or possible benefits are greatly outweighed by the costs.

> *Lewis: "I'm currently a lot in the Rhine-Ruhr area and there is a lot of short-time working. They don't have any money and so on. And if someone is threatened by short time work, or may lose his job, well, then I won't sell them anything. Then I tell them straight that it doesn't make any sense at the moment, as the future is so uncertain. There is no point talking about insurance if they don't know what they will be doing in half a year's time. Well, and you can only do that, I have to say, if you don't have a lot of sales pressure behind you."*[48]

Lewis chooses not to try and sell to the customer. He does not see it as impossible because of the customer's uncertain future and low funds, as he states that he is only able to do so because he does not have high sales pressure. So it is a case of *will not*, not *cannot*, sell. He makes similar points elsewhere in the interview, saying he will not "take money out of their pocket" if he realizes the customer has little money.

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[47] Interviewerin: *Und gibt es da Kundensituationen, in denen du das vielleicht mehr im Interesse des Unternehmens steuerst oder mehr im Interesse des Kunden oder geht das nicht auseinander?*

Lewis: *Das geht sicherlich mal auseinander. Ich würd dann aber eher sagen, dass ich das in meinem Interesse steuere und nicht im Unternehmensinteresse. 194-197*

[48]Lewis*: Ich bin momentan viel im Ruhrgebiet unterwegs und da gibt es Kurzarbeit. Die haben kein Geld und so weiter. Und dann, wenn einer von Kurzarbeit bedroht ist, vielleicht seinen Job verliert halt oder so, dann naja dann verkauf ich dem nix. Dann sag ich ihm klipp und klar: ‚dann macht das keinen Sinn, weil momentan deine Zukunft so ungewiss ist. Da macht das keinen Sinn über Versicherung zu reden, wenn du nicht mal weißt, was im halben Jahr ist'. So, und das kann man auch nur machen, muss man auch ganz klar sagen, wenn man nicht so eine hohen Verkaufsdruck hat. 218-223*

Lewis: *"If I really find that a customer has no money, I'm the last person to take money from their pockets. If someone has half a million in their account and can do without the money, in a manner of speaking, then the situation looks different again."* [49]

Lewis has drawn a form of moral line; there is a point where he will put protecting customers' interests above making more sales and following his own or his company's interests. This is not the same as saying he will only sell products if he believes this to be in the best interests of the customers. If he does not think the sale would actually harm the customer, he will try to make it. The phrase "taking money out from their pocket" has a strong immoral, though not necessarily illegal, connotation. This guideline of not behaving in an immoral way is echoed in several interviews as a reason for deciding how to behave in a role conflict situation and will be explored in more depth in chapter 6.3.2. The point to be made here is that in some role conflict situations frontline employees decide to side with the customer by not selling a certain product.

Interviewees reported several cases in which they deviated from company rules or guidelines in order to help customers. Charles, George, Olivia, Phoebe, Quinn, Rebecca and Sarah described such cases. For example, Phoebe explains that when customers do not fulfill all of the agency requirements, her company requires her to impose sanctions. If for instance a customer does not accept an offer made to him or her via the agency, then benefits for that customer will be cut. Phoebe goes on to explain that the rules regulating this are both explicit and emphatic and leave no room for discretion. She also reports that she does not always follow these rules in the way she knows her company expects her to:

Phoebe: *"And such directions exist for a lot of things. And then of course you have ... if you act according to regulations, no room for discretion. Of course the case is ... that ... sometimes you do ... well, let's say, the human aspect, let's call it sympathy, or ... well, whatever, for the customer, that you might turn a blind eye, even though you are not allowed, that you say, yes, I understand your situation."* [50]

Phoebe made several very long pauses when reporting the above, appearing to wish to choose her words very carefully. When she 'turns a blind eye' she knowingly deviates from a compa-

[49] Lewis*: Wenn ich jetzt richtig merke, der Kunde hat kein Geld, dann bin ich der letzte, der dem das Geld aus der Tasche zieht. Hat einer 'ne halbe Million auf dem Konto und kann auf Geld verzichten in Anführungsstrichen sieht man das schon wieder anders. 144-147*

[50] Phoebe*: Und diese Weisungen gibt es zu sehr vielen Bereichen. Und da hat man natürlich, ... wenn man vorschriftsmäßig handelt, gar keinen Handlungsspielraum. Natürlich ist es so, ... dass ... man an der einen oder anderen Stelle dann doch, ... ja, sagen wir mal, wo dann vielleicht die menschliche Seite, nennen wir es Mitleid, oder… ja, wie auch immer, hat man dann mit dem Kunden, dass man dann vielleicht ein Auge zudrückt, obwohl man es nicht dürfte, dass man sagt, ja ich verstehe jetzt ihre Situation. 105-109*

ny rule, she creates room for discretion where there is none in the eyes of her company. She offers more freedom to the customer than the company is willing to give. While she does not explicitly say that this is in the interests of the customer, the fact that she does so out of sympathy for the customer strongly implies that this is the case. She describes similar cases later in the interview, where again she refrains from imposing sanctions for a customer who did not adhere to the company regulations. Here, sympathy for the customer is again cited as a reason, stating that she accepted the breakup of a relationship or similar personal reasons as the excuse for the customer's failure (110-115).

Rebecca describes how she often refuses to include her customers in research studies by her company, even though she knows this is expected of her. She says that the research projects can be harmful and stressful to her customers and sometimes counterproductive to the aims of the therapeutic sessions (249-279). She describes wanting to protect her customers and therefore not following guidelines set by her company. Olivia describes approving credits for customers who were below the income levels set by her company as minimum for giving credits, if she thought that the customer would be able to afford the monthly installment. She places her own judgment of the customer before the company guidelines.

> Olivia: *"Well, we have the strict guidelines for approving loans. For example a customer must have so and so much left over to pay off the loan. You assume for every customer up to a certain income level that he is going to need 700 Euro to live on. Food, Drinks and so on. And there just are customers who can definitely get by on less. Where you can say, this is against the regulations, but I can justify it and show it based on the account activities that this customer can get by on 450 Euro.(...) And these are then cases, where you can say, I decide in favor of the customer"*[51]

George reports granting applications from customers for treatment in a health resort or facility even though he does not believe this to be medically necessary and thus goes against his company's rules. He does this in cases where the customer has done something for him or his company, as a form of reward and to ensure future benefits.

> George: *"There are sometimes cases where one does something for somebody, for example in a company, where someone insures that all five trainees that start there every year go to my company. Then he does something for me. If he wants a*

[51]Olivia: *Also wir haben ja zum Beispiel die strikten Vorgaben bei Kreditvergabe, dass ein Kunde monatlich so und so viel überhaben muss, um einen Kredit zu bedienen. Und man rechnet zum Beispiel ganz pauschal für jeden Kunden bis zu einem bestimmten Einkommen, dass er halt monatlich 700 Euro Lebenshaltungspauschale braucht. Ich spreche jetzt von Essen, Trinken, sonstige Ausgaben halt eben. Und es gibt aber Kunden, die definitiv mit weniger klar kommen. Wo man dann halt sagt, das ist jetzt gegen die Vorschriften, aber ich kann es begründen und ich kann es anhand der Kontoumsätze eben beweisen, dass der Kunden ich sag mal mit 450 Euro jeden Monat klar kommt. (...) Und es sind dann schon Fälle, wo man dann auch sagt, da entscheide ich zugunsten des Kunden. 202-215*

stay in a health facility that really he views as a cheap holiday, then I'm faced with the question of what to do? (…)If he does something for you, you have to make getting the stay in the health facility easier for them."[52]

In all of these cases the frontline employees decide to not enforce a rule or to ignore a guideline to help the customer. However, there were also some examples of frontline employees actively and deliberately working against the regulations. They not only sided with the customer but can even be said to team up with the customer to sidestep a company rule. Two examples for this behavior are provided by George and Quinn.

George describes helping customers appeal against a company decision. These customers had applied for treatment in a health facility and George knew his company would not grant this. He told them while the application would have to be rejected at first, he would later help them write an objection to this decision in order to enable the application to be granted in a second round.

> Interviewer: *"What are important aspects when deciding whether a treatment is granted to side with the insurance taker? In cases where it wasn't clear cut?"*
>
> George: *"… I am anonymous, so I can just openly…"*
>
> Interviewer: *"I promise"*
>
> George: "*… If I thought the benefit was justified, because I knew the person and because I knew [company name] did not want to grant so many stays in health facilities any more so that the premiums would not have to be raised again and we won't lose even more of the healthy, young, and well-earning, so it was made difficult for people. But if for me that was a case, I'd talk to the people and told them 'we are going to refuse this now. I have to do this because of such and such a reason'. I was open about it with those I had trust in. Then I said: 'and when you have that letter, then we will sit down. I will write the objection for you.' And that usually went through and was accepted."*[53]

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[52]George: *Es gibt manchmal in Bereichen, wo der eine was für den anderen tut, zum Beispiel in einer Firma, jemand dafür sorgt, dass alle fünf Auszubildende, die jedes Jahr dort anfangen, zur [Versicherungsunternehmen] gehen. Dann tut der was für mich. Wenn der eine Kur haben will, die er eigentlich als billigen Urlaub ansieht, die er eigentlich nicht braucht, dann bin ich halt in der Frage, was tue ich? (…) Wenn der was für einen tut, muss man dem schon die Kur leichter machen. 426-439*

[53]Interviewerin: *Was sind denn für Sie Entscheidungskriterien, wenn es um Sachen geht wie: wird eine Kur bezahlt, wird eine bestimmte Behandlung bezahlt, sich da für den Versicherten zu entscheiden? Wenn die Fälle nicht eindeutig sind?*

George: *… ich bin ja anonym, von daher kann ich das offen…*

Interviewerin: *Versprochen.*

George: *… Wenn für mich diese Leistung sinnvoll war, weil ich die Person kannte und weil ich wusste, dass [Unternehmensname] jetzt bei den Kuren nicht mehr so viel Kuren haben wollte, um die Beiträge nicht noch einmal*

Here, George defends his company in stating that the reason stays in health facilities were often not granted was to protect the company from having to raise premiums and the consequences this entails. He is also clearly uncomfortable in reporting his behavior, asking whether the interview would stay anonymous. This suggests he is well aware that his behavior violated his company's rules and does not wish the company to be aware of what he did. George did more than just ignore a rule or regulation; he surreptitiously helped the customer to lodge an appeal against the company decision. He also points out that these were cases where he believed the application should have been granted ('benefit was justified', 'if for me that was the case'). He also did so openly in cases where he knew and trusted the customer - so that the customer would have been aware that George was acting against his company's wishes.

Quinn reports similar behavior. She works in the call centre of a home shopping company. The company has special offers of the day, products that are sold at a reduced price on a particular day. These products have to be ordered on that particular day for the lower price to apply. Also, orders can only be added to within the same day, orders made after midnight on the following day are processed separately, which means that the customer has to pay for packaging and postage for a separate order. Quinn sometimes adds tomorrow's special offer to a customer's order even though she knows she is not supposed to do so (185-200). She even states that she believes she would get in trouble if her manager was aware of her doing this (226-230). She also helps customers by finding products for them that are offered with free packaging and postage. When such articles are added to an order, the entire order is packaged and sent for free. Customers sometimes order such products solely to receive the benefit of free postage and packaging and then return the unwanted item later, again without needing to pay for postage.

> Quinn: *"Many ask for, well, mostly it is about the items with free postage and packaging, or if orders can be merged or for cheaper prices for products. It mostly is about that and then we have items with free postage and packaging, if this means that everything is postage-free for that day. And if a customer sometimes asks if that is available we look for such an item for him, whether he ends up keeping it or not. He probably won't keep it, but his order is postage-free, so he can send it back for free." (...)*
>
> Interviewer: *"So if I have one postage-free item, the entire order is sent for free?"*
>
> Quinn: *"Exactly, and you can send everything back within 30 days. Most send the item back, as they didn't actually want it, but they save on postage. OK, a lot of*

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erhöhen zu müssen, damit uns noch mehr Gesunde, Junge, Gutverdienende weggingen, dann wurde es den Leuten schwerer gemacht. Wenn das aber für mich ein Fall war, ich habe dann mit Leuten gesprochen und denen gesagt, "wir lehnen das jetzt ab. Muss ich aus den und den Gründen", ich habe mit denen auch offen geredet, zu denen ich Vertrauen haben konnte. Dann sag ich: "und wenn Sie das Schreiben haben, dann setzen wir uns hin. Ich schreibe Ihnen den Widerspruch". Und der ist dann durchgekommen. 458-474 *customers know this by now, which means this gets done a lot. That's why the number of postage-free items is being drastically reduced again. But I think I'd definitely always do it. And not say, 'oh, do you really want this'. I deliberately add those, so that they can have it postage-free."*[54]

Quinn purposely helps customers abuse the postage-free special items policy by looking for such items for them to add to their order. The fact that she states "we look for such an item for him" (238) also implies that the customers have not asked for a specific item, but any item that would offer the postage-free benefits. She also says quite openly that she thinks most people return these items and that they aren't actually wanted and is also aware that the company is trying to reduce this behavior. She sides with the customers and actively helps them to work around company rules and regulations to their advantage and the disadvantage of the company.

In summary, siding with the customer can take on various forms. It can involve the decision to sell less or different products from those the company wishes the frontline employee to focus on. This can also mean deciding to not try and sell something to the customer, even if the employee believes his company wishes him to do otherwise. Siding with the customer can also mean deviating from company rules and regulations, purposely acting against these in order to help the customer. In some cases this went beyond simply ignoring rules or company expectations to actively working with customers to find a way around company regulations (see figure 21).

In contrast to the decision discussed in the previous chapter on siding with the company, there were no cases where frontline employees reported siding with the customer in order to harm their company, or to side against the company. Even though some frontline employees stated that their negative feelings for their company influenced their decision, the main aim of siding with the customer was always described as helping that customer. The influence of the frontline employee's relationship with their company will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6.4.

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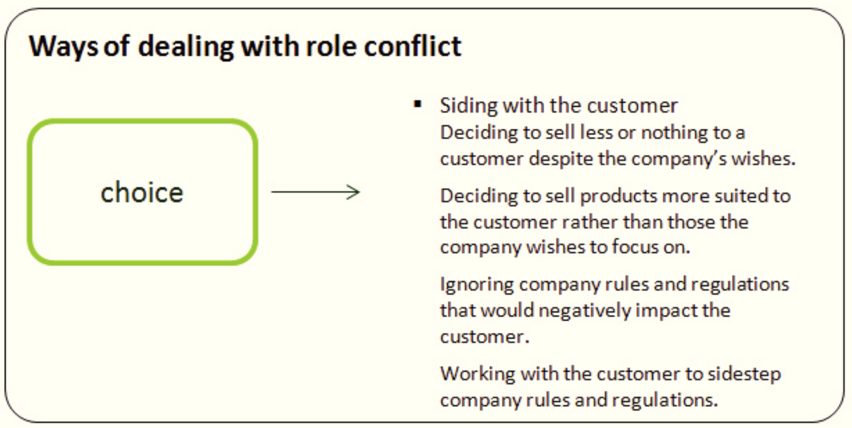
[54]Quinn: *Viele fragen dann auch, also es geht hauptsächlich wirklich wenn um diese Porto/Verpackungsfreien Sachen, oder das man dann eine Bestellung zusammenfügen kann, oder halt auch um günstigere Preise dann von Produkten. Das läuft hauptsächlich schon darüber, und da ist es dann auch so, dass wenn es Porto/verpackungsfreie Produkte gibt, ob dann alles portofrei ist für den Tag und wenn dann ein Kunde schon mal fragt, ob es das denn auch gibt, suchen wir dem dann auch so einen Artikel raus, ob er den jetzt letztendlich behält oder nicht, wahrscheinlich behält er ihn nicht, aber seine Bestellung ist ja portofrei, er kann es ja dann kostenlos zurückschicken.*

Interviewerin: *Also wenn ich einen Portofreien Artikel habe, geht die ganze Bestellung portofrei?*

Quinn: *Genau und du kannst ja dann quasi alles zurückschicken innerhalb von 30 Tagen. Die meisten schicken diesen einen Artikel dann wieder zurück, weil sie den ja eigentlich nicht haben wollten, aber dadurch ersparen sie sich halt dieses Porto. Okay, das wissen mittlerweile auch schon viele Kunden, das heißt, es wird auch oft genutzt, deshalb wird es auch wieder stark reduziert diese portofreien Artikel, aber da denke ich mir auch, das würde ich auf jeden Fall immer machen. Und nicht sagen, ne aber wollen sie den denn wirklich haben und so, das fügen wir dann absichtlich hinzu, dass die das portofrei kriegen.231-249*

Figure 21: Dealing with Role Conflict: Choosing the Customer



6.2.3. Finding a Compromise

A common form of dealing with conflicting demands and interests from company and customers was to find a compromise. This way of dealing with role conflict situations could take on different forms. The first form was to choose an alternative to what either the customer or the company wanted, that still promoted that party’s interests but resolved the conflict or at least lessened it.

This may involve the frontline employees aiming to make *a* sale rather than *the* sale their company wanted them to make. If there was a particular product they were to sell that they believed was not good for a customer or suited to that customer, then they would offer him something else. So the company would get a sale and the customer a more suitable product. However, the frontline employees did not concede to the expectation of the company to sell a particular product. Andrew speaks of selecting alternative products to the ones his company wants him to push:

> Andrew: *“Products get developed that do fit the situation, no doubt, but they just don’t suit every customer. Then you feel pressure from behind or from above that a certain product has to be focused on somehow. You have to introduce it to a customer, even though you know it doesn’t really fit. In those situations I think it depends very much on who you are, whether you continue to promote the product or you say ‘no, that is not for you. But I do have something else’.”*[55]

and

[55] Andrew: *Da werden schon Produkte entwickelt, die auch in die Situation reinpassen, gar keine Frage, aber es nicht unbedingt bei jedem Kunden auch gut passt und, wenn man dann so den Druck von hinten verspürt oder von oben verspürt, dann, man muss jetzt dieses Produkt irgendwie in den Fokus stellen. Man muss es jetzt einem Kunden vorstellen, obwohl man jetzt selber weiß 'passt eigentlich nicht', dann glaube ich, dann kommt es auf jeden selber an, ob man das jetzt weiter anpreist oder ob man sagt: "Nee, zu Ihnen passt das nicht. Ich habe hier aber noch was anderes". (80-88)*

Andrew: *"Thank God you don't just have the one product that you have to offer, but several, so that you get to choose. And the products we offer are all good. Well, I say all, but the ideas behind them are good and therefore you can always find something suitable. It's just difficult if there is a specific product, then you just have to weather it for a while and take a lot of stick if you're not convinced of the product."*[56]

Charles describes this as his strategy for dealing with difficult situations:

Interviewer: *"Have you found a way of dealing with these conflicts? They do seem to be fairly common in your job."*

Charles: *"Well, I always found a way, was lucky, in that I found a way to wriggle my way through. I have always had a lot of mandates and always found something, to make a profit, so that I mostly didn't have to touch those products."*[57]

Phoebe similarly describes making a compromise by enforcing some standards of her company, but not all of them. She works for a government agency which looks after unemployed people, governs unemployment benefits and seeks to put people back into employment. In the following situation she deals with a customer who has a job, but needs additional state benefits because her job pays too little and she works too few hours. The agency rules require her to look for work in a wide area around her home town, the customer wants to keep working in her old job. Phoebe insists on the rules demanding that the woman looks for a new job, but tries to soften the blow by requiring her to only look for jobs close to home.

Interviewer: *"How did you decide to deal with this case? What happened?"*

Phoebe: *"I insisted. I mean, yes there is sympathy, and I also told her, I can understand you very well (...) but you are required to apply for jobs, I'll print some things out for you. And I tried to accommodate her as much as I could, I only gave her offers close to home, so she wouldn't have to travel far, close to her home (...) I try to find a balance by saying, OK, I won't relieve you from your obligation to look for a new job, but I will make a concession by at least not forcing you to*

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[56] Andrew: *Gott sei Dank ist es so, dass es nicht nur ein Produkt ist, was man dann anbieten muss, sondern dass es mehrere sind und so hat man dann die Auswahl und die Produkte, die jetzt bei uns angeboten werden, die sind auch alle gut. Naja, was heißt alle, aber die Ideen, die dahinter stecken, die sind gut, und so hat man immer irgendwie so was Passendes. Nur doof ist, wenn es jetzt wirklich explizit um ein Produkt geht, dann muss da eine ganze Zeit ausharren und sich viel anhören, wie man davon nicht überzeugt ist. 98-103*

[57] Interviewerin: *Haben Sie für sich selber denn eine Strategie entwickelt, wie Sie mit diesen Konflikten umgehen? Das scheint ja schon sehr präsent zu sein im täglichen Jobleben.*

Charles: *Also ich hatte immer die Leichtigkeit, das Glück, dass ich mich immer durchgemogelt habe. Ich hatte immer viele Mandate gemacht und ich habe immer was gefunden, was Ertrag gebracht hat, wo ich also praktisch nicht an diese Produkte dran musste.727-731* *travel for two hours every day.(...) That is something I don't have to do, quite the opposite in fact."*[58]

Sarah also offers an alternative to a customer in a situation of role conflict. Her patient feels that she needs to continue her therapy but her insurance will not pay for further sessions and so Sarah's company wants her to end the therapy relationship. Sarah does comply with her company's wishes but offers her patient to stretch the last sessions over a longer period of time.

> Sarah: *"Well, I did feel a little sorry for that patient, but on the other hand I was also a little relieved that there was this forced limitation. (...) So I sort of accepted a compromise. That we would stretch the last sessions as much as possible. (...) We had 80 sessions and these are the last five and so I tried to accommodate her but I also told her that that is the most I am allowed to do."*[59]

Sarah also bent the rules a little in other circumstances, allowing customers, or patients in this case, to fill in questionnaires later, not straight after a session as they are supposed to, but at another time.

Compromising can also be less specific to one situation and more of a general aim to create win-win situations, in which the frontline employee aims to ensure that both company and customer profit from the situation. Both sides could profit more if the other profited less.

A comment by Nicolas illustrates this point very well.

> Nicolas: *"If, for example, I have a customer and I assess his needs and the customer might say: 'I'm with [competitor company] (...) and my telephone costs amount to 80 Euro a month on average'. I could, if I was a really good salesperson and a fair salesperson, bring the costs down to 40 Euro. I could also bring them to 60 Euro. The customer will still be satisfied and I have sold another product and everyone is happy. I still gave added value to the customer, he can tele-*

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[58] Interviewerin: *Wie hast du in diesem Fall weiterentschieden? Was ist da passiert?*

Phoebe: *Ich bin da hart geblieben, also bei allem Verständnis, ich habe ihr das aber auch gesagt, ich habe gesagt: ‚Ich kann Sie sehr gut verstehen, (...) aber das ist Ihre Pflicht sich zu bewerben, ich drucke Ihnen hier was aus'. Ich bin der Kundin auch sehr entgegen gekommen, aber ich hab ihr wirklich nur etwas mitgegeben, wo sie es nicht weit hatte, also direkt in der Nähe. (...) Also ich versuche dann dadurch dann so einen Mittelweg zu finden, indem ich sage: ‚Okay, ich befreie Sie nicht von Ihrer Pflicht, sich um eine neue Stelle zu kümmern, aber ich komme Ihnen insofern entgegen, dass ich Sie da nicht noch dazu verdonnere, jeden Tag noch zwei Stunden unterwegs zu sein. Sondern wenigstens etwas in Ihrer Wohnungsnähe', das ist dann so ein Entgegenkommen, was ich nicht machen müsste. Ganz im Gegenteil. 358-372*

[59] *Sarah: Also jetzt bei der Patientin tat es mir auch irgendwo ein bisschen leid, aber andererseits war ich auch ein bisschen froh, dass es diese zwangsweise Begrenzung gab, (...) Also ich habe mich ein bisschen auf einen Kompromiss eingelassen, also dass wir gesagt haben, die letzten Sitzungen strecken wir ganz extrem. (...) Wir hatten jetzt 80 Sitzungen gehabt und das sind jetzt die letzten 5 und dann habe ich versucht dem so ein bisschen entgegen zu kommen, aber da habe ich dann auch gesagt, das ist jetzt die Grenze von dem was da auch erlaubt ist. 165-181*

phone for less and has a higher benefit, but I also made 20 Euro more for my company."[60]

Lewis speaks of being able to "reconcile it at least partially, with minor concessions for all concerned"[61]. This underlines the idea of compromising by finding a middle road, in which all parties profit somewhat, even if each could profit more at the expense of the other. This form of compromise does not involve finding alternatives, but compromising on the extent to which the frontline employee pushes the interests of each side.

A variation of this form of compromising does not involve a single instance of role conflict, but rather is a compromise over time. It can be seen as a form of 'choosing your battles wisely'. In this case, the frontline employee will select situations in which to bow to a particular role demand, even though it is not in the interest of the other party. For example, the frontline employee might feel under pressure by his or her company to sell a product that he or she does not think suits the customer. He or she may choose to give in to this pressure with some customers but not others – or with some products but not others.

A good example is offered by Charles. He frequently feels under considerable pressure by his company to sell products he does not think are good for his customers.

> Charles: *"There are products, these days you just get given products, that you had best sell. And then there is, what I just said, then you are in a tight spot, if I don't sell that, I might make less than the others. And that's when you start asking yourself, should I or shouldn't I. And I always tried to balance it in the last years, but nevertheless, sometimes you just had to, if it fitted, say ‚alright'."*[62]

Because the pressure to sell the product is very great, Charles feels he cannot always refuse to do so, but must select in what instances he does this. This idea is underlined in several other comments made by him.

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[60] *Nicolas: „Wenn ich jetzt zum Beispiel einen Kunden habe, wo ich sage, man macht diese Bedarfsanalyse und der Kunde erzählt mir jetzt, zum Beispiel bei der [Konkurrenz] (...) und Telefonkosten von 80 Euro im Monat, das ist der Schnitt, so ich könnte jetzt, wenn ich wirklich ein sehr guter Verkäufer bin und ein fairer Verkäufer, die Kosten auf 40 Euro bringen, ich könnte die Kosten aber auch auf 60 Euro bringen. Der Kunde ist trotzdem zufrieden und ich habe ein Produkt mehr verkauft und alle sind zufrieden, weil ich habe dem Kunden trotzdem einen Mehrwert gegeben, er telefoniert günstiger, hat einen höheren Nutzen, das Unternehmen hat aber trotzdem noch diese20 Euro mehr Umsatz erreicht. 108-120*

[61] Lewis: *„... sich das schon ein Stück weit vereinbaren lässt mit geringen Abweichungen für alle Beteiligten" 208-209*

[62] Charles: *Es gibt eben Produkte, die man jetzt, heutzutage bekommt man eben Produkte benannt, die sollte man tunlichst dann auch verkaufen. Und da ist eben dieses, was ich vorhin gesagt habe, dann kommt man in Bedrängnis, wenn ich das nicht verkaufe, mache ich eventuell weniger Betrag als die anderen. Da geht es dann schon los, dass man sich die Frage stellt, soll ich das, soll ich das nicht und ich habe in den letzten Jahren immer versucht da ein Gleichgewicht zu halten, aber trotzdem müsste man auch irgendwo mal, wo es dann eben reinpasst, auch sagen ‚okay'. 319-324*

Charles: *"You get several products and things on your desk every day, so that you can choose from among these things. Sometimes it might be like there are five things, you don't like any of them, because just from experience you can say, wait a minute, for starters the compensation is too much, until the customers earns anything from that (...)"*

Interviewer: "*Compensation?"*

Charles: "*For the bank. Those are our earnings. But you can't stay out of everything and then you have to pick something that you fell you can just about live with and put other things to the back for the time being and try make your profits with those things."*[63]

In other words, Charles will sell some things that he sees as being against the customer's interests to make profits and appease his superiors, so that he can avoid having to sell other products that he believes to be worse.

That it is at least partially about appeasing his superiors is also illustrated by the following comment:

Charles: *"Well, it just is that if I do that every time and never sell anything, how do you survive as an investment consultant? If your boss says, you are a failure, you aren't one of us, you can go?"*[64]

In the above instances Charles chose between products, deciding when to follow his company's wishes and when not to. Another form of his way of dealing with role conflict, with the company wanting to sell something he saw as detrimental or dangerous for customers, was to offer and sell it only to selected customers.

For example, in the situation already described in chapter 6.1:

Charles: *"I had a product on my desk, for example, all real estate prices had been in free fall and then last year there are these people from London and talk about real estate products in England that had been making 15 to 20%. (...) And I said*

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[63] Charles: *Sie kriegen ja mehrere Produkte und Sachen jeden Tag neu auf den Tisch, also Sie können sich auch aus verschieden Sachen etwas raus nehmen. Manchmal ist es so, da sind fünf Sachen, die gefallen Ihnen alle nicht, weil jetzt einfach aus der Erfahrung heraus, sagt man: ‚Moment, erst mal zu viel Bonifikation drin, bis der Kunde da mal verdient hat'.*

Interviewerin: *Bonifikation bedeutet?*

Charles: Für die Bank. Unser Verdienst ist da drin. Man kann sich nur nicht aus allen raus halten und da muss man das für sich heraussuchen, wo man meint, das kann man eben noch vertreten und anderes eben erst mal dann hinten anstellen und versuchen, eben mit dem dann seine Erträge zu machen. 338-347

[64] Charles: *Nur es ist ja einfach wenn ich das jedes Mal mache und nie etwas verkaufe, wie wollen Sie da als Anlageberater überleben. Wenn Chef dann irgendwann sagt, Sie sind eine Niete, Sie gehören nicht zu uns, Sie können gehen? 786-788*

to myself, you can't do that with your customers. It stinks to high heaven, they just want to get rid of it. So I didn't even tell my customers about it. But that product had to be placed, it was in a letter from the boss, we have to place so and so many million of this. (...) And so and so many have to be sold by us and you're stuck with them. So, the question isn't do I do this, but which customer do I sell it to.[65]

Charles ends this with the question "who do I sell it to?" He describes trying to select customers who can afford the risk or impact of the product, where he judges the possible negative consequences to be minor in comparison to the value of that customers custody account.

> Charles: *"You have to ask yourself, what happens to that customer's custody account if the customer has seven, eight or nine million and he gets 100.000 of that product. Which isn't so bad that I can't do that, how much is that percentage wise? What could happen? Of course, if I did that with a million, then I'd have to be prepared for questions, what is that. But it does have to fit, yes. Then you do of course get to the point eventually where you will do that"*[66]

In summary, the findings suggest that compromising is a common method for frontline employees to deal with situations of role conflict. This approach is also one of the resolutions for role conflict found in the literature (see chapter 3.35; Kahn et al. 1964). Compromise is usually described as fulfilling both role demands partially (Gross, Mason, and McEachern 1958; Grover 1993; van de Vliert 1981). This can be done by finding a balance between the role demands from both parties, aiming for a win-win situation in which both sides profit, though they could each profit more at the expense of the other side. A compromise can also be made by finding an alternative way in which to fulfill a role demand so that the conflict situation would be resolved or lessened. It can involve choosing other products to sell to the customer than those the company wants to be focused on. This means that the customer gets a product the employee believes to be more suited and the company still has a sale, although the employee did not do what the company (or his or her superiors) expected him (or her) to. It can also involve bending the rules a little, enforcing most of what is expected by one party in the role conflict, but not everything, in order to help the other party.

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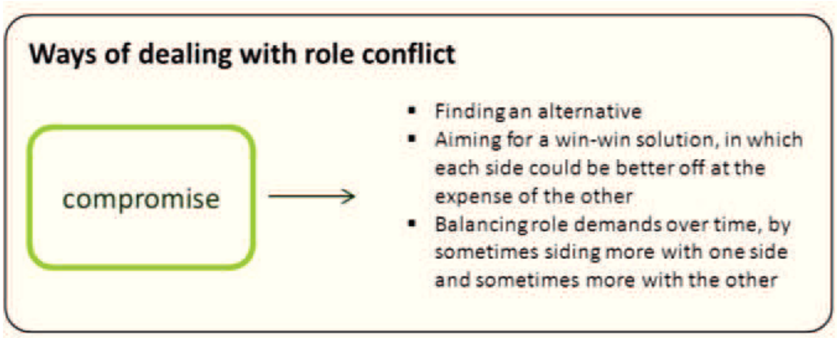
[65] Charles: *... weil ich habe ja ein Produkt auf dem Tisch liegen zum Beispiel, alle Immobilienpreise sind extrem gefallen und dann kommen im letzten Jahr welche aus London an und erzählen von Immobilien in England und die hätten über 15 bis 20% gebracht, (...) und da habe ich schon gesagt, das kannst du mit deinen Kunden nicht machen, weil das stinkt schon zum Himmel, die wollen das nur los werden und da habe ich den Kunden erst mal gar nicht drauf angesprochen. Nur das muss platziert werden, da stand dann drin, in einem Schreiben vom Chef, wir müssen noch so und so viele Millionen davon platzieren. (...) ja dann kommen da in unsere Stadt so und so viele Millionen an und die haben Sie dann an der Backe. Das heißt, da ist nicht die Frage, mache ich das überhaupt, sondern welchem Kunden verkaufe ich das jetzt.* (632-647)

[66] Charles: *Da muss man sich die Frage mal stellen, was macht das in dem Kundendepot aus, wenn der Kunde sieben, acht oder neun Millionen hat und der bekommt 100.000 von diesem Produkt, was jetzt nicht so schlimm ist, dass ich es nicht machen kann, darein, wie viel ist das prozentual, was kann da passieren. Das muss man sich als Frage stellen. Wenn ich natürlich das jetzt mit 'ner Mio mache, dann müsste ich mir die Frage gefallen lassen, was ist denn das. Aber das muss irgendwo darein passen, ja. Da kommt man natürlich schon irgendwann auch mal dazu das eben auch zu machen. 679-685*

Figure 22: Dealing with Role Conflict: Compromise



Finally, another way of compromising is not to do so in a single role conflict situation but to do so over a longer period of time, balancing the times that he puts the demands and/ or interests of the company before those of the customer and vice versa. These different forms of compromising are listed in figure 22.

6.2.4. Avoidance

Avoidance is the third option (along with choice and compromise) that is described as a way of dealing with role conflict situations (see chapter 3.3.5.; Gross, Mason, and McEachern 1958; Kahn et al. 1964). Avoidance can refer to the actual physical avoidance of situations in which role conflict arises, linked to higher levels of absenteeism and job turnover (Anton 2009; Chung and Schneider 2002; Rugulies et al. 2007). It can also involve psychological withdrawal (Cheng and McCarthy 2010; Goolsby 1992) . This can be achieved by distancing oneself cognitively and/or emotionally from the situation causing role conflict or from the role partners. For example, studies have linked role conflict to lower organizational commitment (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Singh 1998). There is also empirical support for the idea that psychological detachment reduces the negative impact of role conflict on well-being (Cheng and McCarthy 2010) and that lower empathy with customers reduces role conflict (Varca 2009).

Avoidance or withdrawal from the role conflict situation was a frequent theme in the interviews. It is described as a way of handling role conflict by thirteen of the nineteen interviewees. The two main forms of avoidance were psychological withdrawal, particularly emotional withdrawal, and passing the decision on to one of the role partners.

Several interview partners reported that it was important to them to maintain a certain distance to customers, to not get personally or emotionally involved in customer contacts. One of the main reasons given was that this helps them remain more objective. Eric describes this as follows:

> Interviewer: *"So there are situations, in which it can be challenging to have to represent, on the one hand, the insurance company and the insurance pool, to regulate everything correctly, and on the other hand you have a customer, a person, who had an insurance case and can often be under a lot of…"*

Eric: *"…emotional..."*

Interviewer: *"…emotional upheaval?"*

Eric: *"I try to accommodate both sides. You try to address the emotional side of it a little, but not too much. I try to switch that off to a great extent, because in the end, the more you get onto an emotional level, the less objective it gets. Because you do, if you have an insurance case involving casualties, if you have a car accident with a little child in the back of the car that is injured and in hospital. How do you react? You have to address the emotional side, express your sympathies, of course. But you can't let it go so far that you promise them everything because of pity. That doesn't help them either. You need a certain amount of emotionality, to give them the feeling that you care, which you also want to do yourself. But then you have to remain objective, explain everything rationally, because the more you explain wrong in the beginning, the worse it gets when you then have to take it back."*[67]

Here, there are two aspects to showing and having emotions when dealing with customers and with a role conflict arising from different expectations and wishes. The first pertains to emotional labour (see chapter 2.2, Hochschild 1983) the need for employees to "express organizationally desired emotions during interpersonal transactions" (Morris and Feldman 1997, p. 987). Eric speaks of having to "address the emotional side", to "give them the feeling that you care" and needing a certain amount of emotionality. These feelings are not necessarily false just because there is a need to express them, they can be real. Eric says himself that he does wish to express his sympathies. He wants the customers to know he actually cares.

At the same time, he has to remain objective and distance himself from the customers. He "switches that off to a great extent". Suppressing emotions that are actually felt but should not be displayed is also a form of emotional labour (Groth, Hennig-Thurau, and Walsh 2009; Hochschild 1983). However, in this case, Eric suppresses emotions that he still has to display. He must try to feel less than he is required to act out towards the customer and less than he

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[67] Interviewerin: *Es gibt also Situationen, in denen es herausfordernd ist, auf der einen Seite die Versicherung und die Versicherungsgemeinschaft zu vertreten, mit: das richtig reguliert werden und auf der anderen Seite hat man ja einen Kunden, einen Menschen, der einen Schadenfall hat und dann ja oft (*Eric*: "emotional") emotional aufgewühlt ist?*

Eric: *Also ich versuche schon, beide Seiten irgendwie zu bedienen, dass man versucht, auf die emotionale Ebene so ein bisschen einzugehen, aber nicht zu viel. Ich versuche das schon weitestgehend auszuschalten, weil im Endeffekt, je mehr man auf die emotionale Ebene eingeht, desto unsachlicher wird die Geschichte. Weil man hat das auch z.B. wenn man ein Schadenfall hat mit Personenschaden. Wenn man einen Verkehrsunfall hat, wo das Kleinkind hinten im Auto war und das verletzt ist und im Krankenhaus ist. Wie reagiert man dann, man muss dann auch auf die emotionale Ebene eingehen, auch sein Beileid aussprechen, ganz klar. Bloß man darf halt nicht so weit hin darein verfallen, dass man denen alles zusagt, nur weil man Mitleid hat. Weil dann bringt es denen nämlich auch nichts. Man muss so ein gewisses Maß an Emotionalität haben damit die dann auch das Gefühl kriegen, dass man auf die eingeht, was man natürlich auch persönlich gerne machen möchte. Aber man muss dann auch so sachlich bleiben, dass man denen das vernünftig erklären kann, weil je mehr man am Anfang falsch erklärt, desto schlimmer wird es am Ende, wenn man wieder kürzen muss. 175-193* may be inclined to feel. He has to show sympathy, and does feel sympathy with customers, but also believes that he cannot let that influence his decisions. To remain objective and judge the case rationally, to give rational advice, he must distance himself from the customer's situation. Eric also points out that in the end feeling too much is not good for the customer either. One can promise too much, agree to help more than will be possible and so later have to take back much of what was offered.

The idea that remaining objective, emotionally distanced from the customer or the customer's situation, is important and necessary in order to do one's job well is echoed by other interviewees. For example, Olivia also points out the importance of emotional distance:

> Olivia: *"There are cases, erm ... well, where you have to make sure that you don't lose your objectivity and don't let things get close to you on a personal level, because you're deciding ... in effect other people's livelihoods. And that is difficult then. If you have a case, a company, that is close to bankruptcy. You know that there are so and so many employees. Then you have to decide: Do they get another restructuring credit or do you end it? Do you end the support? Those are cases where it's difficult because you are dealing with people's fates."*[68]

Like Eric, Olivia points out that the sympathy she may have for customers is problematic as it interferes with the decisions she needs to make. She also speaks of not letting things get to close as greater emotional distance helps to deal with role conflict decisions and makes these decisions less difficult. A little later she says:

> Olivia: *"There are a lot of aspects that you have to consider to decide, well, put bluntly, top or flop, or something like that. And those are then really difficult situations because you have to be careful not to go down the pity road, because then I might grant another credit, thinking, well they'll manage it and then later I have to write off the credit."*[69]

Again she emphasizes the dangers of empathy with the customer, or pity, clouding her judgment and leading to wrong decisions in cases where the customer is asking for a credit extension and her company wants her to make a responsible judgment regarding the credit.

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[68] Olivia: (…) *und das sind dann Fälle, ähm ..., ja, wo man gucken muss, dass man die Objektivität nicht verliert und sie nicht persönlich an sich ranlässt, weil da entscheidet man ... eigentlich über Existenzen. Und das ist dann schon schwierig. Wenn man dann einen Fall hat, eine Firma, die vor der Pleite steht. Man weiß, es sind so und so viele Angestellte da. Dann zu überlegen, gibt man da nochmal einen Sanierungskredit oder wickelt man ab? Kündigt man das Engagement? Das sind dann schon Fälle, wo ich sage das ist hart, weil man da über Schicksale entscheidet. 125-135*

[69] Olivia: *Das sind total viele Aspekte, die man da berücksichtigen muss, um dann zu entscheiden, ja, kurz gesagt, Top oder Hopp, so nach dem Motto. Und das sind dann schon sehr schwierige Situationen, weil man dann aufpassen muss, dass man nicht in diese Mitleidsschiene kommt, weil sonst schieße ich da vielleicht nochmal einen Kredit nach und denke, naja, die schaffen das und hinterher kann ich den Kredit dann abschreiben. 141-145*

Eric and John reported that they become inured to situations of role conflict over time, that they are less sensitive and less likely to become emotionally involved.

> Interviewer: *"Are such situations, where you feel in-between or torn, common or are most cases fairly clear and it only happens rarely?"*
>
> Eric: *"It is rare, it does happen but it is rare. Especially because after a while you get less sensitive to it, you aren't as susceptible any more. It's like somehow, some agents are completely on a rational level all day, they aren't emotional at all. That is frightening sometimes, I can't do that. I just get emotional sometimes."*[70]

John has a similar experience. He describes situations where customers want him to spend more time with them or to react immediately, which clashes with both his responsibilities to other customers and his company's expectations to treat all customers equal and to take on several additional functions in the running of the company.

> Interviewer: *"How do you experience such situations, what are thoughts or feelings that you have?"*
>
> Eric: *"Well, sometimes you are a little, I wouldn't say angry, but after a while you just get used to it, and say yeah, yeah."*[71]

Over time frontline employees can get used to dealing with pressures and difficult, emotionally involving situations. This makes it easier to establish an emotional distance.

Emotional distancing sometimes also took the form of accepting the difficulties arising from contradicting expectations as simply given, a "that is just the way it is" point of view. This could take on an almost cynical note and was usually used to explain why the frontline employee could not fulfill the customer's expectations or wishes.

> Lewis: *"There are some really sad personal stories, if you get around and that ... that can be quite shocking, what you hear and find out. About medical histories and ... I often have to ask people, how is your state of health and so on. Some people will quite readily give you a detailed answer. That can be difficult some-*

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[70] Interviewerin: *Ist so eine zwischen den Stühlen, Hin- und Hergerissenheit, ist das häufig, oder sind die meisten Fälle klar und es passiert einem eher selten?*

Eric*: Es passiert schon selten, es ist da, aber es passiert wirklich selten. Also, vor allem, nach einiger Zeit stumpft man da auch irgendwie ab. Also dann ist man nicht mehr so empfänglich dafür. Das ist dann irgendwie - es gibt Sachbearbeiter, die sind den ganzen Tag auf der Sachebene unterwegs, die sind nicht emotional. Also, das ist erschreckend manchmal. Ich kann das nicht, bei mir zum Beispiel. Ich bin dann manchmal halt etwas emotionaler. 141-145*

[71] Interviewerin: *Wie erlebst du denn dann solche Situationen, was sind denn da Gefühle, die du da hattest, oder Gedanken?*

John: *Ja ist man schon ein bisschen, ich würde jetzt nicht sagen sauer, aber irgendwann fängt man an da ein bisschen abzustumpfen, dass man sagt ja, ja. 370-374* *times. To tell them, listen, we can't insure you. You are simply too ill. We won't take you. That is just sometimes the case.*

Interviewer*: Oh. That is difficult?*

Lewis: *"Yes and no. That's just the way it is. I mean, I am a realist. That's just the way it is. We are a private company, not the Caritas. Er, that sounds harsh. But it is the way it is. Fact is we can choose who we want as a customer and who we don't want. There is a saying in the insurance industry: no one insures a house on fire. There is some truth in that."*

Interviewer*: "And is that difficult for you sometimes?"*

Lewis: *"No. I honestly have to say no. You have to keep those things separate. That is just the way life is. That is how I am in a way"*[72]

Lewis here distances himself in several ways emotionally from situations of role conflict, where a customer is looking for insurance and help from him but he believes his company does not wish to insure the customer. For example, he repeats "that is just the way it is" and similar statements such as "I am a realist" several times in this quote. This negates some of the responsibility that could come from the expectations and the wishes of the customer, and shows these to be unjust, unreasonable or unrealistic. It can make it easier to decide against the customer and reduces any pressure or moral responsibility that might result from such a decision. A study by O'Brien, Hill, and Autry (2009, see also chapter 3.3.4) shows that demands from customers that are perceived to be illegitimate because they do not adhere to socially accepted norms, reduce role conflict.

He also clarifies the responsibilities of his company: "*We are a private company, not the Caritas"*. He speaks of "*we"*, including himself as a member of the organization. He also does this throughout the rest of the quote. A private company will have instrumental goals, be profit-oriented, while a charity such as the Caritas would have much more altruistic and hu-

[72] Lewis*: Es gibt natürlich schon echt schwere Schicksale, wenn man so draußen rumläuft und das … das ist schon heftig zum Teil, was man da so hört und mitkriegt und auch Krankengeschichten und so weiter. Ich muss oftmals fragen, wie sieht es mit dem Gesundheitszustand aus und bla bla. Die Leute erzählen dann manchmal auch relativ breit. Das ist natürlich schon schwierig manchmal, ne. Auch zu sagen: ‚Hören Sie mal zu, wir können Sie nicht versichern. Sie sind einfach zu krank. Wir nehmen Sie nicht'. So was gibt es einfach.*

Interviewerin*: Oh. Das ist schwierig?*

Lewis*: Ja und nein. Ist halt so. Ich mein', da bin ich auch Realist. Ist halt so. Wir sind ein privatwirtschaftliches Unternehmen, wir sind nicht die Caritas. Äh hört sich hart an. Ist aber genauso. Wir können uns halt aussuchen, wen wir als Kunden möchten und wen wir nicht möchten, und so ist es halt. Ich mein', in der Versicherungsbranche sagt man dann immer so: ‚Niemand versichert ein brennendes Haus'. Das stimmt auch irgendwo.*

Interviewerin*: Und ist es persönlich für dich manchmal schwierig?*

Lewis*: Nee. Muss ich ganz ehrlich sagen nein. Da muss man auch irgendwie trennen. So ist es halt im Leben, ne. So da bin ich irgendwie. 322-337* manistic goals. Lewis makes it clear that he sees making a profit, working for the company, as his task and not helping customers without considering his own or his company's interests.

The sentiment of "that is simply the way it is" can be found in other interviews as well. For example, Sarah states several times that company rules are there and simply need to be followed. She says she used to think more about those decisions, but now accepts the rules as they are. She talks about a particular rule regarding the fact that patients need to spend an hour after sessions filling in questionnaires as follows:

> Sarah: *"It isn't something in which I see a whole lot of sense. But I'd do it anyway. I used to sometimes think, why and what's the point. But now I just do it."*[73]

On the rule that all patients must agree to the therapy sessions being taped, something that some patients feel uncomfortable doing, she says:

> Sarah: *"I wouldn't leave it away altogether. I would say, you have to do this. That's just a condition."*[74]

In the above cases the frontline employees distanced themselves from the customer, from emotions or responsibilities felt towards the customer. There were also several examples of interviewees distancing themselves from their company when dealing with role conflict situations. While in these cases the frontline employees distanced themselves from the other side of the role conflict, from the company rather than the customer, the inherent aim is similar – to make the decision in a role conflict situation easier or to reduce the pressure resulting from role conflict.

A very good example for this is Charles. He often speaks of his company's management as "they" and frequently points out that "they" do or want things that are not in the customer's interests. After being asked whether he believes that there are differences in what the customer expects from him and what his company wants him to do, he responds as follows:

> Charles: *"Unfortunately there are.*
>
> Interviewer: *"What kind of differences?"*
>
> Charles: "(...) *There are ranking lists and my boss, whom I hate, the new one, that came from [other financial institute], he stands for the exact opposite of what I believe. He doesn't care, whatever, just out with the products. (...) He really*

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[73] Sarah: *Aber das ist jetzt nicht was, wo ich so einen totalen Sinn drin sehe. Also die würde ich trotzdem machen, aber teilweise habe ich mir früher gedacht, was soll das und warum das. Aber jetzt macht man das halt einfach .303-305*

[74]Sarah:. *Ich würd sie nicht ganz weglassen, also ich würde schon sagen: ‚Sie müssen das halt machen, das ist einen Bedingung'. 369-370*

wouldn't understand my qualms at all, he really wouldn't understand. 'Why? Don't you want money at the end of the year?' he would ask. 'Others do it, so why don't you?' And if I put something in a customer's investment account that runs ten years and the customer is 80 years old, than in my eyes that is a crime."[75]

Charles uses strong emotional language and speaks of "hating" his boss. He describes his boss's values as the exact opposite of his own and sees some of the things he is expected to do as verging on criminal. A little earlier he says the following of his company:

> Charles: "*We have a real product factory in [city in Germany], they hired a lot of people and they are really just knocking the products out. And those are then supposed to be designed for the customer? Of course not."*[76]

Charles explains that he believes the company's wishes and expectations are often not designed for the customer and are bad products. He uses these examples to explain his desire to help the customer and his aversion to sell products that he believes are bad for the customer.

Quinn also distances herself from her company and her company's management. A new management in her company has imposed several changes affecting the call centre agents' work. Quinn explains that she feels less loyal and committed to the company:

> Quinn: *"I don't think much of them any more to be honest."*[77]

> Quinn: *"...that they belong to the company, that is also gone lost a little I think, this feeling of belonging. You used to really feel that this job was important to the company somehow, because all the orders come in through us and that is just gone. You just feel like the small and stupid ones in the company, on the lowest level. (...) So you really just come to work and bye and go home again"*[78]

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[75] Charles: *Gibt es leider.*

Interviewerin: *Was für Unterschiede?*

Charles: *(...)Es gibt Ranglisten und unser Chef, den ich hasse, der neue, der ist von [anderes Finanzinstitut] gekommen, und der verbrieft genau das Gegenteil von mir. Dem ist alles völlig wurscht, egal, einfach rein damit, ne. (...) Also der würde überhaupt nicht verstehen, was ich für Bedenken habe, das würd der überhaupt nicht verstehen, der würde überhaupt nicht verstehen. ‚Wieso, wollen Sie jetzt kein Geld am Jahresende haben?', würde der fragen. Und ähm ja: ‚Andere machen das doch, warum Sie nicht? Das passt doch in das Kundendepot rein', und wenn ich was in ein Kundendepot rein pack, was zehn Jahre läuft und der Kunde 80 Jahre alt ist, dann ist das für mich schon ein Verbrechen. 402-415*

[76] Charles: *Wir haben eine richtige Produkteschmiede in [deutsche Stadt], die haben ja sehr viele Leute eingestellt und die machen ja nur was, die hauen die Produkte raus, die sollen ja auf den Kunden zugeschnitten sein, sind sie natürlich nicht.327-329*

[77] Quinn: *So viel halte ich jetzt ehrlich gesagt nicht mehr von dem Unternehmen. 270-271*

[78] Quinn: *... dass man zum Unternehmen gehört, also das ist auch so ein bisschen verloren gegangen finde ich, diese Zugehörigkeit. Also früher hatte man wirklich das Gefühl gehabt, diese Stellen sind auch irgendwie wichtig für das Unternehmen, weil bei uns gehen nun mal die ganzen Bestellungen ein, und das ist irgendwie verloren*

The lower level of loyalty and commitment felt towards the firm can make the decision to side with the customer against the company in a situation of role conflict easier. Both Charles and Quinn talked of siding with the customer if possible (see chapter 6.2.2).

In both these instances, the distance to the company and the consequent lower organizational commitment and identification can also be seen as an influencing factor on how the decision on dealing with role conflict is handled. This will also be discussed in chapter 6.4. However, expressing anger or disappointment in the company's expectations in a particular role conflict situation can be a way of handling that situation.

As well as distancing oneself psychologically from one of the role partners, a further strategy that can be grouped under the term avoidance was to pass on the decision to either the customer or somebody else in the organization, usually to a higher level of authority. Although the role conflict situation then still exists, the frontline employee is no longer as involved in it and the responsibility for making a decision as to how to solve the conflict gets passed on. This does not avoid the situation as such, but it does lower the emotional investment.

David for example sees himself as more customer-oriented than company-oriented. When customers have claims that he believes to be justified, he tries to help them get their money from the company.

> David: *"Well, I think I am 60% customer-oriented and 40% company-oriented. Of course that does not mean that I would bend rules or regulations or similar things, but if it is about helping a customer get their supposed due, then I am on their side."*[79]

However, in situations where he does not feel comfortable doing this, he passes on the decision to the company. In his descriptions this is mainly because he believes the claims of the customer to be unjustified or dishonest. The customer expects David to help him get money from the insurance company, whereas presumably the company wants David to protect them from fraudulent claims. In these cases, David 'passes the buck', or as he says *"I pass the Peter on"*[80] referring to the card game 'Black Peter', a phrase that means someone passes on an unwanted responsibility or task.

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gegangen. Man hat nur noch das Gefühl, man ist nur noch die Kleinen, Blöden im Unternehmen, also die unterste Stufe,(...) daher man geht wirklich nur noch hin zur Arbeit und Tschüss und geht wieder. 316-322

[79] David: *Also, ich denke mal, ich bin immer 60% kundenorientiert und 40 % unternehmensorientiert. Was natürlich nicht bedeutet, ich sag mal irgendwelche Vorgaben über Bedingungen oder sonstige Paragraphen umgangen werden, aber wenn es darum geht, dass man dem Kunden zu seinem vermeintlichen Recht verhilft, dann bin ich auf seiner Seite. 540-543*

[80] David: *Dann gebe ich den Peter weiter. 330*

David: *"With claims I usually help customers and I may process the claim, or do it together with the customer and if I have, ahm, misgivings, then I let that be done over the head office. Then I am like, come, we send the claim to the company and they have experts or external people vet the whole thing and if they are of the opinion that it is correct and honest enough, then the company can pay."*[81]

In a similar line, a little later he says:

David: *"And I like it when customers are honest when filing an insurance claim. That is not always the case. Some of the stuff I get is just ludicrous. I pass them on of course. Because it is the customer's decision, if he wants to try and defraud the company, let him try. But I am not helping him. I pass it on to the head office and then the head office can use its abilities to find out whether the facts of the claim are possible or probable. I pass the buck."*[82]

David is in a role conflict situation he feels uncomfortable with. In situations where he believes the customers to be honest, he will help them with their claim against the company. But if he believes a customer is dishonest or there is something wrong about the claim, he passes it on and thereby avoids having to make a decision against the customer's claim and hereby withdraws from the situation. This tactic is also reported by others: George passes on decisions in role conflict situations that he is not comfortable with to a group of experts working for the company, even if he could make the decision himself. Olivia also passes on difficult decisions or situations in which role conflicts are particularly difficult.

Olivia: *"Otherwise I try to pass on cases where I know I cannot be objective, because for example I know the people involved personally, that another clerk does those because I say I cannot handle this case. That is someone of my personal acquaintance. I just don't want that. That, if it goes wrong, that someone says I made that decision as a favor."*[83]

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[81] David: *In Schadenfällen ist es ja so, dass ich dem Kunden auch behilflich bin und die Schadenabwicklung abnehme oder zusammen mit ihm mache und auch teilweise durchführe und wenn ich dann ein äh ungünstiges Gefühl habe, dann lass ich das lieber über die Direktion laufen. Dann bleib ich, komm, machen wir die Schadensmeldung ans Unternehmen und dann können die also möglicherweise mit Sachverständigen oder anderen außenstehenden Personen das Ganze durchleuchten und wenn sie dann der Meinung sind, das ist korrekt und ehrlich genug, kann das Unternehmen bezahlen, ne. 204-209*

[82] David: *Und ich finde es gut, wenn also ein Kunde zunächst mal mit der Schadenmeldung ehrlich ist. Das ist nicht immer der Fall. Wenn ich manchmal einige kriege, da sträuben sich mir die Nackenhaare. Ich gebe sie trotzdem weiter, natürlich. Weil das ist die Entscheidung des Kunden, wenn er, ich sag das mal in Anführungsstrichen, etwas betrügen möchte, dann soll er das tun. Dann helfe ich ihm dabei nicht mit. Dann gebe ich das an die Direktion weiter und dann soll die Direktion über ihre Möglichkeiten, die sie hat, herausfinden, ob dieser Schadenssachverhalt denn so möglich war, oder wahrscheinlich ist. Dann gebe ich den Peter weiter. 312-330*

[83] Olivia: *Ansonsten versuche ich, Fälle, bei denen ich weiß, dass ich nicht objektiv sein kann, weil ich die Leute z.B. privat kenne, dass die ein anderer Sachbearbeiter macht, weil ich sage: ‚Ich kann den Fall einfach nicht bearbeiten. Das ist jemand aus meinem Freundeskreis. Das will ich einfach nicht'. Dass, wenn der Fall in die Hosen geht, dass es dann heißt, das war von mir 'ne Gefälligkeitsentscheidung. 384-395*

In these cases the decision was passed on to someone within the company, and the employee could avoid further working on the case or being made responsible for the decision. In other cases the decision was also passed on, but to the customer. This was generally done by trying to inform the customer as much as possible, but refusing to recommend a particular solution. Of course, the final decision about whether or not a customer buys a certain product or offering always lies with the customer. Here, it is less about the decision itself that is moved on, but about the responsibility and accountability for the decision. By not giving a recommendation or advice with regards to the decision, the employee withdraws himself from the decision process and thereby at least somewhat from the role conflict situation.

> Andrew: *"Finally, I think it is important to leave the decision up to the customer. So that he cannot later turn around and say this and this, because I then know, if he comes again and it went down the drain, then I can look him in the eyes and he can look in mine."*[84]

Because Andrew ensures that the customer makes the decision himself, he finds problematic situations easier to deal with. He reduces the pressure from a role conflict situation by passing some of the responsibility on. A similar explanation is given by Nicolas.

> Nicolas: *"Sometimes it is a little borderline, but in the end I think, that ... the customer knows what he gets. He isn't forced into anything, he can see on a piece of paper exactly everything he gets, it is all there, what is for what and in the end they are adults that can say I want this and this. (...) If I write down all the products and their value and he says that is what I want, then in the end he is grown up enough to know whether he wants that or not. So the moral side of it doesn't really come into it much."*[85]

Again the effect of role conflict is reduced by placing the responsibility for the outcome, whether or not and how much a customer buys, firmly on the customer. The employee's responsibility in a role conflict situation is covered by being honest – by showing the customer exactly what it is that he or she is paying for. Informing the customer as much as possible in a role conflict situation and leaving the decision to him or her is a response also given by Sarah (330-341); Rebecca (280-284) and Harry (270-278).

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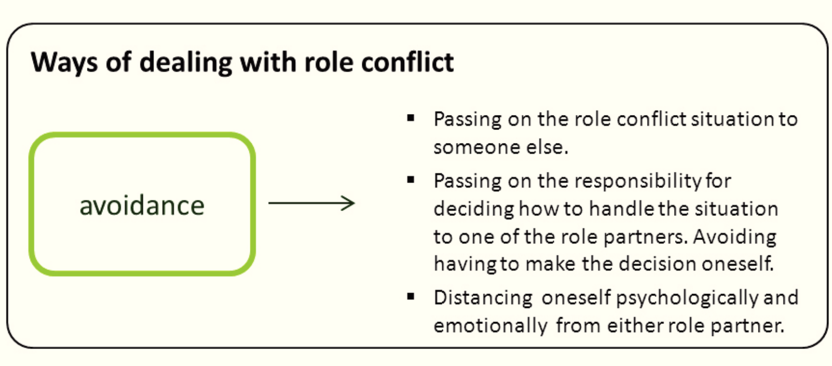
[84] Andrew: *Letztendlich, find ich, ist es wichtig, dass man den Kunden nachher die Entscheidung überlässt. Das er dann nachher nicht sagen kann so und so , weil dann weiß ich auch, wenn er das nächste Mal kommt, es ist in die Buchse gegangen, dann kann ich auch ihm in die, in die Augen gucken und er mir auch. 265-269*

[85] Nicolas: *Manchmal ist es ein bisschen grenzwertig, aber letztendlich denke ich schon, dass man ... der Kunde weiß ja, was er bekommt. Er kriegt es ja nicht reingedrückt, sondern er sieht es ja auf dem Zettel alle Positionen, die er hat, genau drauf geschrieben, was wofür ist, und letztendlich sind sie erwachsene Menschen, die dann sagen, genau so möchte ich das haben. (...) Wenn ich die ganzen Produkte, oder den ganzen Nutzen der Produkte aufschreibe, und er sagt, genauso will ich das haben, dann ist er ja letztendlich erwachsen genug, um zu wissen, ob er es haben will oder nicht. Deswegen hält sich diese moralische Schiene eher in Grenzen. 158-169*

In summary, several different forms of avoidance of role conflict situations were described in the interviews. One prominent way of avoidance was to distance oneself psychologically and emotionally from one of the role partners involved in the situation. A second form of avoidance was to remove oneself from the situation by passing on the decision to either a role partner or a third party. These different forms of avoidance are listed in figure 23.

Figure 23: Dealing with Role Conflict: Avoidance



These two aspects of avoidance – removing oneself from the situation and distancing oneself psychologically – differ in an important aspect. In removing oneself from the situation, one is no longer involved in the role conflict. For example, when Olivia decides to pass on a case to a colleague, the situation has ended for her. By passing on the situation within the company, particularly to management, it can be said that the frontline employee does decide in favor of the company. However, there is a definite feeling of passing on the responsibility for resolving the role conflict, well-illustrated by David's statement "I pass the buck".

Psychological distancing, which is often described as a form of avoidance (Goolsby 1992; Varca 2009; Cheng and McCarthy 2010), does not resolve a role conflict situation. The decision whether to side with one of the role partners, find a compromise or some other way of dealing with the conflict, still needs to be made. It can, however, be a way of making that decision easier. This is suggested both by the findings in this study as well as in the literature on conflict resolution (Cheng and McCarthy 2010). It is therefore more of a supplementary or supportive strategy or way of dealing with role conflict.

6.2.5. Voice

Some of the interviewed frontline employees reported responding to role conflict situations by attempting to make role partners aware of the conflict and aiming to change it. Usually this involved addressing superiors to draw attention to the expectations leading to conflict. This way of addressing role conflict is captured by the concept of voice, introduced by Hirschman (1970). Hirschman saw voice as one of three ways in which employees respond to dissatisfaction in the workplace[86]. It is defined as "any attempt at all to change rather than to escape from an objectionable state of affairs" (1970, p. 30). This can refer to contacting superiors within the organization in an attempt to point out difficulties, but can include any action or form of protest aimed at changing the situation. Voice has also been included in the possible responses to situations of role conflict (Grover 1993, Nonis, Sager and Kumar 1996). Nonis and colleagues found that role conflict increased salespeople's use of a variety of tactics to influence their superiors. (1996, p. 50). The use of assertiveness (demanding change) and upward appeal (appealing to superior's superiors) as tactics was especially increased; other tactics were exchange, integration and coalition building.

Charles, David, John and Rebecca all give examples for using voice to try and resolve a role conflict situation. John reports that his approach was successful. He works as a trainer in a fitness center. As well as training with customers his management also wants him to carry out a variety of administrative and service tasks. John feels that these tasks often prevent him from being able to look after customers he is training with properly (305 – 326). His management not only insisted that he takes on service tasks such as handing out locker keys, but also does this promptly.

> John: *"Yes, that is such an example, even though the issue has been resolved by now. That was a case where I had to clearly say at a meeting that it just does not work that I have to bring a key somewhere or hand it back when I am helping someone. One time I just asked someone what happens if the customer gets hurt? Shall I explain that I just had to go hand out a key, that that was more important than helping you even though you asked for help? Even though I am a trainer?"*[87]

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[86] The other two options discussed by Hirschman (1970) are exit (leaving the organization) and loyalty (a more passive form of reaction, members put their belief in the organization and its management, hoping that things will change for the better. Hirschman's three options have been expanded to include neglect (Farrell 1983; Rusbult, Zembrodt, and Gunn 1982), which refers to a reduction in motivation and effort. Naus and colleagues (2007) have added organizational cynicism as a fifth option. Voice is also seen as a form of pro-social behavior (George and Brief 1992; Van Dyne and LePine 1998), which involves speaking up and making constructive suggestions. Van Dyne and colleagues (2003) further differentiate between acquiescent, defensive and pro-social voice. See also chapter 3.3.5.

[87] John: *Ja, das wäre so ein Beispiel. Obwohl wir das inzwischen auch aus der Welt haben, wenn man ich sag das mal, bei so einer Sitzung klar sagen musste, dass es nicht geht, dass ich irgendwo so einen Schlüssel rausbringen muss, oder abgeben muss, wo ich gerade jemandem helfe. Da habe ich mal jemanden gefragt, wie sieht es denn aus, wenn der sich da verletzt, kann ich dem dann erklären, hör mal ich musste da gerade einen Schlüs-*

John described that he often found himself in a difficult situation when on the one hand the customers he trains demand his full attention while at the same time his company and other customers expect him to be able to perform little service tasks as soon as he is asked to do so (for example 311-325; 335-342; 373-381). He mentions this type of role conflict situation very frequently, and also explains that he usually tries to resolve it by explaining the conflict to the concerned parties. As well as addressing his management as described in the quote above, he also tries to explain to customers why he cannot immediately fulfill every customer expectation. He asks those wanting him to perform a short service task, such as getting a key, to wait until he has finished helping a customer in need of training.

> John: *"Yes, it often happens, you're just helping a customer in the training area and then you hear someone from the front.: 'hello, hello, hello' and they come running on the training area and say: 'I need a key', so you say, 'just a moment please, I am helping someone.' And then they'll go away, wait maybe five seconds and then start shouting again. Then you go to the front and explain that when you are just helping someone you can't get a key, to please understand that it just takes two minutes and try to explain: 'if I was helping you, you wouldn't want me to hand out a key either'."*[88]

The role conflict here stems from different expectations from different customers, but John sees this as caused by the role given to him by his management.

> John: *"As boss one should really think about maybe putting someone else there in the front. So that the trainer can do his job."*[89]

Several other frontline employees also described voicing role conflicts and factors leading to role conflict to their company or customers. It should also be pointed out that most of the voice attempts described by the frontline employees were unsuccessful.

> Charles: *"... I have always waited for the moment when three, four, five people in a meeting would stand up and say 'no, we won't do that'. Twice two or three people said that and were pushed down immediately: '[headquarters] want that and I am also convinced'. It was about gold accounts, gold was already over 1.000 and*

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sel rausgeben, das ist wichtiger als dir da zu helfen, obwohl du mich da gefragt hast? Obwohl ich Trainer bin? 362-367

[88] John: *Also man gerät häufig, wenn man gerade einem Kunden hilft auf der Fläche und dann hört man schon von Vorne, Hallo, Hallo, Hallo, dann kommen die auf die Fläche gelaufen und sagen ich brauche einen Schlüssel und dann sagt man einen Moment bitte ich helfe gerade und dann gehen die auch wieder weg, warten noch fünf Sekunden, bevor sie dann wieder alle rufen und dann kommt man dann nach Vorne und erklärt denen, wenn ich gerade am Helfen bin, kann ich dir nicht den Schlüssel geben, versteh das bitte, es dauert nur zwei Minuten und habe ich versucht zu erklären, wenn ich dir helfen würde, möchtest du auch nicht, dass ich gerade einen Schlüssel raus gebe. 372-379*

[89] John: *Da sollte man vielleicht aber auch als Chef überlegen, okay stell ich vielleicht auch jemanden da vorne hin. Damit der Trainer seinen Job machen kann. 322-323*

three people were asked, including me, and I said, no I won't do that, I am of the firm opinion that gold is about to go down, that it is not a good investment. 'Yes, but there is so and so much compensation for it'. And that is how it starts. I said: ‚No, that is not a good thing to sell'. Two or three others agreed and then the nagging started. 'You can earn so much with that, it does not have to be much, and it fits every customer. You just have to be able to sell that'. I said: ‚What is this, does he doubt our selling abilities?' There is hardly a way to get out of that circle. I wouldn't know. It hurts, but I would not know."[90]

Charles' company's expectation that he sell gold conflicts with his wish to protect his customers' interests and their expectation to be able to trust in his advice, creating role conflict. Charles tries to resolve this situation by pointing out to his company that the order to sell gold is against customer interests, but is quickly shot down by his superior.

Brian and David both report contacting their head office to try and change company decisions that they felt led to a role conflict situation (Brian 93-115; David 334-344). Rebecca appeals to her superior and tries to persuade him to change a decision that leads to role conflict (due to a mistake made by the company software, a patient's therapy is to end very abruptly. Rebecca feels her patient still needs her help and more time to end the therapy; 361-375). Olivia herself has not used voice to make her management aware of expectations leading to conflict, but reports having seen others try to voice these problems and then being sanctioned for this (Olivia 123-133).

Most examples for using a voice approach to solve a role conflict situation involved the frontline employees addressing someone in their company, usually a superior or management. However, there were several cases where frontline employees tried to change or lower their customers' expectations in order to reduce or resolve role conflict. Phoebe (223-260), Sarah (183-189) and Rebecca describe explaining company rules or decisions in order to reduce role conflict.

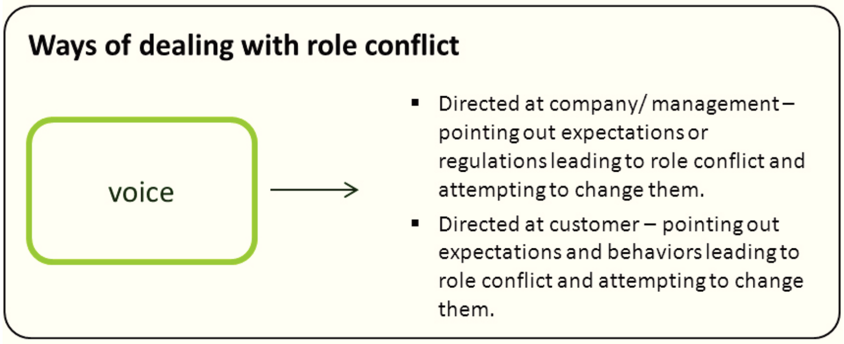
Rebecca: *"If I can see it coming that I am going to disappoint you, the patient, somewhere along the line, then I think it is really important to ensure that the*

[90]Charles: *Ich habe immer auf den Moment gewartete, wo mal in so einer Sitzung vielleicht drei, vier, fünf Leute aufstehen und mal sagen: ‚Ne, das machen wir nicht'. Zweimal haben es zwei, drei gesagt, und die sind sofort niedergedrückt worden von: ‚[Hauptsitz] will das aber und ich bin auch davon überzeugt'. Das waren Goldkonten, da war Gold schon über 1000 und da wurden drei gefragt, ich unter anderem auch, da sage ich: ‚Ne, das mache ich nicht, ich bin der festen Überzeugung, dass Gold praktisch untergeht, das ist überhaupt keine gute Anlage'. , Ja, aber da gibt es so und so viel Bonifikation für'. Und? Ja so geht das dann los und, ne: ‚Ne', sag ich, ‚das ist kein guter Fall, um das zu verkaufen'. Das haben dann noch zwei andere gemacht, und dann hat der richtig da rumgeblökt. ‚Da kann man so viel dran verdienen und das muss ja auch nicht viel sein und das passt doch zu jedem Kunden. Da muss man doch in der Lage sein, das zu verkaufen'. Ich sagte: ‚Was ist denn da los, hat der Zweifel an unseren verkäuferischen Tätigkeiten?'. Also die Fähigkeiten, da kann man im Grunde genommen, gibt es da kaum eine Möglichkeit rauszukommen aus dem Kreis. Ich wüsste es nicht. Das tut mir weh, aber wüsste ich nicht. 738-750*

rules are clear from the very beginning to keep that disappointment as small as possible. (...) I think it is really essential to clearly say from the beginning on what you can do and what you cannot do to keep the disappointment down."[91]

Brian, David and George work in the insurance industry and try to ensure that customers understand what is covered by a certain policy or why some things cannot be insured (Brian 197-213; David: 217-236; George: 313-330).

Figure 24: Dealing with Role Conflict: Voice



In the literature on voice as a form of addressing conflict, voice is usually addressed to others within the organization (see for example van Dyne, Ang and Botero 2003; van Dyne and Le Pine 1998; Whiting, Podsakoff and Pierce 2008) . The reported behavior of the frontline employees interviewed for this research indicates that voice can also be used to address the customer side of role conflicts. The different forms of voice are shown in figure 24.

6.2.6. Deceit

Deceit, misinformation, and secrecy describe another way in which some of the interviewed frontline employees responded to role conflict situations. Grover (1993) has described lying as the fifth option available in dealing with role conflict. It involves resolving the conflict by acting in one way and giving one or more of the role partners the impression of having acted differently and in their interests. Charles for example states that he selectively writes the reports for his superiors. He includes the fact that he offered the customer the products the company wanted him to sell, but neglects to mention the fact that he advised the customer not to buy them. He also simply writes that the customer did not want to buy the product, but does not elaborate on why the customer decided this way.

Interviewer: *"Are there situations in which you feel emotionally closer to the customer than to your company?"*

[91] Rebecca: *Also wenn ich schon kommen sehe, dass ich dich als Patient an irgend einer Stelle enttäusche, dann finde ich es halt total wichtig, von vornherein die Regeln klar zu machen, um die Enttäuschung möglichst gering zu halten. (...) Und dann ist es glaub ich total wichtig, von vornherein zu sagen, was man liefert und was man nicht liefert, um halt diese Enttäuschung möglichst gering zu halten und um auch was… um auch zu zeigen, dass man sich irgendwie verlässlich und nach diesen Regeln verhält, weil es gibt ja auch eine gewisse Sicherheit, man verpflichtet sich damit ja vielleicht auch zu manchen Sachen, auf der anderen Seite. 536-541*

Charles: *"Yes. All the time. Sometimes I say that. I even use it as a selling argument; 'I am currently of a different opinion than my company. I have something else that I think is better'. One should be able to do that. Of course that gets put in the report, that is really important, with the heading: ,recommended this and this', because it got recommended, what the company said I recommended. I mentioned it. When my superior sees it, he can't touch me. And if it turns out differently, okay."*

Interviewer: *"So you have to know how to report it to the company?"*

Charles: *„Yes."*

Interviewer: *"Do you think others do the same thing? That the reports are ... well, it isn't exactly lying..."*

Charles: "*No, it isn't lying. Not at all. I do introduce everything the company wants me to. But I also give my opinion. I don't have to put that in the heading. I can write I introduced that and that, and the customer did not want it. Why he didn't want it ..."*

Interviewer: *"Is not included in the report?"*

Charles: *"Doesn't need to go in there."*[92]

Charles here is adamant that he did not lie. Not only does he point that out ("No it isn't lying. Not at all.") but he also repeatedly stresses that he did do what he wrote in the report, recommend the product his company wanted him to. The omission of a crucial piece of information, that in effect he told the customer not to buy that product, however, still is a form of deceit. This deceit allows Charles to resolve the role conflict, by acting in the customer's interests

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[92] Interviewerin: *Gibt es Situationen, in denen Sie sich dem Kunden emotional näher fühlen als Ihrem Unternehmen?*

Charles: *Ja. Permanent. Ich sag das auch manchmal. Ich mach das auch als Verkaufsargument sogar: ,Ich bin jetzt in dem Augenblick, habe ich eine andere Meinung als mein Unternehmen dazu'. Dann habe ich was anderes eben, was ich für besser fände jetzt, das kann man ja wohl machen. Das kommt dann natürlich in den Bericht rein, das ist auch ganz wichtig, mit der Überschrift: Empfohlen das und das und das', das heißt empfohlen ist ja das, was das Unternehmen gesagt hat, hab ich ja empfohlen, ich hab es ja erwähnt. Wenn der Vorgesetzte das dann liest, okay, der kann mir dann ja keinen reinwürgen. Und wenn dann was anderes dabei rauskommt, okay.*

Interviewerin: *Das heißt, man muss wissen, wie man es dem Unternehmen berichtet.*

Charles: *Ja. Weil viele von den Berichten, da kann der Vorgesetzte reingucken, was ich da geschrieben habe.*

Interviewerin: *Glauben Sie, dass das Kollegen auch so machen, dass sie die Berichte so, na gelogen ist es ja natürlich nicht.*

Charles: *Ne es ist nicht gelogen. Gar nicht. Ich stell Sie vor. Ich stell alles, das was das Unternehmen von mir will, stelle ich vor. Ich sage aber meine Meinung dazu. Das muss ich ja nicht als Überschrift drauf machen. Dann kann ich ja reinschreiben, das und das vorgestellt, Kunde wollte nicht. Warum der nicht wollte...*

Interviewerin: *Kommt natürlich nicht in den Bericht.*

Charles: *Das muss da nicht rein. 767-786* and making his company believe he acted in theirs. This follows the line of reasoning for lying to resolve role conflict given by Grover (1993).

Rebecca also reports selecting what information about customers she passes on to her company in situations of role conflict. She begins by describing a situation in which she reported all information about the customer to her company, including the fact that the customer had regularly used drugs several years earlier. Her company then expected her to put the customer through a drug screening, a procedure that was very difficult and humiliating for the customer. In this case Rebecca complied with the company's expectations (see also chapter 6.2.1). However, she also states than in future she would keep such information secret from the company and only inform them of what she thinks necessary.

> Rebecca: *"And now I think I would simply keep quiet about it (...). It was really uncomfortable for her [the customer], the doctor did not want to do it because it is expensive, then I had to phone the doctor, and then the screen came out clear. I know such situations now and simply know what difficulties come with what behaviors and I would behave accordingly."*
>
> *Interviewer: "So you have made your own rules as to how to handle such situations?"*
>
> *Rebecca: "Yes, if he [her boss] does not know. I also don't have to put everything in the report, only what I believe is relevant. (...) I think I apply some of the rules on my own, and I'll tell her [the customer] that we have to do this, but I think if I thought it irrelevant I would just leave it out."* [93]

Here Rebecca describes that she would choose which information to include in her reports in order to avoid a situation of role conflict, such as her company demanding a procedure that would be very unwelcome to her customer. She also reports having seen customers in secret. She ran out of approved therapy sessions unexpectedly because of a computer error by her company. Her boss told her she had to end the therapy straight away, as future meetings

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[93] Rebecca: *Und jetzt glaub ich, würde ich es einfach verschweigen. (...) Das hat halt ihr viele Unannehmlichkeiten bereitet, dann wollte die Ärztin das nicht machen, weil es teuer ist, dann musste ich mit der Ärztin telefonieren, (...) es kam ja dann im Screening raus, dass sie lange nichts konsumiert hat und das zum Beispiel, solche Sachen glaube ich, kenne ich einfach mehr und würde dann glaub ich, man weiß von vornherein welche Schwierigkeiten mit welchem Verhalten einhergehen und würde mich dementsprechend verhalten.*

Interviewerin : *Du hast dir also eigene Regeln sozusagen aufgebaut, wie du mit solchen Situationen umgehst?*

Rebecca: *Ja, wenn er das nicht weiß. Ich muss ja auch nicht alles in den Antrag einschreiben, ne, sondern nur das was ich für relevant halte. (...) Dann hab ich da glaube ich so einen Teil der Regeln für mich intern realisiert und dann spreche ich mit ihr, dass wir das machen müssen, hab ich auch schon, aber ich glaub, wenn ich jetzt so denken würde, dass es eigentlich keinen Grund dafür gibt, das so machen zu müssen, dann würde ich es einfach weglassen. 444-474* would not be covered by the customer's insurance. Rebecca felt that her patient still needed her and expected her to help her, so she decided to give the patient a few therapy sessions in secret. Rebecca also did this on her own time, meaning she was not recompensed for it, a point that will be discussed in the next chapter.

> Rebecca: *"In one case I had done about nine hours too many (...) and we have such a crappy computer program and that showed that we still had sessions and then it became clear that we didn't. And the patient had just gone through a break-up, and it was important to her that we continue. And then [my boss] said I shouldn't see her because we had already done too many sessions. (...) I thought that was really unfair, as the patient felt everything was fine.(...) To be honest I met her in secret, I gave her some sessions for free."*[94]

Rebecca solved the role conflict situation by helping the customer and hiding this information from the company, so that they would be led to believe she complied with their expectations.

Phoebe reports similar behaviors. She explains that she sometimes deliberately ignores company rules stipulating that she must sanction customers who have deviated from regulations set by the agency she works for. In other words, in some situations where she feels herself between the customer's wish for sympathy and help and her company's expectation of sanctioning, she chooses the customer's side (see also chapter 6.2.2). As she has to make a written report about every encounter, she always runs the risk of being discovered and sanctioned herself (116-124). While unlike Charles she does not say that she writes the reports in such a way that she cannot get in trouble, she does point out that she keeps her behavior hidden from management. Phoebe reports that among her co-workers it is openly discussed that sanctions aren't always given when the company rules demand them, but that no one would pass that information on to management.

> Interviewer: *"But it isn't that [the company] knows and tolerates this room for decision?"*
>
> Phoebe: *"No, no, no. In trainings (...) this is trained using role playing. So you're the clerk sometimes, sometimes the customer, and it is regularly pointed out. We have to act according to these rules and can make no exception. But everybody training there, mostly they work in the same job area we do, know that in the end everybody turns a blind eye sometimes. (...)"*

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[94] Rebecca: *Zum Beispiel in dem einen Fall hatte ich dann irgendwie neun Stunden zu viel gemacht, (...) wir haben ja so ein scheiß Computerprogramm, das hat angezeigt, dass wir noch bewilligte Stunden hätten, ähm und dann ist es halt rausgekommen, dass es nicht passte (...) Und die Patientin war frisch getrennt und der war schon wichtig, dass wir weiter machen und da hat [Chef] zum Beispiel schon gesagt, dass ich mich nicht mit ihr treffen soll, da wir schon so viele Stunden drüber gemacht haben. (...) Das fand ich zum Beispiel schon total unfair, weil die Patientin sich voll in Sicherheit gewogen hat.(...) Ich hab mich da auch ehrlich gesagt mit der heimlich getroffen, also der ein paar Sitzungen geschenkt. 281-303*

Interviewer: *"So you can say that it sort of is possible unofficially, that the trainers know about it, but that it isn't tolerated and is sanctioned?*

Phoebe: *"Yes, if the top level finds out about it. Among colleagues it is openly discussed and people say: 'Oh I turned a blind eye there', it isn't treated as a state secret, but no one would take that to the boss. (...) But it doesn't get to the boss because everybody does it really"*[95]

In this case the deceit lies not in manipulating the reports but in keeping the deviation from the management level in the company. It is also not a secret Phoebe keeps to herself – she states that she is quite open about it to her co-workers, who also openly admit that they deviated from the rules. This has strong parallels to the situations of service sabotage described by Harris and Ogbonna (2002). In particular it can be described as a form of customary-public service sabotage, in that this behavior is routinely done andis openly admitted. However, unlike in most of the situations of service sabotage described by Harris and Ogbonna (2002), the customer here is not the victim but the beneficiary of the employee's deviance from the rules. It is also a form of workplace deviance, defined by Robinson and Bennett (1995) as "voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both". The behavior described by Phoebe is clearly voluntary and violating significant organizational norms. Whether the behavior is harmful to the organization is open to discussion, but it does undermine the aims the company set by setting up the regulation. It can be seen as a constructive deviant behavior (Warren 2003, see also chapter 4.3), but the outcome is positive for the customer, not the organization.

Frontline employees deceive not only their companies in order to resolve a role conflict situation. They also lie to their customers or give information only selectively. The fact that frontline employees sometimes lie to make their life easier and to avoid conflict has been found in other studies as well. In a study from 2003, Scott shows that frontline employees working as service personnel for airlines lie to passengers for a variety of reasons, including protecting the company by claiming that problems due to the company are due to third parties or outside

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[95] Interviewerin: *Also ist es nicht so, dass [das Unternehmen]diesen Spielraum kennt und toleriert?*

Phoebe: Nein nein, nein. Es wird ja auch bei den Schulungen, (...) unter anderem wird das auch in Rollenspielen trainiert. Einmal bist du Bearbeiter, einmal bist du Kunde und so und da wirst du regelmäßig drauf hingewiesen. Wir haben nach diesen Vorgaben zu handeln und wir dürfen da auch keine Ausnahme machen, aber alle die, die dort schulen, meistens sind das selber Leute aus dem Bereich, wissen das natürlich, dass letztendlich alle mal ein Auge zudrücken(...).

Interviewerin: *Also kann man schon sagen, das gehört schon irgendwie inoffiziell dazu, aber auch so, dass die Schuler das wissen und so, aber dass es nicht toleriert wird und auch sanktioniert wird?*

Phoebe: *Ja, wenn das die oberste Ebene rausbekommt, ne. Also unter den Kollegen wird da auch offen drüber gesprochen also das wird auch gesagt: (...) ‚Ich habe da gerade noch mal ein Auge zugedrückt', das wird auch ausgesprochen, da wird kein großes Staatsgeheimnis draus gemacht, aber es würde keiner zum Chef herantragen. (...) Aber zum Chef gelangt eigentlich nichts, weil es auch jeder macht. 130-145* events, or lying to the passenger about their ability to provide a service. While Scott (2003) does not connect this to role conflicts, it does enable the frontline employees to manage customer expectations and thus lower or prevent role conflicts.

In this study, few interview partners spoke about outright lying to the customers. One such interviewee was Phoebe. She talked about deliberately lying to customers in order to be able to fulfill company expectations.

> Interviewer: *"Can you give me an example for a situation, where it was particularly salient for you that these different expectations collide?"*
>
> Phoebe: *"(...) One expectation for example is to fill those lists for a course, so there was this requirement to find so and so many customers for these lists and I only just managed to fish out some of my customers for this list. And they regularly get letters now: 'Miss Smith, you have to take part in such and such a course on such and such a day'. And so shortly afterwards I get a call from a very irate customer, who was affected by this, and didn't see the point of this course, as she had already taken part in that exact course two years ago, it was a job application training. (...) And then I said: 'Look, for one thing it is two years ago, and the training obviously hasn't lead to any results yet or you would have found work, maybe you can need support again. And some things change, especially regarding applications', (...) and I tried to argue using these points. What I actually thought is: 'I can really understand this woman. I would never have put her in this course if I didn't have this requirement'. And that is a classic example in which these things collide. And you cannot tell the customers. I can't tell the truth and say: 'I just had to fill this list, I agree with you that it makes no sense at all'. I just cannot do that and there are many such situations"*[96]

[96] Interviewerin: *Gibt es da eine Beispielsituation, in der das besonders prägnant für dich war, dass da diese beiden Erwartungen kollidieren?*

Phoebe: *(...) Also eine Erwartung war zum Beispiel mit diesem Füllen der Listen für diese Maßnahme, also da gab es halt wieder eine Vorgabe: ‚Du brauchst unbedingt noch so und so viele Kunden in diesen Listen', und ich habe das dann auch mit Mühe und Not halt da irgendwelche aus meinem Bestand rausgefischt und draufgesetzt, und die werden jetzt halt immer angeschrieben, und dann steht da halt: ‚Frau Meier, Sie nehmen am so und so vielten an der und der Maßnahme teil'. (...) Und dann erhalte ich kurze Zeit später einen Anruf von einer sehr aufgebrachten Kundin, die halt betroffen war, und die Sinnhaftigkeit der Teilnahme doch stark angezweifelt hat, weil die gesagt hat, sie hätte erst vor zwei Jahren an dieser exakt dieser Maßnahme teilgenommen, also das war halt ein Bewerbungstraining (...). Und dann habe ich gesagt: ‚Ja schauen Sie doch mal, erstens ist das ja schon zwei Jahre her, und anscheinend hat ja jetzt das Training bei Ihnen noch keine Früchte getragen, sonst hätten Sie ja Arbeit gefunden, vielleicht brauchen Sie da nochmal Unterstützung, einige Sachen ändern sich ja auch, gerade im Bereich Bewerbung', (...) und habe halt versucht, mit solchen Dingen zu argumentieren. Wobei ich eigentlich gedacht habe: ‚Ich kann die Frau auch gut verstehen. Oder ich hätte sie auch nie in diese Maßnahme gepackt, wenn ich nicht diese Vorgabe gehabt hätte'. Und da ist zum Beispiel eine klassische Situation, wo sowas kollidiert. Wobei man dem Kunden natürlich nicht sagen darf, ich könnte ihnen nicht die Wahrheit sagen, ich könnte nicht sagen: ‚Ich musste nur die Liste voll machen, ich finde auch, dass das eigentlich Schwachsinn ist'. Das geht ja nicht, und solche Situationen gibt es ganz viele. 223-260*

On the face of it, here Phoebe fulfilled the expectation of her company to fill the course lists with her customers. However, she also misrepresents the situation to her customer. Phoebe feels the inclusion of the woman in the course to be arbitrary, but she tells the customer that this was done in her own interest. She frames the situation so that she is not going against the customer's interests by including her in a course that has no significant benefit for her and will cost her time, but that by including her in the course she was helping her to find a job. While this does not resolve the role conflict, Phoebe tries to soften it by presenting the decision as being in the customer's interests.

While other frontline employees interviewed did not report explicitly lying to customers, they did sometimes selectively give information. This is illustrated particularly well by a quote by Lewis:

> Lewis: *"Of course you can steer the discussion to the point that you end up or at least have the chance to end up where you want to be. Because you're sitting in front of a layman, whom you are explaining things to and you know what the issue is about and therefore you can usually direct him."*[97]

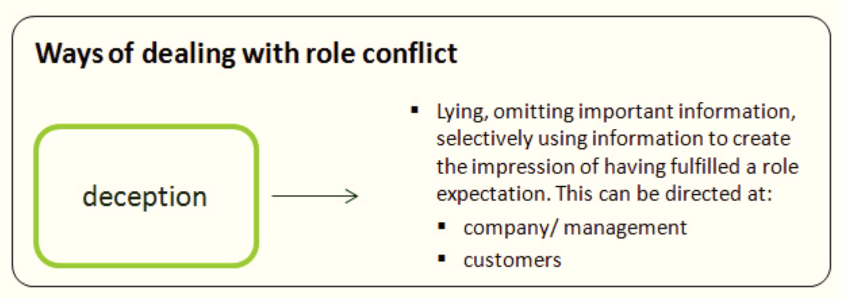
By omitting information frontline employees can influence customers' ability to make informed decisions and thereby also their expectations and evaluation of how well the employee fulfilled these expectations. Finally, it should be pointed out that every time an employee believes that a product or a service is unnecessary to a customer, potentially harmful or goes against what the customer explicitly states as his or her wishes, and the employee still attempts to sell it, this a form of deception (Carson 2001). The aim of this deception is of course not necessarily to resolve role conflict, but by impacting customers' expectations and their perception of how these are being served, it can lower the role conflict perceived by the frontline employee.

Deception is usually not a way of resolving role conflict in and as of itself. Although Grover (1993) describes it as a fifth option to those given by Katz and colleagues (1964) and voice (Hirschman 1970), it is more of a facilitator that can help with other options. It allows employees to try and lower the sanctions associated with siding against one role partner (or not fulfilling all expectations in cases of compromise) by deceiving one or both role partners on the extent to which their expectations were met (see figure 25).

[97] Lewis: *Ja also man kann natürlich seine Gesprächsführung irgendwo dahin lenken, dass man da auch landet vielleicht, oder dass man die Chance zumindest erlangt, da zu landen, wo man auch landen möchte. Weil man sitzt vor einem Laien, dem man etwas erklärt, und man selber weiß, worum es geht, also dementsprechend kann man den schon steuern. 186-193*

In the examples in this chapter for example Charles let his company believe that he did exactly as asked in promoting a particular product, while he actually sided with the customer. Phoebe let a customer believe that a company decision was in that customer's interests rather than due to organizational reasons that had nothing to do with the customer's needs or welfare Like psychological distancing in chapter 6.2.4, deceit is more of a supplementary or supportive strategy in dealing with role conflicts.

Figure 25: Dealing with Role Conflict: Deceit



6.2.7. Using Personal Resources

Besides the five options for dealing with role conflict described in the literature - choice, compromise or withdrawal (Kahn et al. 1964), voice (Hirschman 1970, Nonis, Sager and Kumar 1996) and deceit (Grover 1993) - one further approach emerged during the interviews. Some of the interview partners reported that in certain role conflict situations they resolved the issue by using personal resources to enable them to meet both company and customer expectations.

Rebecca's behavior in a role conflict situation is an excellent example for this option. In a role conflict situation she talked very much of in her interviews and which has come up as an example in the above chapter on deceit, Rebecca unexpectedly found herself at the end of approved therapy sessions with one of her patients, or customers. Due to a computer error and a confusing program for charting time, she had used up all the company and insurance approved sessions, whereas she had believed and led her customer to believe that there were still several sessions to go. Her company expected her to end the therapy straight away, or at least pause until new sessions were available, a process taking some time. At the same time Rebecca believed her customer trusted that everything was alright and that she would receive further assistance. The customer was also going through a separation, which increased her need for further therapy.

> Rebecca: *"In one case I had done about nine hours too many (...) and we have such a crappy computer program and that showed that we still had sessions and then it became clear that we didn't. And the patient had just gone through a break-up, and it was important to her that we continue. And then [my boss] said I shouldn't see her because we had already done too many sessions (...) I thought*

that was really unfair, as the patient felt everything was fine.(...) To be honest I met her in secret, I gave her some sessions for free."[98]

Within the possibilities of her job, Rebecca could not both follow the expectation of her company to end the therapy and the expectation of help and further therapy by the customer. She gave the customer free sessions in secret. Rebecca was not reimbursed for these sessions, her company did not earn anything from them nor did the customer or the customer's insurance have to pay for it. She thus fulfilled the customer's expectation and sided with the customer. That she did it in secret implies that she did not wish her company to know. It is debatable in how far she did or did not fulfill the company's expectation. She did not end the therapy, or pause it, but she also caused no further costs to the company. What can be said is that she sees her actions as benefitting both the patient and the company and addressing at least some of the role conflict issues.

> Rebecca: *"I mean, I did do unpaid overtime. That I think is good for him [her boss]. The patient is happy because she gets her therapy and the company probably looks good to her, well not the boss maybe, but I think on the whole she is satisfied. And the boss doesn't need to take on the financial risk that the sessions might not be paid for."*[99]

She goes on to say that she thinks it is fairly common for therapists working at her company to take on extra work or carry out unpaid work in their own time.

> Rebecca: *"I think most people that work there (...) are fairly intrinsically motivated, they have a relationship with people [the customers] and like them, so that I think when push comes to shove they do whatever is necessary to show the company in a good light. I do think that leads to the therapists [the employees] carrying a lot of weight on their own shoulders, so that they do extra hours or finish writing an application [for therapy sessions] on the weekend."*[100]

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[98] Rebecca: *Zum Beispiel in dem einen Fall hatte ich dann irgendwie neun Stunden zu viel gemacht, (...) wir haben ja so ein scheiß Computerprogramm, das hat angezeigt, dass wir noch bewilligte Stunden hätten ähm und dann ist es halt rausgekommen, dass es nicht passte. (....) Und die Patientin war frisch getrennt und der war schon wichtig, dass wir weiter machen und da hat [Chef] zum Beispiel schon gesagt, dass ich mich nicht mit ihr treffen soll, da wir schon so viele Stunden drüber gemacht haben. (...) Das fand ich zum Beispiel schon total unfair, weil die Patientin sich voll in Sicherheit gewogen hat.(...) Ich hab mich da auch ehrlich gesagt mit der heimlich getroffen, also der ein paar Sitzungen geschenkt. 281-303*

[99] Rebecca: *Ich mein', ich hab ja jetzt unbezahlte Überstunden gemacht, das ist zumindest glaub ich schon gut für ihn [den Chef]. Die Patientin ist zufrieden, weil sie kriegt ja ihre Therapie und das [Unternehmen] steht bestimmt in ihren Augen, ok [der Chef] steht gerade nicht gut dar, aber ich denke insgesamt ist sie schon zufrieden und [der Chef] muss halt - geht kein finanzielles Risiko ein, dass es hinterher nicht übernommen wird. 396-400*

[100] Rebecca*: Ich glaube die meisten Leute, die da arbeiten (...) sind ziemlich intrinsisch von sich aus motiviert und haben auch eine Beziehung zu den Leuten und mögen die Leute, so dass man glaub ich im Zweifel, dann schon das macht , was das Unternehmen ganz gut da stehen lässt. Also ich glaub das führt schon dazu, dass man, dass halt die Therapeuten relativ viel auf den eigenen Schultern ausbaden so, also dass man dann Über-*

Rebecca states that people do extra work, sometimes outside of work hours. This of course is not necessarily linked to resolving role conflicts, but she does give this example when explaining why she did extra work in a role conflict situation.

Brian gives a slightly different example of similar behavior. In some situations in which his company offers less compensation for an insurance claim than he had told the customer to expect, Brian will make up the difference from his own pocket.

> Brian: *"Well it is like this, I am a businessman and when I make a statement I stand by it. Now it can happen, and has happened several times, that you may (...) have a liability case and I give the customer my assurance that one way or another we will take care of it and then suddenly the company cuts payment by 100, 200 Euro. Then I'll pay the resulting loss to the customer out of my own pocket because I said I gave my word to the customer. (...) There I feel more responsible to the customer than the company, so that I have to pay that out of my own pocket."*[101]

Brian here assumes responsibility for his commitment towards the customer. The customer expects the insurance company to pay for the full sum of the claim and directs this expectation also to the frontline employee. This expectation is strengthened when the employee ensures the customer that the claim is covered and will be paid. The company here does not pay the full claim. Brian finds himself between the customer's expectation and the company's offer. He makes up for the difference out of his own pocket, allowing him to resolve the conflict situation by satisfying the customer without the company having to pay more.

Both Brian and Rebecca have used their own personal resources, be it time or money, to be able to reconcile different expectations that they could not otherwise do. The two examples discussed in this chapter were the only ones where the interviewed frontline employees reported using private resources to balance conflicting expectations. Other interviewees also reported investing more time or effort in role conflict situations. David goes to his company's headquarters to talk to his superiors about some cases (David 331-334; 362-370), Eric reports that on some cases he spends far more time than usual (Eric 248-260) and Fred and Olivia spend time double-checking information or working their way through calculations and information given by the company to ensure that it is correct (Fred 315-330, 402-420; Oliv-

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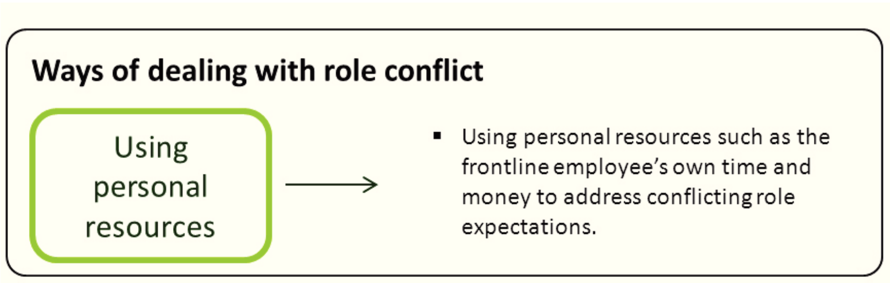
stunden macht oder was für die Leute macht, das man eigentlich nicht machen müsste oder den Antrag am Wochenende schreibt. 397-411

[101] Brian: *Also es ist so, ich bin halt Kaufmann, und wenn ich eine Aussage treffe, dann muss ich dazu stehen. Jetzt kann es passieren, ist auch schon häufiger vorgekommen, dass Sie jetzt, (...) einen Schadensfall haben oder ich mache dem Kunden eine Zusage, so oder so übernehmen wir das, und [das Unternehmen] kürzt auf einmal um 100, 200 Euro. Dann zahle ich aus eigener Tasche diesen entstandenen Schaden den Kunden weiter, weil ich gesagt habe, ich steh dem Kunden gegenüber im Wort. (...) Aber da fühle ich mich dem Kunden mehr verpflichtet als dann der Gesellschaft, so dass ich das dann aus eigener Tasche das zahlen müsste. 172-182*

ia136-162, 197-221). But in these cases the extra time spent either was during work hours (Eric, David and Olivia) or was not used to resolve the role conflict but to reassure the frontline employee of his or her decision (Fred and Olivia). These cases qualify more as siding with the customer and have been discussed in that chapter (see 6.2.2).

In summary, using private resources can be seen as a way of approaching role conflict alongside the other options (see figure 26). It can also be seen as a pro-social or citizenship behavior directed at the customer or both the company and the customer. Citizenship behaviors (Moorman, Niehof, and Organ 1993; Organ 1988), pro-social organizational behaviors (Brief and Motowidlo 1986) or extra-role behaviors (Van Dyne, Cummings and Parks 1995) are related concepts usually defined as voluntary behaviors that promote organizational wellbeing and success (Podsakoff et al. 2009). These behaviors are voluntary, or discretionary, in that these behaviors are not mandated by the employee's job description. Not carrying out these behaviors is generally not seen as punishable (Podsakoff et al. 2000). Citizenship behaviors have also been linked to customer satisfaction (Podsakoff et al. 2009; Yen and Niehoff 2004).

Figure 26: Dealing with Role Conflict: Using personal resources



This has mostly been explained by citizenship behaviors improving organizational effectiveness in providing goods and services. Using personal resources is far more directly aimed at the customer. In promoting customer satisfaction it can however be also seen as promoting organizational wellbeing.

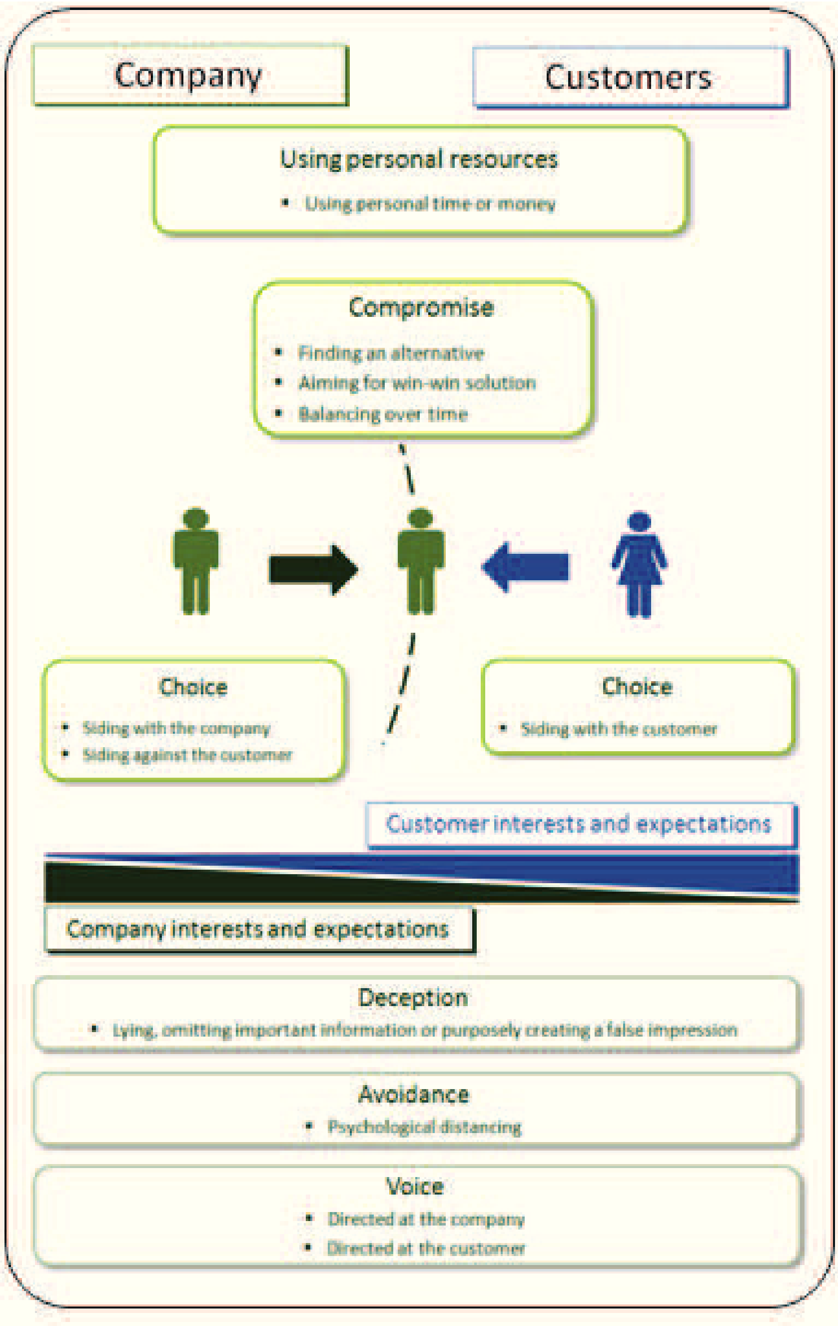
6.2.8. Summary

Chapter 6.2 looked at how frontline employees deal with situations of role conflict created by differing expectations and interests of their company and their customers. The different approaches reported by the interview partners mirrored the strategies described in the literature: choice, compromise, avoidance, voice and deceit. The use of personal resources was a sixth approach to role conflict found in the interviews.

These ways of dealing with role conflict situations can be differentiated into stand-alone and supplementary or supportive approaches. Stand-alone methods address the conflict situations by themselves. Choosing to side with either customer or company, compromising, avoiding the role conflict by physically withdrawing from the situation or passing it to someone else, or using personal resources all can resolve role conflict situation. .

Psychological withdrawal as a form of avoidance (Goolsby 1992; Varca 2009; Cheng and McCarthy 2010) involves the frontline employee emotionally and cognitively distancing him- or herself from the situation. This can mean distancing from the customer or from the company, reducing the importance of fulfilling all expectations or looking after the interests of either role partner. This by itself does not resolve the situation, but can make it easier for the employee to choose one of the other paths. For example, distancing oneself from the customer may make choosing to side with the company easier and vice versa. This fits with research showing that reduced empathy with customers also leads to lower perceived role conflict (Varca 2009).

Figure 27: Dealing with Role Conflict: Summary



Voice may be enough to address a situation, if it successfully resolves the conflict. If voicing the problems and conflicting expectations leading to role conflict leads to these being changed, no further decision may be necessary. However, in most cases described by the frontline employees of either themselves or others using voice these attempts were unsuccessful; employees had to also use another way of dealing with the role conflict situation.

Deceit is a further strategy that is more supplementary than stand-alone. It is usually used to cover up having used another approach. For example, a frontline employee uses deceit to keep having chosen the side of the customer from his company. The reverse may of course also apply.

Deceit can make it easier to choose one of the other approaches, for example by increasing the likelihood that the customer will go along with what the company expects of the frontline employee. These different approaches are shown in figure 27. The supplementary strategies are depicted at the bottom of the figure.

Not all strategies were used by every interview partner. The exception was siding with the company. Everyone interviewed described that in role conflict situations they have fulfilled their company's expectation at least some of the time. Siding with the company also usually involved in-role behavior - offering the products the company wants to be promoted, obeying company rules and guidelines or following instructions from management. As these are in-role behaviors, they will influence employee evaluation and career chances. Also, non-adherence can be sanctioned. Other than that, there were differences in the way employees looked to which options to take to resolve role conflict. An overview is given in table 20.

Table 20: Overview of Sample - Dealing with Role Conflict

Interview partner	Choice - siding with company	Choice- siding with customer	Compromise	Avoidance	Voice	Deceit	Using personal Resources
Andrew	●	●	●	●			
Brian	●				●		●
Charles	●	●	●	●	●	●	
David	●	●		●	●		
Eric	●			●			
Fred	●	●					
George	●	●				●	
Harry	●			●			
Ian	●						
John	●			●	●		
Lewis	●	●	●	●		●	
Matthew	●						
Nicolas	●		●				
Olivia	●	●		●	●		

Phoebe	●	●	●			●	
Quinn	●	●		●			
Rebecca	●	●		●	●	●	●
Sarah	●	●	●	●	●		
Thomas	●						

The next chapters will look at the reasons given by frontline employees for their behavior. Chapter 6.3 will look at factors related to the frontline employee him- or herself, chapter 6.4 will look at those related to the company, chapter 6.5 at factors related to the customer , and chapter 6.6 at contextual factors.

6.3. Influencing Factors Related to the Frontline Employees

This chapter will address the reasons given for choosing a particular way of dealing with role conflict situations, specifically those reasons pertaining to the frontline employee him- or herself. Reasons relating to the relationship with the customer and the company as well as situational factors will be discussed in the next chapters.

Three aspects were particularly salient in this respect. The first refers to the concept or understanding the frontline employees have of what their roles consist of and of what qualifies them as doing their job well. The second has to do with their moral and ethical values and whether these are being challenged by a role conflict situation. The third relates to instrumental and self-oriented motives. These points will be outlined in the following sections.

6.3.1. Different Perceptions of Roles - What Makes a Good Frontline Employee?

During the interviews the employees were asked what they believe makes a good frontline employee. This question was adapted to the particular situation of the interview partner - so a customer service representative was asked what he or she believes constitutes being a good service representative (see also the interview guide, appendix A). The interview partners then were asked what they believe their company or their customers' value in a good frontline employee. For some, there was very little difference in these expectations, for others the difference was vast and included irreconcilable expectations. Those with considerable differences between their own view of their job roles and those of their employers generally reported more difficulty with role conflict situations, spoke less well of their company, and were more likely to aim for compromises or side with the customer.

Charles is particularly vocal about this and so will serve here as an example for how these different ideas of what a frontline employee should be and do can impact behavior in role conflict situations. He sees himself as representing both the interests of his company and customers, and that a good frontline employee should endeavor to balance these.

> Charles: *"Someone once wrote something in my evaluation that I found extremely good and that was that Mr. [Charles] understands it exceptionally well to give equal importance to the interests of the customers and the company. And that is essentially my guiding ... - my motto and my guiding principle. That is what I always try to act by. And 'try' documents that in the end I only tried, in the end I could not do it anymore."*[102]

The idea of balancing the interests of customers and company is a central theme for Charles, again brought up in later as a defining characteristic of a good customer consultant.

> Interviewer: *"What makes a good customer consultant for you personally?*
>
> Charles: *"That he defines the customer as equal to the company. The interests of the customers must be balanced and the reason I have for that is that if the customer is satisfied with you (...) then it is fine that a commission has gone to the company but he must also have profited, not that the company profits and he does not."*[103]

Looking out for the customer is picked up by other requirements Charles has for being a good frontline employee: being honest to customers[104], only selling products that the frontline employee can stand behind, that he or she would buy herself[105], and ensuring that the customer is not cheated[106]. He or she should also not sell products for the commission only (*'that you are selling products where you get a compensation, and sell it only because of the compensation*

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[102] Charles: *In der ganzen Zeit hat mir irgendeiner eine Beurteilung geschrieben und die fand ich extrem gut, und das war, dass Herr [Charles] in außerordentlicher Art und Weise es versteht, die Interessen der Kunden und [des Unternehmens] gleich zu gewichten. So, und das ist im Grunde genommen, das ist mein Leit-..., mein Motto und mein Leitbild. und danach habe ich eigentlich versucht, immer zu handeln. Und 'versucht' dokumentiert ja schon, dass ich also nur zum Schluss es versucht habe, das geht dann jetzt am Schluss jetzt nicht mehr. 110-115*

[103] Interviewerin*: Was macht denn für Sie einen guten Berater aus, für Sie jetzt persönlich?*

Charles: *Dass er den Kunden mindestens gleichbedeutend definiert wie [das Unternehmen]. Also die Interessen der Kunden müssen im Gleichklang sein und das begründe ich auch dadurch, weil, wenn der Kunde zufrieden ist mit Ihnen (...), und dann kann ruhig Provision geflossen sein, [dem Unternehmen] gegenüber, aber er muss selbst auch noch verdient haben, nicht [das Unternehmen] verdient und er gar nichts mehr. 362-368*

[104] Charles: „*That one is fair to the customer, honest to the customer" Das man fair dem Kunden ist, ehrlich gegenüber dem Kunden ist 387*

[105]Charles: *„The recommendation would of course be to always be honest and be oneself, and to only do what one would buy oneself." …die Empfehlung wäre natürlich immer ehrlich bleiben und immer man selber sein, und nur das machen, was man selber kaufen würde*. 735-736

[106] Charles: *"yes, and definitely ensuring that the customer is not cheated in the end". Ja, und das da auf jeden Fall zugesehen wird, dass der Kunde letztendlich nicht übers Ohr gehauen wird. 385-386*

and not out of conviction, then it gets problematic'[107]) or promote products just because the company says they are good ('*he must have an opinion of his own, not just parrot what the company tells him'*[108]). A good frontline employee should be well informed and give the best advice he can. The way Charles phrases his expectations and requirements for a good front-line employee often positions him in opposition of his company: "not just parrot what the company tells him", "not sell just for compensation", "have an opinion of his own" and ensuring the customer is not cheated. He also points out that he finds it increasingly difficult to abide by his own standards, as illustrated at the end of the quote above:

> Charles: *"And 'try' documents that in the end I only tried, in the end I could not do it anymore."*[109]

He also sees advice on staying honest and selling only products one would buy oneself for younger employees as unrealistic.

> Interviewer: *"Would you have a recommendation for a younger colleague, say for someone in their thirties working for the company, who asks how to deal with such situations?"*
>
> Charles: *"Well, I wouldn't have any recommendations, simply because from the current point of view, I see what is being done with them. And the recommendation would of course be always be honest and be yourself, and only do what you yourself would buy, but a general recommendation that would simply be far removed from reality."*[110]

This quote from Charles not only points again to the value he puts on the fair and honest treatment of customers, but also shows his belief that acting that way towards customers is made difficult, and even unrealistic, by the company. During the interview Charles gives several examples of situations in which he felt his company was expecting him to act against what he feels to be part of his role as a customer consultant. Many of these have been cited in the chapters above (6.1 and 6.2). Therefore I will give only a short summary of some of these

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[107] *Charles: ‚Wenn sie Produkte verkaufen, wo eine gewisse Bonifikation drin sind, und die nur verkaufen, weil die Bonifikation da drin ist, und nicht aus Überzeugung, dann wird's problematisch. 369-372*

[108] Charles: *der muss auch eine eigene Meinung haben, darf halt nicht nur das und das nachquatschen, was ihm die Bank vorgibt.* 374-375

[109] Charles: *Und 'versucht' dokumentiert ja schon, dass ich also nur zum Schluss es versucht habe, das geht dann jetzt am Schluss jetzt nicht mehr. 110-115*

[110] *Interviewerin: Hätten Sie denn Empfehlungen für einen jüngeren Kollegen, sagen wir jemand, der 30 ist und für das Unternehmen arbeitet, der mit Ihnen spricht und sagt, Mensch wie gehe ich mit solchen Situationen um?*

Charles: Also ich hätte keine Empfehlungen, weil es einfach aus der jetzigen Sicht - ich seh' ja, was mit denen gemacht wird, und die Empfehlung wäre natürlich immer ehrlich bleiben und immer man selber sein, und nur das machen, was man selber kaufen würde, aber eine generelle Empfehlung, die einfach von der Realität weit entfernt wäre. 732-737 situations as an illustration. In one case Charles was asked to sell real estate products that were seen to be highly profitable to the company. Charles did not want to sell these, he believed the offer to be wrong for customers, but still felt that the customer expected him to sell these products.

> Charles: *"And I said to myself, you can't do that with your customers, it stinks to high heaven, they just want to get rid of it. So I didn't even tell my customers about it. But that product had to be placed, it was in a letter from the boss, we have to place so and so many millions of this. (...) And so and so many have to be sold by us and you're stuck with them.*[111]

In a similar situation the company expected him to sell gold, which Charles believed would not be profitable for the customer at that point. Again, he reported feeling under a lot of pressure from his superiors to sell gold to the customer despite his misgivings (Interview Charles 738-750, see also chapter 6.2.5). In the interview, Charles talked of fundamental differences in what his company and his superiors expected of him and what he believes a customer consultant should be. When asked whether there were differences in the company's expectations and his own, his response is:

> Charles: *"Unfortunately there are.*
>
> Interviewer: *"What kind of differences?"*
>
> Charles: "(...) *There are ranking lists and my boss, whom I hate, the new one, that came from [other financial institute], he stands for the exact opposite of what I believe. He doesn't care, whatever, just out with the products. (...) He really wouldn't understand my qualms at all, he really wouldn't understand. 'Why? Don't you want money at the end of the year?' he would ask. 'Others do it, so why don't you?' And if I put something in a customer's investment account that runs ten years and the customer is 80 years old, than in my eyes that is a crime."*[112]

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[111] Charles: ... *und da habe ich schon gesagt, das kannst du mit deinen Kunden nicht machen, weil das stinkt schon zum Himmel, die wollen das nur los werden, und da habe ich den Kunden erst mal gar nicht drauf angesprochen. Nur das muss platziert werden, da stand dann drin, in einem Schreiben vom Chef, wir müssen noch so uns so viele Millionen davon platzieren. (...) Ja dann kommen da in unsere Stadt so und so viele Millionen an und die haben Sie dann an der Backe.* (632-647)

[112] Charles: *Gibt es leider.*

Interviewerin: *Was für Unterschiede?*

Charles: *(...)Es gibt Ranglisten und unser Chef, den ich hasse, der neue, der ist von [anderes Finanzinstitut] gekommen, und der verbrieft genau das Gegenteil von mir. Dem ist alles völlig wurscht, egal, einfach rein damit, ne. (...) Also der würde überhaupt nicht verstehen, was ich für Bedenken habe, das würd der überhaupt nicht verstehen, der würde überhaupt nicht verstehen. ‚Wieso, wollen Sie jetzt kein Geld am Jahresende haben?', würde der fragen. Und ähm ja: ‚Andere machen das doch, warum Sie nicht? Das passt doch in das Kundendepot rein', und wenn ich was in ein Kundendepot rein pack, was zehn Jahre läuft und der Kunde 80 Jahre alt ist, dann ist das für mich schon ein Verbrechen. 402-415*

In this quote, Charles describes his superior's expectation as being strongly outcome-oriented, looking for sales over customer orientation. The ranking lists also imply that employees are very much judged according to their sales success. Contrasting this with Charles' own opinion of what a good customer consultant should be, it becomes evident that, from his point of view, the company and he hold very different ideas of what constitutes job-role behaviors. Charles makes one other important point in the quote above - some of the things his superiors ask him to do go not only against what he believes his job to be, but also against his moral beliefs. He describes some of the things he is asked to do as a crime. This issue of job expectations by the company clashing with personal moral beliefs will be explored in the next chapter (6.3.2).

Charles is a very good example of a frontline employee whose own role expectations and job definition differ from that which he or she perceives his or her company and superiors have. Several other interview partners also reported similar experiences and views - that their role concepts differed substantially from those they believed their company and superiors to have. These frontline employees were Andrew David, Phoebe, Quinn and Rebecca. The following table (see table 21) gives examples of how these perspectives differ.

Table 21 : Frontline Employees with Role Expectations Differing from Those They Believe Their Employers to Have.

Frontline Employee	**Own description of role expectations and tasks**	**Role expectations of the company as perceived by frontline employee**
Andrew	Should be honest, act in customer's interests, not one's own. Not be overbearing or pushy. Interviewer: *"What makes a good consultant in your eyes?* Andrew: "*A good consultant should be honest, should show the customer things that suit him and not something that happens to suit the consultant."*[113] Customers should be able to trust the consultant and feel comfortable (58-60). The concepts of honesty and trustworthiness are repeated several times. Andrew: *"Then, on the one side it*	Andrew believes that the company measures performance according to sales success. Customer service and consulting are important and training courses and seminars are offered, but short-term sales success is central for measuring the success of an employee. Andrew: *"Well, I think that the higher up one's position, the more you concentrate on the sales success of your own company. Then it is more about the right revenue. But I think it is more that while a lot of importance is placed on customer service and consulting, as can be seen by sales qualifications, semi-*

[113] Interviewerin: *Was ist ein guter Berater für dich?*

Andrew: *Ein guter Berater sollte ehrlich sein, sollte dem Kunden das auch vorstellen, was zu ihm passt und nicht das vorstellen, was jetzt vielleicht gerade irgendwo dem Berater nützt.* 50-52

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<td>would have been great for the company if I had closed that contract. On the other hand it was also somehow my, my job as, as consultant to not abuse the trust."[114]

Successful consultants should make sales, have a lot of appointments and be competent. They should be able to quickly recognize the economic context and find the right product.

Andrew: "… on the other side be successful, in closing contracts, having lots of appointments, when he is honest, when he is competent, can essentially assess the situation, the economic contest and filter out the right product."[115]

Andrew sees a good consultant as a balance between a good salesman who makes profit and at the same time is worthy of the trust that his (or her) customers place in him (or her). Customer orientation and honesty are very important.</td>
<td>nars and so on, on the other hand it is always the short term success that you are mostly judged by."[116]

Andrew talks of sometimes feeling pressure to sell products even if they do not entirely fit a customer's needs. (81-88;118-122). He also reports that he feels the pressure to sell to be increasing.

Andrew: "And I do sort of have the feeling that it is starting to go in that direction, that it's going more in the direction of sales, revenue and so on, that one has no chance any more to build a customer relationship as otherwise the pressure on you personally gets too much."[117]</td>
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<td></td>
<td colspan="2">While Andrew sees similar values as being important to himself and his company, the importance placed on each differs. In both cases Andrew sees customer orientation and customer service as central points, as well as profit- and sales orientation and financial success. But when describing his own view of what his job is and what makes a good consultant, these aspects are balanced. When describing his view of what his company expects, the greater importance is attributed to generating sales and revenues. While customer service is important, it takes second place to sales success.

He also sees his role as a good consultant to involve honesty and trustworthiness. At the same time, he describes growing pressure to sell products at the cost of building a good customer relationship.</td>
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[114] Andrew: *Dann, eh, auf der einen Seite eben das Unternehmen, wär toll gewesen, wenn ich den Abschluss gemacht hätte. Auf der anderen Seite dann aber auch irgendwo meine, meine Aufgabe als, als Berater irgendwo das Vertrauen nicht zu missbrauchen. 128-130*

[115] Andrew: *…auf der anderen Seite auch erfolgreich ist, indem er Abschlüsse tätigt, wenn er viele Termine hat, wenn er ehrlich ist, wenn er kompetent ist, im Grunde genommen die Situation erkennen kann, die wirtschaftlichen Zusammenhänge erkennen kann, das passende Produkt herausfiltern kann. 60-63*

[116] Andrew: J*a, ich glaube schon, dass je höher man in der Position ist, desto eher schaut man auf den Vertriebserfolg, des eigenen, eh, eigenen Unternehmens. Da geht's dann eher in die Richtung, dass die Erträge stimmen. Aber da glaube ich eher, dass es so ist, dass zwar großen Wert auf gute Beratung gelegt wird, das sieht man an Vertriebsqualifikationen, Seminaren, etc. , aber auf der anderen Seite ist immer der kurzfristige Erfolg das maßgebliche, woran Sie gemessen werden.68-72*

[117] Andrew*: … und ich habe so ein bisschen das Gefühl es geht so langsam in diese Richtung, dass es immer mehr Richtung, Richtung Verkaufen, Ertrag und so weiter, dass man keine Chance mehr hat Kundenbeziehungen aufzubauen, weil sonst der, der Druck auf einem persönlich auch zu hoch wird. 277-280*

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<td>David</td>
<td>Honesty is central for a good costumer consultant – towards the company but especially towards the customer.

Interviewer: “What constitutes a good customer consultant? For you personally?”

David: “Well, honesty. (…)”

Interviewer: “Honesty towards the company or …?”

David: “Both. The company but primarily the customer. I have to tell the customer what he has, but also what he has not. And I must be prepared to say that it costs so and so much.”[118]

The concept of honesty and openness is repeated often. The consultant should ensure that the customer understands the contract, as well as the drawbacks of particular contracts (136-140; 191-195; 215-220).

The consultant should consider the situation of customers and help them find the right products (166-170).

He sees himself as intermediary or agent for both customer and company. He does not want customers to take advantage of the company, but also wants to ensure that the company does not take advantage of customers.

David: “And I don’t want that someone uses me to cheat the company. I also don’t want the company to deprive a customer of claims they are legitimately entitled to. And so, for both sides I’m an intermediary.”[119]</td>
<td>David believes that his company expects him to keep existing customers and win new ones. He believes that numbers and statistics reflecting financial aspects are central to company, and that individual or human aspects have become unimportant (see also 418-423).

Interviewer: “What do you think the company expects from you in meetings with customers?

David: “Well, I’d say the company … the company expects erm…, that you keep your customer base and expand it. That is it really. The, erm … the human elements, often don’t count any more today. (...) Every month statistics are generated. So they are always, the company management, informed about things concerning the individual employees. So I think they don’t think about the individual person, but it is all about numbers and only about numbers”[120]</td>
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[118] Interviewerin*: Was macht denn für Sie einen guten Versicherungsberater aus? Für Sie persönlich?*

David*: Tja. Ehrlichkeit. (...)*

Interviewerin*: Ehrlichkeit dem Unternehmen gegenüber oder … ?*

David*: Beiden. Dem Unternehmen, aber in erster Linie dem Kunden gegenüber. Ich muss dem Kunden sagen, was er hat, ich muss ihm aber auch sagen, was er nicht hat. Ich muss auch bereit sein zu sagen, das kostet den und den Betrag. 138-148*

[119] David*: Und ich möchte nicht, dass jemand mit mir das Unternehmen betrügt. Ich möchte auch nicht, dass das Unternehmen einem Kunden berechtigte Ansprüche vorenthält. Und deswegen, ich bin ja in beiden Seiten immer Vermittler. 362-364*

[120] Interviewerin: *Was glauben Sie erwartet das Unternehmen von Ihnen in Kundengesprächen?*

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<tr><td></td><td colspan="2">David sees himself as being both an advocate for both the customer and the company. He

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David sees himself as being an advocate for both the customer and the company. He wants to achieve a situation in which both parties’ interests are protected. Honesty plays an important role. It is the first characteristic David mentions when asked what makes a good consultant. He also underlines the importance of transparence and openness.

He sees the company’s goals as being more financially motivated, and believes that his company expects him to build upon his customer base.

While he doesn’t directly discuss a conflict of his own expectations and those of his company, he does point out that the human side of the customer relationship has become irrelevant to. the company</td></tr>
<tr><td>Phoebe</td><td>For Phoebe, a good consultant finds a balance between doing what is necessary in her job – fulfilling regulations and rules of her company and still being considerate and empathic.

Interviewer: “What is a good customer consultant for you? In your personal view?”

Phoebe: “Hmm… let me think where I should start. On the one hand a good consultant to me ... to manage to find a balance between ... the attempt to objectively ... with all possible means find the right offer for a customer ... and facilitate and support him, but also, despite all the rules and regulations to not forget the human aspects.”[121]

The central aim is to help customers find employment. Achieving this aim is governed by the company’s rules and regulations.

Her ideal of what a consultant should be includes sometimes going against the strict rules. She portrays someone who always ad-</td><td>Phoebe believes her company expects her to help reach the organization’s aims - to help as many customers as possible to find work. She shares this part of the job aims (74-75; 180).

However, she also thinks that her company expects her to adhere to all rules, regulations and guidelines. These include sanctioning customers and the offers she can and has to make to customers. She is generally not allowed to make exceptions based on customer’s individual circumstances (76-85; 220-232; 125-132).

Phoebe: “And such directions exist for a lot of things. And then of course you have ... if you act according to regulations, no room for discretion. Of course the case is ... that ... sometimes you do ... well, let’s say, the human aspect, let’s call it sympathy, or ... well, whatever, for the customer, that you might turn a blind eye, even though you are not allowed, that you say: ‚Yes, I understand your situation’.”[123]</td></tr>
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David: *Tja, ich sag mal das Unternehmen, das Unternehmen erwartet ... äh ... von allen Mitarbeitern, dass sie ihre Bestände halten und ausbauen. Das ist im Prinzip alles. Da, ähm... das Menschliche, das zählt heute häufig nicht mehr. (…) Da werden jeden Monat Statistiken erstellt. Die sind also jederzeit, die Unternehmensleitung, informiert über das, was die einzelnen Mitarbeiter des Unternehmens anbetrifft. Also, ich glaube, die machen sich heute über die Personen keine Gedanken, sondern da geht es um Zahlen und nur noch um Zahlen. 373 -385*

[121] Interviewerin: *Was macht denn für dich eine gute Vermittlerin aus? Was macht die aus, jetzt aus deiner persönlichen Sicht?*

Phoebe: *Also, lass mich mal überlegen, wo ich anfange. Also zum einen macht für mich einen guten Vermittler aus, …. ja es zu schaffen, Balance hinzukriegen zwischen ... ja, dem Versuch objektiv … mit allen erdenklichen Mitteln, das für den jeweiligen Kunden beste Angebot herauszusuchen … und ihn entsprechend zu fördern und zu unterstützen, aber dabei, bei all diesen Vorlagen und Vorgaben, die menschliche Seite, ja, nicht außer Acht zu lassen. 154-160*

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<td>heres to the regulations as heartless:

Phoebe: “If a consultant always obeys the regulations to the letter, then it can quickly happen that he … I’m lacking the right word, but yeah harsh and relentless.”[122]

A good consultant listens to his or her instincts when evaluating customers and does not use one-size-fits-all approaches (163-169). He or she should also not have preconceived ideas about customers, but be open towards the individual situation of every customer (170-179).

Phoebe repeats the point on being empathic, friendly and interested in the customer’s well-being. She often uses “being human” or the “human side” (105-109, 156-160, 170-171, 186-188, and 300-302).</td>
<td>Phoebe: “This is trained using role playing. (…) We have to act according to these rules and can make no exception.”[124]</td>
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<td colspan="2">To Phoebe, being a good consultant involves helping customers find work and she sees this as the main expectation of her company of her. The disagreement between her own expectations and those she perceives her company to have is how to achieve this aim. She believes that if she always did everything the way her company wants her to, adhered to all rules and regulations, she would not be fulfilling another part of what being a good consultant is about - being compassionate and understanding and taking individual situations into considerations.</td>
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<td>Quinn</td>
<td>When asked about what makes a good call center agent, Quinn focused very much on friendliness to customers. The frontline employees should remain friendly, even though their working conditions are often stressful.

Interviewer: “What is a good employee in the order entry? What is important for you?“

Quinn: „Well, definitely friendliness. Many are just irritated and you can hear that, so I think …”

Interviewer: “The customers?”</td>
<td>Quinn describes that employees are expected to follow a script for conversations with customers. This script details what is to be said when, but also points out that employees should be responsive to customers.

Quinn: „Well, there is a script that everybody learns and you’re really expected to stick to that script. This means that it specifies which question, first the greeting and then you ask for the order number, how many, it really is quite rigid, I’d say. But of course every conversation is differ-</td>
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[123] Phoebe*: Und diese Weisungen gibt es zu sehr vielen Bereichen. Und da hat man natürlich, … wenn man vorschriftsmäßig handelt, gar keinen Handlungsspielraum. Natürlich ist es so, … dass … man an der einen oder anderen Stelle dann doch … ja, sagen wir mal, wo dann vielleicht die menschliche Seite, nennen wir es Mitleid, oder… ja, wie auch immer, hat man dann mit dem Kunden, dass man dann vielleicht ein Auge zudrückt, obwohl man es nicht dürfte, dass man sagt: ‚Ja ich verstehe jetzt Ihre Situation‘. 105-109*

[122] Phoebe: *Also so, … wenn sich jemand so ganz, ein Arbeitsvermittler sich so ganz gerade an die Vorgaben hält, dann kann es schnell passieren, dass er so … mir fehlen die richtigen Worte, ja so hart und unerbittlich, also in diese Schublade gehört. 154-162*

[124] *Phoebe: Unter anderem wird das auch in Rollenspielen trainiert. Wir haben nach diesen Vorgaben zu handeln und wir dürfen da auch keine Ausnahme machen. 127-130*

	Quinn: *"No, many employees, us as well, because unfortunately there are less and less employees during the course of the last years. This means you always have these waiting loops, so that you get one caller after the next on the phone. (...) I think it is really important to always be friendly. Sure, you're stressed, but one should really be friendly and be responsive and answer questions as much as possible."*[125] Being responsive to customers includes looking for alternatives if an item the customer wants to order is not available; helping customers understand product information, and to generally make an effort to ensure that the customer is satisfied and happy (60-67; 68-78; 149-153).	*ent, you have to respond to customers, react if they have a question, or you know, sometimes people pour their heart out on the phone, then you should say something nice. That you're not just like an answering machine but really be responsive to the customer."* [126] Calls are to be handled quickly and efficiently. There is a call time, the average duration of a call, and employees are expected to stay within this time. So, while responsiveness to customers and service are important, efficiency is more strongly emphasized. Quinn: *"Well, of course they expect us to stick to our talk time and deal with calls quickly, but also that we are customer friendly, that we stick to the script, which has been made a little more flexible. There is now a point on being very empathic (...). Primarily they do want that you get through your calls quickly, take on the order and then take the next call as quickly as possible."*[127]

[125] Interviewerin: *Was macht für dich einen guten Mitarbeiter in der Bestellannahme aus? Was ist da für dich wichtig?*

Quinn: *Also auf jeden Fall erst mal Freundlichkeit, viele sind halt wirklich erst mal genervt und das hört man denen auch an, also ich denke schon ...*

Interviewerin: *Den Kunden?*

Quinn: *Ne, viele Mitarbeiter, auch von uns, ist halt leider auch so, dass es immer weniger Mitarbeiter geworden sind jetzt im Laufe der Jahre. Das heißt, man hat immer diese Warteschleifen, wo wirklich einer nach dem anderen am Telefon ist. (...) Und dann merkt man halt schon, ich finde es ist immer wichtig, immer freundlich zu sein, klar ist man mal genervt, aber man sollte schon freundlich sein, auch auf den Kunden eingehen, soweit es geht Fragen beantworten. 47-55*

[126] Quinn: *Also es gibt halt so ein Skript, das kriegt auch quasi jeder gelernt und das ist eigentlich auch so, dass man sich strikt an dieses Skript halten soll. Das heißt es ist wirklich vorgegeben, welche Frage, also erst die Begrüßung und dann die Frage nach der Bestellnummer, wie oft, das ist eigentlich sehr starr gehalten, würde ich eher sagen. Aber man hat natürlich in jedem Gespräch immer wieder ein bisschen was anderes, weil man muss ja auch auf die Kunden eingehen, bisschen mehr drauf reagieren, wenn sie jetzt doch noch eine Frage haben irgendwie, oder ja sonst irgendwie, manche schütten einem ja dann quasi das Herz aus am Telefon, dann soll man auch etwas Nettes noch irgendwie sagen. Dass man jetzt nicht nur so wie ein Anrufbeantworter am Telefon sitzt, sondern soll wirklich auch auf den Kunden eingehen. 15-25*

[127] Quinn: *Also klar die erwarten das natürlich, dass wir uns während unserer Talk Time Zeit halten, und auch relativ zügig telefonieren, dass wir aber auch kundenfreundlich auf jeden Fall sind, dass wir uns eigentlich auch an das Skript halten, was jetzt auch ein bisschen aufgelockert wurde. Da war jetzt der Punkt, dass man sehr empathisch werden soll. (...) In erster Linie sind die schon darauf aus, dass man wirklich zügig da durch telefoniert und die Bestellungen aufnimmt und dann schnellstmöglich dann erst mal den nächsten Anrufer entgegen nimmt. 105-115*

		Employees who repeatedly take longer are sanctioned (see also 129-132; 142-146). Interviewer: *“How long is the talk time?”* Quinn: *“Well, 90 seconds on average. Lately there was someone with a talk time of two minutes and he was asked to see the manager straight away, along the lines of what is taking you so long when all others need less time. So I do think that it really is important to them, the faster, the higher the sales, the better.”*[128]
	Quinn places a strong emphasis on being customer-oriented: friendly, empathic and putting effort into ensuring the customer is satisfied. She believes that these values are important to the company too: they want employees to be friendly, responsive and empathic. But she feels greater importance is placed on efficiency: keeping the average duration of a call down and getting through calls quickly. This leaves less room for engaging with customers.	
Rebecca	Rebecca describes a good psychologist, a frontline employee of a health center, as empathic, open, tolerant, and non-judgmental (146-159; 177-182). They should also be creative and spontaneous to be able to deal with unexpected developments in conversation with clients. They should also be optimistic, sanguine, and able to distance themselves from the negative emotions that can arise during customer contact (160-176). She also feels a strong responsibility towards her customers. She points out that her customers are people in need and that she feels under an obligation to help. This is particularly apparent when she talks about a case where a mistake made by her and the company lead to a disadvantage for a customer and	Rebecca believes that her company expects her to stick to the rules and regulations surrounding providing psychotherapy to customers. This particularly applies to those regulations relating to payment for services, use of resources and legal issues (116-128; 208-229). Rebecca: *“The health insurance covers five sessions initially and then you have to apply for more. When the five initial sessions are over, the patients here for example have to sign that they will cover the costs if the application is denied. And that is one of the rules, we never received that in writing but he [her superior] hammered it into us right at the start.”*[132]

[128] Interviewerin: *Wie lange ist denn die Talk Time?*

Quinn: *Also im Schnitt darf, also sprich 90 Sekunden. Da war aber zum Beispiel letztens einer, der hatte irgendwie eine Talk Time von 2 Minuten und der wurde dann auch direkt zum Gespräch gebeten, zum Manager, nach dem Motto: ‚Wie kann es nur sein, dass du so lange brauchst und alle andere brauchen weniger‘. Also das ist dann wirklich schon so, dass ich denke, dass es denen wirklich wichtig ist, je schneller, je mehr Umsatz, desto besser dann irgendwie. 123-128*

[132] Rebecca: *Man kriegt ja bei der Krankenkasse erst mal nur fünf Sitzungen und dann muss man es beantragen (…). Wenn dann die fünf Sitzungen Probatorik um sind, dann müssen die Patienten hier zum Beispiel unterschreiben, dass sie die Kosten tragen, wenn's nicht durchgeht. Und das ist zum Beispiel so eine Regel, das haben wir nie schriftlich gekriegt, aber das hat er uns am Anfang so total eingebläut. 122-126*

	her company offers no help in remedying the situation. Rebecca: *"I do think that you can get into a dilemma. On the one hand it is work and you earn money with it and I find it okay that you have a business interest. But they are people, people in difficult circumstances. And I think if you then do something wrong, then you have to sometimes put the business interest aside. And that is something that you have to carry on your own shoulders here."* [129] Rebecca: *"I do have the feeling that it is my role to be caring and to somehow look after them." (Note: talking about customers).* [130] Rebecca: *"I do believe that I have a greater obligation of care towards them." (Note: towards the customers rather than the company.)* [131]	She also believes that her superiors care less about the quality of the service she offers than about financial and legal aspects. Rebecca: *"Whether I offer good therapy or not is not of that much interest to the company I think. That is more something for the supervisors [note: supervisors here refers to experienced and certified therapists looking over the work of therapists-in-training]. Of course they would not say ‚go and do bad therapy' but I do think it is a little unimportant to them. I think one important aspect is the image to the outside world. (...)* *But I think otherwise it is more the financial side of things, that I generate payments according to my contract, that I adhere to the formal requirements. And patients have to fill in questionnaires for research here and that is one of my tasks and those are things the company looks out for mostly.* *(...) then the costs are not covered and then he (her superior) acts but if I did something rubbish in my job, he'd not necessarily spring into action."* [133]

[129] Rebecca: *Das finde ich schon, dass man manchmal so irgendwie in einen Zwiespalt kommt. Auf der einen Seite ist es die Arbeit und man verdient auch Geld damit und das finde ich auch ok, dass man wirtschaftliches Interesse hat, aber es sind halt schon Menschen, auch schon Menschen in einer Notsituation. Und ich finde, wenn man dann noch selber was falsch macht, dann finde ich, muss man halt auch mal irgendwie ein wirtschaftliches Interesse aufgeben. So, und das finde ich ist dann schon was, was man hier auf den eigenen Schultern trägt. 304-309*

[130] Rebecca: *Ich hab das Gefühl, dass es so meine Rolle ist, da auch fürsorglich zu sein und mich irgendwie um die zu kümmern. 630-631*

[131] Rebecca: *Weil ich finde schon, dass ich auch eine größere Sorgfaltspflicht denen gegenüber habe. 655-656*

[133] Rebecca: *Ob ich gute Therapie mache oder nicht, ist glaub ich gar nicht so im Interesse des Unternehmens, da gucken fast mehr die Supervisoren. Also die würden jetzt bestimmt nicht sagen, ich soll schlechte Therapie machen, aber das ist denen glaub ich so ein bisschen wurscht. Ich glaub es geht viel so um die Außendarstellung. (….)*

Aber ich glaub sonst ist es mehr so die finanzielle Seite, dass ich was meinem Vertrag entspricht erwirtschafte und das ich halt so dieses Formelle einhalte. Und die Patienten müssen ja auch hier immer so für Forschung Fragebögen ausfüllen, das ist halt auch meine Aufgabe, denen immer hinterher zu laufen und die so zu erinnern und so, und auf sowas achtet das Unternehmen mehr. (….) Dann sind die Kosten nicht gedeckt und dann wird er aktiv, aber ich glaub, wenn ich jetzt inhaltlich Scheiße mache, dann würde nicht unbedingt er aktiv (lacht) ja. 236-248

		These quotes illustrate that Rebecca believes the main focus of her company to be on ensuring that all services are covered, formal requirements are adhered to, and that the research needs of the company are met. The quality of her work she sees as less important to her company. Rebecca's organization also carries out scientific research and she herself is working on her PhD in a research project. Frontline employees are expected to facilitate research by including their patients, or customers, in a project. Rebecca also reports that patients in a research project are treated differently from others. Rebecca: *"And in research projects the contacts are more superficial because so many people come for a research appointment. So I do think that you do things with them that are good for research, not for the patients."*[134] She believes that there is often a conflict of interest in what is needed for research and what would be in the best interests of the customer. Rebecca: *"I feel that there are a lot of situations where there is conflict with research, even though I am working on my doctorate myself and think research is really important, it is taxing for the patients. And some of the time the questions are just intolerable, not just the amount of time required, but it is also the content."*[135] She also states that when she does not want to include her customers in research projects, such of those of colleagues, she has to justify

[134] Rebecca: *Und in dem Forschungsprojekt sind die Kontakte schon ein bisschen oberflächlicher, weil die Leute, viele für diesen Forschungstermin kommen, ich find halt schon, dann macht man auch ein bisschen Sachen mit denen, die für die Forschung gut sind, nicht für die Patienten. 73-76*

[135] Rebecca: *Also ich finde an vielen Stellen gibt es einen Konflikt mit Forschung, obwohl ich hier selbst auch promoviere und eigentlich Forschung sehr wichtig finde, es ist halt 'ne Belastung für die Patienten. Und zum Teil sind auch die Fragebögen unmöglich, also erst mal ist es ein Zeitaufwand, aber es ist auch inhaltlich eine Belastung. 253-256*

<table>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>herself. There is a certain expectation to support research projects and meet the necessary demands.

Rebecca: "I don't give that [a questionnaire] to my patients any more. (...) and you do get asked, 'why don't you do that' and have to defend yourself".[136]</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="2">Rebecca's expectations of a good frontline employee center on characteristics that allow her to offer good service to the customer as well as protecting her personal well-being. She also feels a strong responsibility for her customers and sees her main task as offering help. Her company's expectations she believes to be less focused on the quality of the service she offers as on the financial and administrative aspects as well as on supporting the empirical research of her organization. These different aims can be at odds with another, such as when financial security supersedes a customer's need for help or a customer's wellbeing is compromised by including him or her in a research project.</td></tr>
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The striking similarity between all of these cases is the different levels of customer and profit orientation between their own role expectations and those they believe their companies to have. The frontline employees all place a strong emphasis on customer orientation. For the most part, the employees also believe their companies to be customer oriented and point out that they are expected to act in customers' interests. For example, Quinn states that the company expects employees to be courteous and friendly (105-115) and Andrew points to service trainings by his company (68-72). However, sales and profit and other company interest are often perceived to be of more importance to their companies.

This does not mean that the frontline employees interviewed are not profit- or success-oriented themselves or see such goals as unimportant. Rebecca states "On the one hand it is work and you earn money with it and I find it okay that you have a business interest" (304-305) and Andrew describes a good frontline employee as a successful sales person (60-63). The concept of a balance between interests is often invoked, for example by Phoebe (154-160) and Charles (110-115). But these interviewees do generally place customer interests above sales, profit or other company goals.

The differences the employees see between their own expectations and those of their company generally lie not in the values or goals themselves, but in their relative importance.

There are several empirical studies that support the idea that employees have different role perceptions and expectations than their superiors in an organization. Much of this research

[136] Rebecca: *Und das [einen Fragebogen] habe ich jetzt meinen Patienten nicht mehr gegeben, (…) man wir auch schon gefragt warum man das nicht macht und muss sich dann verteidigen. (249-274)*

focuses on perceptions of what constitutes in-role and extra-role behaviors (see also chapter 3.2) and in particular on what behaviors are considered to be organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs). OCBs (as discussed in chapter 4.1) are generally defined as discretionary behaviors that promote the organization's well-being and functioning, yet are not officially rewarded by the organization. Morrison (1994) and Lam and colleagues (1999) found differences in job (or role) expectations between employees and supervisors. Lam and colleagues (1999) found that supervisors were more likely to see OCBs as part of the job, as in-role behavior, than subordinates did. Such differences in role and job perceptions were also found by Chiaburu and Marinova (2012). While Morrison's (1994) and Chiaburu and Marinova's (2012) studies did not look at frontline employees, the sample used in the study by Lam and colleagues (1999) consisted of over 400 bank tellers in four countries and their respective superiors. This supports the finding of this study that frontline employee's role perceptions can differ from that of their superiors and their organizations.

A study by Hsuing and Tsai (2009) looked at what influences the level of congruence, or agreement, between superiors' and subordinates' role perceptions. They found a positive relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and the congruence of role perceptions. In other words, beneficial and supportive relationships between superiors reduced the differences in role perceptions between the two groups.

Not all frontline employees interviewed for this study reported differences between their own definition of what a good frontline employee should be (their personal role expectations) and those of their company. They saw little or no differences in their aims as a frontline employee and the aims the believed their company set for them. This was particularly the case for Ian, Matthew and Thomas. Brian, Lewis, Olivia, and Sarah also saw a general consensus between their own expectations and those of the company, with a few small points on which differences were perceived. The following table (see table 22) looks at the perspectives of the three interview partners who reported a strong overlap between their own expectations and those of the company.

Table 22 : Frontline Employees with Role Expectations Similar to Those They Believe Their Employers to Have.

Frontline Employee	Own description of role expectations and tasks	Role expectations of the company as perceived by frontline employee
Ian	Sees a good frontline employee as someone who balances objectivity and competence with friendliness and customer orientation. Interviewer: *"What is a good front-*	When asked about what he believes his company expects of a good frontline employee, he names similar points to his own expectations: objectivity, competence and working

	line employee in this company? Ian: *"There are many people in this industry, I think, who are a little too fixated on numbers and then, well, forget the customer relationship. The laws and regulations we have to keep to demand that a little, that you really focus only on whether the numbers are correct or not. But of course you can't forget that it really is a customer who can go to a different provider.* [137] He sees his role as a highly responsible one, and that he owes it to the customer, the customers' stakeholders and his own company to do his job objectify and thoroughly. Ian: *[If he says the numbers are okay] ... "there is a responsibility to shareholders to really ensure that everything is in order. That really is my responsibility towards myself, but also towards others, such as shareholders or stakeholders, that is a responsibility that I bear. And of course also for the name of my company for which I work, there is a responsibility that the job done in the name of my company is done well.* [138]	on the customer relationship. Ian: *"I think there are two particular skills that are important. On the one hand there is professional competence, that you know the laws very well and on the other hand social competences, so that you can walk that fine line in the customer relationship. That you get all the information on the one hand, but also maintain a good relationship to the customer.* [139]
	Responsibility towards his company and to the customer is part of Ian's personal role definition - and both are achieved best by absolute honesty (also 348-354). He also names very similar aspects in both his description of his own role expectations and those he believes his company to have: professional competence, including objectivity and honesty, and working on a	

[137] Interviewerin: *Was macht für dich einen guten Mitarbeiter in dieser Firma aus?*

Ian: *(...)Es gibt viele Leute, denke ich mal, in der Branche, die zu zahlenfixiert sind dann auch, na das Kundenverhältnis ein bisschen vernachlässigen. Ist ja auch teilweise in den Gesetzen, an die wir uns richten müssen dann auch ein bisschen gefordert, dass man dann wirklich äh, nur darauf achtet, ob die Zahlen richtig sind oder nicht, aber man darf natürlich nie vergessen, dass es wirklich ein Kunde ist, der auch zum anderen Anbieter wechseln könnte. 51-59*

[138] Ian: *Jetzt gegenüber den Aktionären, das ist schon die Verantwortung, die man hat, dass man sich also wirklich davon überzeugen muss, dass alles in Ordnung ist. Also das ist schon so meine Verantwortung, die ich mir dann selber und vielleicht gegenüber Dritten, wie Aktionären dann auch zum Beispiel auch noch sehr, dass sie oder den anderen Shareholdern, oder Stakeholdern, da ist schon die Verantwortung, die ich dann da, die ich dann trage. Andererseits natürlich auch im Namen meiner Firma, für die ich ja agiere, da ist natürlich die Verantwortung, dass ich den Job im Namen der Firma vernünftig mache. 332-347*

[139] Ian: *Ja also da denke ich gibt es zwei besondere Skills, die das ausmachen. Einerseits die Fachkompetenz, das heißt, dass man sich auch viel mit den Gesetzen sehr gut auskennt, (…) und auf der anderen Seite dann eben auch soziale Kompetenzen, dass man eben gerade diesen schmalen Grat beim Kundenverhältnis dann auch trifft. Also einerseits, dass man alle Informationen hat, (…) aber auch andererseits ein gutes Kundenverhältnis pflegt. 133-138*

	good customer relationship.	
Matthew	Sees his job as mainly doing what his company expects of him. Expects the customer to be upfront about any expectations they have towards him. Matthew: *"I have been kicked off a project as well. I was there two weeks. Well, after a week I was told the customer said something about the communication not working. I hadn't talked to him. That was not my job. (...) I was not the interface to the customer.*[140] Matthew: *"Some come, I've had a few of those: 'well, I thought you would make a few suggestions, on how to improve things.' I didn't know that was expected. I did my work and that's that.*[141]	Matthew defines few, if any, expectations that his company has of frontline employees. One aspect he does point out is that the company wants employees to maintain a professional distance to customers. There were verbal rules against using the informal 'you' towards customers. Employees were to always use the formal 'you'.
	Matthew sees his job as doing what his company tells him too. A good employee fulfills the expectations of his company. Beyond that, he defines few role expectations.	
Thomas	Thomas views friendliness, a good understanding of human nature and empathy as important characteristics of a frontline employee in his job (35-41; 46-52). He measures his success in "getting" the customer (acquisition of new customers), the continuity of the customer relationship and in monetary values. Interviewer: *"What would you say gives you the feeling that you did your job well?"* Thomas: "*Well, that can be measured monetarily, if at the end of the day..., okay with new customers it is easy, you get them or you don't. If you do, you must have done something right, if you don't, you must*	Thomas believes his company looks especially at the financial success of their frontline employees. Thomas: *"From the point of view of the company I think only the monetary things are important, because they can be measured. Was there success, was there no success, did the company's performance go up or down? So I think that the company I'm in thinks in monetary terms only. Well, the rest is difficult to measure. I would say they only look at monetary ones."*[146]

[140] Matthew: *Also ich bin auch einmal aus einem Projekt rausgeflogen. Da war ich irgendwie zwei Wochen. So, dann kam so nach einer Woche: ‚Kunde hat irgendwie, da stimmt irgendwas mit der Kommunikation nicht'. Ich hab mit dem gar nicht geredet. War auch nicht meine Aufgabe. (...), ich war nicht die Schnittstelle zu der. 175-178*

[141] Matthew: *Manche kommen dann, hab ich auch schon gehabt: ‚Ja, ich dachte, Sie machen ein paar Vorschläge mal, Sachen irgendwie zu verbessern'. War mir nicht klar, dass das auch erwartet wird. Habe hier meine Aufgaben erledigt und gut. 210-212*

	have done something wrong. So you can measure it. With existing customers I would say that one can measure how long I was there and how long the customer was there. In some cases that is a perfect match, that they are gone now that I am gone."[142] He does state that he felt that the customer's expectations were opposed to those of the company, but also, that he did not find such situations difficult. Interviewer: *"Were there situations in which the expectations of customers went against those of the company, when you needed to find a balance between them?"* Thomas: *"Yes, that is the case really for every customer on the monetary side. Of course the customer wants to invest as little as possible and the company wants a high profit. So yes, there was always this aspect of balance. (...)"* Interviewer: *"Can you remember a situation in which that was particularly difficult?"* Thomas: *"No, I wouldn't know one where it was particularly difficult. Where it didn't fit at all, no."*[143]	

[146]Thomas: *Auf Gesamtunternehmenssicht zu sehen sind nur die monetären würde ich sagen wichtig, weil es eben messbar ist. Gab es einen Erfolg, gab es keinen Erfolg, geht das Unternehmensergebnis nach oben oder nach unten? Also ich denke dass das Unternehmen in dem ich bin nur rein monetär denkt. Gut das andere ist schwer messbar. Ich würde sagen, die nehmen nur monetäre. 64-67*

[142] Interviewerin: *Und was würde ausmachen, dass du das Gefühl hast, du hast deinen Job gut gemacht?*

Thomas: *Ja das kann man natürlich erst mal monetär messen am Ende des Tages, ob du jetzt …, okay beim Neukunden ist es einfach, du kriegst ihn oder du kriegst ihn nicht. Wenn du ihn kriegst, musst du ja irgendwas gut gemacht haben, wenn nicht, musst du was schlecht gemacht haben. Also durchaus messbar. Bei Bestandskunden ist es würde ich sagen, dass man messen kann, wie lange ich da war und wie lange der Kunde da war. Das ist bei einigen eins zu eins auch dass die jetzt weg sind nachdem ich weg bin. 53-59*

[143] Interviewerin: *Gab es Situationen, in denen die Erwartungen deiner Kunden bestimmten Erwartungen deines Unternehmens entgegenstanden, wo du einen Balanceakt machen musstest, um die zusammenzubringen?*

Thomas*: Ja, ich meine das ist eigentlich bei jedem Kunden auf der monetären Seite, der Kunde will natürlich, ist daran interessiert, möglichst wenig zu investieren, und das Unternehmen möchte natürlich, dass da hoher Profit dabei rausspringt, also ja eigentlich hatte man immer diesen Balanceakt. (…)*

Interviewerin: Kannst du dich an eine bestimmt Situation erinnern, in der das besonders schwierig war?

Thomas: Ne, wo das besonders schwierig war, wüsste ich jetzt nicht. Also wo das jetzt überhaupt nicht gepasst hat, ne.

<table>
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<td>When asked what a customer would have to be like to make it more likely that Thomas would prioritize the customer's interests, he states that the customer would have to offer prospects that are in the company's long-term interests, such as a chance for later projects (140-143). The one case he recounts where he did push for the customer's interests against those of his superiors was such a case. Thomas knew that the customer's financial situation was stronger than it looked from the outside, but could not reveal this as the knowledge stemmed from internal, sensitive data (144-156).

He also states that he represents the interests of his company more than those of his customers. His responsibility to his company is greater, as they are his direct employers and pay his wages, which the customer does only in an indirect way.

Thomas: "Essentially I would say I represent my company's interest more than those of the customer, for every customer. There are exceptions, as I said, but really it is the case for all customers."[144]

Thomas: "My employer directly pays for my wages and the customer only indirectly, really. And therefore the profit of my own company comes before the profit of, well, profit might be too monetary a term, but let's say the company I work for comes before ... well that is simply a decision on principles."[145]</td>
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<td></td>
<td colspan="2">Thomas sees his main responsibility and loyalty as being to the company, not the customer. While there are cases where he feels in between opposing expectations from the customer and the company, he does not find these difficult. In most situations he would always choose the company above the customer. In those very few cases where he puts his customers' interests above the immediate interests of the company, he does so because he believes it to be in their</td>
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[144] Thomas: *Also im Grunde genommen ist es, dass ich die Interessen meines Unternehmens vertrete eher als die des Kunden, bei jedem Kunden. Es gibt Ausnahmen, wie ich es gerade gesagt habe, aber eigentlich ist es bei allen Kunden. 160-162*

[145] Thomas: *Mein Arbeitgeber ist mein direkter Zahler meines Gehalts und der Kunde ist ja nur der indirekte eigentlich. Und deswegen steht für mich eigentlich der Profit des eigenen Unternehmens über dem des - okay, Profit ist vielleicht zu monetär gesagt, aber sagen wir mal, das Unternehmen, für das ich arbeite, steht über denen ... ja und das ist einfach eine grundsätzliche Einstellung. 166-169*

	long-term interest.

As mentioned above the table, Ian, Matthew, and Thomas were not the only interview partners to see a strong overlap in their own and their company's expectation. This was also the case for Brian, Lewis, Olivia, and Sarah, though somewhat less strongly so. Ideas that were commonly repeated by them were that their own interests lay more strongly with their company than with their customers and that their responsibility and therefore their loyalty lay more with their company as well.

Brian points out that his goals are very similar to those of his company:

> Brian: *"The company did a poll, as we always thought the customer cared only about the price, but that was not the case. The customers really wanted someone who understands them, who listens, very, very important, and who assesses the risks, wishes and aims and offers a suitable solution. And I think that the company thinks the same way I do about that."*[147]

> Brian: *"Well, I sell the customer something, he won't see me again anyway, that is not the philosophy of my company and it is not my philosophy."*[148]

Lewis states that he acts more in his own interests that in those of the company, but that those are best served by acting in the company's interests:

> Interviewer*: "And are there customer situations in which you might direct the situation more in the interests of the company or more in the interests of the customer? Or do they not differ?"*

> Lewis*: "I'm sure it differs sometimes. But I'd say I direct it in my interest und not in the company's."*

> Interviewer: *"And what is in your interests?"*

> Lewis: *"Well, at the end of the day I want to earn money and be able to earn a living. And I am in the happy position to not work on a commission basis, but nonetheless I am measured by my success. And, in the end a company that earns money with such services pays me from that. You are aware of that and it is im-*

[147] Brian: *Das Unternehmen hat eine Umfrage gemacht, weil wir eigentlich immer gedacht haben, die Kunden sind nur preissensibel, war aber gar nicht so, sondern halt die Kunden möchten wirklich jemanden haben, der sie versteht, der zuhört, ganz, ganz wichtig, und halt die Probleme, Wünsche, Ziele, aufnimmt und dann dementsprechend eine Lösung anbietet. Und ich denke, dass mein Unternehmen da genauso denkt wie ich auch. 62-66*

[148] Brian: *Also, ich verkauf' dem Kunden jetzt was, der sieht mich eh nicht wieder, das ist nicht die Philosophie des Unternehmens, ist nicht meine Philosophie. 83-85*

portant that I am successful, and also if I, well, if you want to have a successful career you need to be successful somehow."[149]

Lewis points out the fact that his company pays his wages and serving the company is therefore in his own interests too, a similar argument made by Thomas. He also believes that while there are differences in the interests of his customers and his company, as well as his own, these are not irreconcilable:

> Lewis: *"I do think that is somewhat compatible, with minor concessions by all parties involved. I really think so."*[150]

Olivia also points out her responsibility to her employer.

> Olivia: *"I think it is important to remain objective. By approaching things in a more critical manner, because in the end I have to be loyal to my employer and identify risks, check things and find discrepancies."*[151]

And finally, Sarah points out several times that following the rules and expectations of her company is in her own interests, and going against them only causes her trouble.

> Sarah: *"On the whole I find it, well it makes sense to me too, that everything is documented properly, that I keep to my times. (...) That is a bother for me too, looking at my time management, so I would not say that I disagree."*[152]

> Sarah: *"Well, I would say that I sympathize more with the customer, but I think that if I deviate from the rules I am supposed to stick to, that my employer gives me, I think that works out really stupidly for me."*[153]

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[149] Interviewerin: *Und gibt es da Kundensituationen, in denen du das vielleicht mehr im Interesse des Unternehmens steuerst oder mehr im Interesse des Kunden oder geht das nicht auseinander?*

Lewis: *Das geht sicherlich mal auseinander. Ich würd dann aber eher sagen, dass ich das in meinem Interesse steuer, und nicht im Unternehmensinteresse.*

Interviewerin: *Was ist dann dein Interesse?*

Lewis: *Naja letztendlich möchte ich irgendwie auch Geld verdienen und muss davon leben, und ich bin in der glücklichen Situation, dass ich nicht provisionsabhängig arbeite, aber nichtsdestotrotz werde ich auch irgendwo auch am Erfolg gemessen. Also letztendlich ein Unternehmen, was mit solchen Dienstleistungen Geld verdient, bezahlt mich auch letztendlich davon. Das ist ja einem bewusst und es ist auch schon wichtig, dass ich erfolgreich bin, außerdem wenn ich, naja, wenn man irgendwann mal Karriere machen möchte, muss man auch irgendwo erfolgreich sein. 195-205*

[150] Lewis: *Wobei ich denke, dass sich das schon ein Stück weit vereinbaren lässt, mit geringen Abweichungen für alle Beteiligten. Sag ich ganz ehrlich. 208-210*

[151] Olivia: *Ich finde, man ist gut, wenn man seine Objektivität auf jeden Fall behält. Wenn man an die Sachen auch kritischer rangeht, weil im Endeffekt muss ich ja meinem Arbeitgeber gegenüber ja loyal sein und Gefahren aufdecken, und nachgucken und Unstimmigkeiten finden. 63-65*

[152] Sarah: *Aber im Großen und Ganzen finde ich schon, also für mich macht das ja auch Sinn, dass das ordentlich dokumentiert wird, sonst, oder dass ich meine Zeiten einhalte (...) , das ist ja für mich auch blöd, von meiner zeitlichen Planung her eigentlich, also würde ich jetzt nicht sagen, dass ich denen so widerspreche. 110-112*

As pointed out above, all these interviewees saw few if any differences between their own aims and expectations of their role as frontline employee and those they perceived their company to have. As well as similar expectations, many of these interviewees expressed that they believed their personal interests to be more in line with serving the interests of the company than those of the customer (see also chapter 4.1.3 where instrumental motives as possible factors influencing role conflict behaviors are discussed).

To summarize the points made in this chapter, the findings of this study indicate that frontline employees differ in the level of difference between their own role expectations and those they believe their company to have. Those that saw little or no difference were more likely to choose the side of the company during a role conflict, those that perceived large differences more likely to seek alternative ways of solving role conflict situations, such as compromise, siding with the customer or voice. The table below (see table X) looks at the responses to role conflict situations commonly described by the employees whose personal role expectations were very different or very similar to those believed to be had by their companies. The table shows only a summary of the ways of dealing with role conflict. The quotes from the interviewees and a more detailed description of the situations can be found in chapters 6.2.1 to 6.2.7.

Table 23 : Ways of Dealing with Role Conflict by Frontline Employees with Varying Levels of Difference between Their Own Role Expectations and Those They Believe Their Employers to Have.

	Siding with company (see also chapter 6.2.1)	**Compromise** (see also chapter 6.2.3)	**Siding with customer** (see also chapter 6.2.2)	**Other approaches to role conflict** (see also chapter 6.2.4 - chapter 6.2.7)
Frontline employees whose personal role expectations **differed** from those they believed their company to have				
Andrew	Reports sometimes siding with the company.	Reports compromising often to try and address interests of both customer and company.	Reports not offering certain products to customers if he feels they are not in the customers interests.	Avoidance - passing on responsibility for deciding on how to handle the situation to the customer.
Charles	Reports feeling he sometimes has to	Reports compromising often to try	Reports not offering certain prod-	Deceit - selectively presenting in-

[153] Sarah: *Also ich würd schon sagen, dass ich eher mit den Kunden sympathisiere, wobei aber wenn ich wirklich jetzt von Regeln, die ich einhalten sollte, abweiche, die der Arbeitgeber mir setzt, das glaube ich ist für mich persönlich immer eigentlich blöd. 288-290*

	side with the company, against his inclination (319-324).	and address interests of both customer and company.	ucts to customers if he feels they are not in the customers interests.	formation from company on how role conflict was handled.
David	Reports siding with the company, a need to adhere to rules, even when unfair to customer. Especially likely to do this if he thinks customer is unfair to company	Aims to find solution that is satisfactory for company and customer.	Reports trying to help customers in role conflict situations, if he perceives customers as honest and 'deserving'.	Avoidance - withdrawal from situation, passing on responsibility for deciding on how to handle the situation to the company.
Phoebe	Reports sometimes siding with the company, need to adhere to rules even when unfair to customer	Resorts to compromise sometimes to try and make situation easier for customers.	Sides with customer when she feels compassion to be important. Wants to keep "human" side in her job.	Deceit - hiding information from company on how role conflict was handled.
Quinn	Reports generally adhering to rules.	-	Works with customer to exploit or sidestep company rules.	Avoidance - distances herself emotionally from company.
Rebecca	Reports generally adhering to rules.	Resorts to compromise sometimes to try and make situation easier for customers.	Sides with customers when she feels protecting or looking after customer to be more important.	Deceit - hiding information from company on how role conflict was handled. Uses personal resources to fulfill both rules of company and expectation of customer. Voice - informing customer of potential conflicts.
Frontline employees whose personal role expectations are **very similar** to those they believed their company to have				
Ian	Reports always following company guidelines.	-	-	-
Matthew	Selling more than he feels the cus-	-	-	-

	tomer needs.			
Thomas	Reports looking after company interests more than customers' (160-163).	-	Only rarely, only when in long-term interests of company (140-156).	-
Frontline employees whose personal role expectations are **mostly similar** to those they believed their company to have				
Brian	Reports generally keeping to company rules and guidelines.	-	-	Voice- addresses certain role conflict situations with company to try and change the situation. Using personal resources to be able to fulfill both company and customer expectations.
Lewis	Selling more products, different products to what he believes would be best for customer (235-244).	Resorts to compromise sometimes to try and make situation easier for customers.	Will side with customer if he feels doing otherwise would be immoral.	Distancing - emotionally from customer, "just the way it is" attitude. Deceit - presenting information to customer in such a way as to create impression that interests have been looked after more than actually the case.
Olivia	Generally adheres to rules, even when unfair to customer. Rules seen as necessary and in her own and other customers' interests. Especially likely to side with company if she thinks customer unfair or	-	Sides with customer in exceptional cases if she feels company rules would be very unfair to customer <u>and</u> that the risks the rules are designed to protect against do not apply.	Avoidance - aims to distance herself emotionally from customers to protect objectivity, to enable her to do her job well.

	unpleasant.			
Sarah	Reports generally keeping to company rules and guidelines.	Resorts to compromise sometimes to try and make situation easier for customers (e.g. 361-383).	Reports having sided with customer once in order to help customer, when she did not see company rule as sensible and saw no real harm to company interests (223-232).	Avoidance - distances herself from conflict situations emotionally, “just the way it is” attitude.

What is striking about the results in the table above is that the three frontline employees who reported the least difference in their own perceptions of what a good frontline employee should be and those they believed their company to have (Ian, Mathew, and Thomas; see also table 22), reported responding to role conflict almost solely by choosing the side of the company. The only exception is Thomas, who had described one instance of having chosen the customer side, but only because of confidential information that led him to believe this to be in the long-term interests of the company.

When comparing the other two groups, those with different perceptions and those with mostly similar perceptions, there is a broader range of behaviors described. There are, however, also distinct differences between the groups. The group with mostly similar role expectations report siding with the customer as more of an exception. Sarah for example reports one case where she decided to not record a customer session against company guidelines (223-232). She does however also make it clear that she is not usually prepared to do so (233-239). For this group, siding with the company appears to be the norm; other ways of dealing with role conflict are taken, but more rarely. Compromises also seem to be rarer: two out of four for the mostly similar group compared to five out of six for the group with different expectations. Although there are of course too few cases to allow for generalization, this does strengthen the impression that for the mostly similar group siding with the company is the go-to option, and fairly strong reasons need to be present for other options to be chosen.

Siding with the customer is most common in the group with the strongest differences between their own role expectations and those they believe their company to have. All six interview partners reported sometimes siding with the customer in role conflict situations. These behaviors were generally not presented as exceptions, but as something comparatively common. Examples for such behaviors were discussed in detail in chapter 6.2.2 and shall therefore be presented only briefly here.

Andrew and Charles reported not selling products or services that they believed were not in the interests of the customer, even if they felt their company expected them to do so. Although both, particularly Charles, stated that this was not always possible, they did report acting like this frequently.

> Andrew: *"Thank God you don't just have the one product that you have to offer, but several, so that you get to choose. And the products we offer are all good. Well, I say all, but the ideas behind them are good and therefore you can always find something suitable. It's just difficult if there is a specific product, then you just have to weather it for a while and take a lot of stick if you're not convinced of the product."*[154]

***

> Interviewer: *"Have you found a way of dealing with these conflicts? They do seem to be fairly common in your job."*
>
> Charles: *"Well, I always found a way, was lucky, in that I found a way to wriggle my way through. I have always had a lot of mandates and always found something, to make a profit, so that I mostly didn't have to touch those products."*[155]

Both of these statements refer to finding compromises in the form of alternative products to sell, but they also speak of situations where the frontline employees sided with the customer. They did not do what was expected of them and sell a particular product. Andrew talks of "weathering it" for a while if there is a specific product to sell with no alternatives, indicating he does not try to sell these products despite having to endure some form of disapproval of his company. Charles also indicates having looked for alternatives to be able to not follow certain expectations of his company, but instead to be able to "wriggle" his way around these expectations.

David describes siding with customers with claims he feels are justified and not wanting the company to deprive these customers of legitimate claims.

> David: *"I also don't want the company to deprive a customer of claims they are legitimately entitled to. And so, for both sides I'm an intermediary."*[156]

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[154] Andrew: *Gott sei Dank ist es so, dass es nicht nur ein Produkt ist, was man dann anbieten muss, sondern dass es mehrere sind und so hat man dann die Auswahl und die Produkte, die jetzt bei uns angeboten werden, die sind auch alle gut. Naja, was heißt alle, aber die Ideen, die dahinter stecken, die sind gut, und so hat man immer irgendwie so was Passendes. Nur doof ist, wenn es jetzt wirklich explizit um ein Produkt geht, dann muss da eine ganze Zeit ausharren und sich viel anhören, wie man davon nicht überzeugt ist. 98-103*

[155] Interviewerin: *Haben Sie für sich selber denn eine Strategie entwickelt, wie Sie mit diesen Konflikten umgehen? Das scheint ja schon sehr präsent zu sein im täglichen Jobleben.*

Charles: *Also ich hatte immer die Leichtigkeit, das Glück, dass ich mich immer durchgemogelt habe. Ich hatte immer viele Mandate gemacht und ich habe immer was gefunden, was Ertrag gebracht hat, wo ich also praktisch nicht an diese Produkte dran musste.727-731*

Phoebe sees it as important for frontline employees to keep a humane side and be empathic and tells of situations where she consciously decides not to adhere to rules laid down by the company if she feels these would be particularly harsh to a customer (105-115, 154-162). Rebecca sees it as part of her job to protect her customers (630-631) and will therefore also sometimes go against company expectations (249-279).

The results of this study discussed in this chapter therefore indicate that:

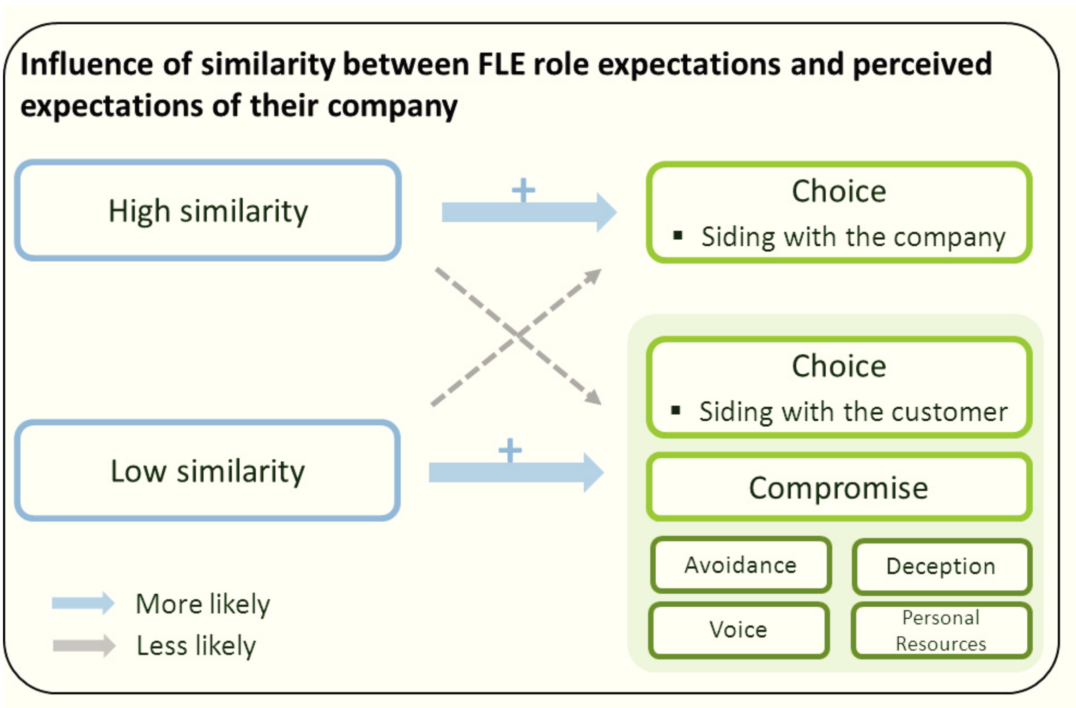
- The higher the similarity in frontline employees own role expectations and associations in comparison to those they believe their company to have, the higher the likelihood that they will side with the company in situations of role conflict.

And conversely:

- The higher the difference in frontline employees own role expectations and associations in comparison to those they believe their company to have, the higher the likelihood that they will choose alternatives to siding with the company in situations of role conflict. In particular, the likelihood of compromises and siding with the customer is increased.

These propositions are depicted in figure 28:

Figure 28: Influence of Difference in Role Perceptions



[156] David:. *Ich möchte auch nicht, dass das Unternehmen einem Kunden berechtigte Ansprüche vorenthält. Und deswegen, ich bin ja in beiden Seiten immer Vermittler. 362-364*

Looking at the cases in this study in which employees' role perceptions differed, in part dramatically, from those they believed their employers to have, differences in the relative levels of customer orientation were particularly pertinent. This implies that customer orientation can be one reason why frontline employees decide to side with the customer, or at least try to achieve a balance between company and customer interests. In situations in which frontline employees chose to do so, protecting the customers' interests was a frequently cited reason. For example, Rebecca refuses to include her customers in research projects as she believes this to be detrimental to them (249-279), and Fred points out that he will not sell products that he does not see as being profitable to customers (428-455, see also chapter 6.2.2). Others also point out that they at least try not to sell products they see as not being in the customer's best interests even though their company pushes for those products to be sold. Andrew and Charles both do this, but also seek to find a compromise by either only sometimes trying to sell the product or by finding an alternative (see chapter 6.2.3).

As has been discussed in chapter 4.2.1, customer orientation refers to a focus on identifying and fulfilling customer needs and keeping their best interests in mind (Knight, Kim, and Crutsinger 2007; Saxe and Weitz 1982). In that chapter customer orientation was discussed as a possible reason for frontline employees to side with the customer or to deviate from their company's expectations. This is supported by the findings of this research. However, it is not customer orientation that leads to employees choosing to not adhere to their company's expectations but the feeling that these expectations violate their own sense of customer orientation. Employees whose levels of customer orientation are on par with the perceived level of customer orientation of their company did not report similar behaviors. Therefore it is not sufficient to know how strongly customer oriented a frontline employee is. The significant factor lies in the difference between employees' own level of customer orientation and they level they believe their company to have.

In summary, a third proposition can be inferred from the results discussed in this chapter:

- Frontline employees are more likely to choose alternatives to siding with the company in situations of role conflict if the perceived level of customer orientation of the company is lower than their own.

The difference in perceived personal role expectations and levels of customer orientation and the perceived expectations and levels of customer orientation of the company thus affect the way frontline employees react to role conflicts arising from differences in customer and company interests. The next chapter will look at the influence of personal values in such situations.

6.3.2. Influence of Personal Values - Person-Role Conflict

During the interviews, frontline employees several times cited moral and ethical values as influencing their decision on how to address role conflict situations. Half of the frontline employees interviewed, ten of twenty, report situations in which their moral and ethical guidelines influences their behavior during role conflict situations. The use of metaphors describing ethical or unethical behaviors was especially common.

Moral and ethical values were mentioned particularly often in connection with drawing a line between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. When addressing conflicts between company and customer interests, moral and ethical arguments were used to define what frontline employees would and would not do. For example, Lewis states that he would not try to sell something to someone if that person really cannot afford it. When asked how he responds in situations where there is a conflict of interests between the company and his customer:

> Lewis: *"I have to honestly say that I definitely try to be an honest consultant and I believe I manage to do so. I do think you need to differentiate, well I, if I really find that a customer has no money, I'm the last person to take money from their pockets. If someone has half a million in their account and can do without the money, in a manner of speaking, then the situation looks different again."* [157]

Literally, the phrase translated in the quote as "to empty their pockets" would be translated as "to draw the money from someone's pocket" and refers to manipulating someone into spending more money than they ought to or into spending money on something they do not need and that will not benefit the buyer sufficiently to warrant the amount of money paid. It usually involves implying a greater benefit or necessity of something to the customer than the seller believes to actually be the case. While there are similar idioms in English (such as 'to rob someone blind' or 'daylight robbery'), these do not work as a direct translation.

Here, Lewis points out that he would not follow his company's interests to the point of hurting a customer. If the customer really cannot afford the offering, he would not push it. If the customer can afford it and paying for the offering would not put the customer in a difficult financial situation, he would not refrain from selling. The moral line here is that Lewis would not do anything that he would perceive as harming the customer. He makes a similar statement a little later in the interview. Asked whether deciding between customer and company interests can be personally challenging for him, he answers:

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[157] Lewis*: Ich muss ehrlich sagen, ich versuch da auf jeden Fall, 'n ehrlicher Berater zu sein und ich, ich denke, dass ich das auch schaffe, ich glaub halt man muss auch abstufen, also ich, wenn ich jetzt richtig merke, der Kunde hat kein Geld, dann bin ich der letzte, der dem das Geld aus der Tasche zieht. Hat einer 'ne halbe Million auf dem Konto und kann auf Geld verzichten in Anführungsstrichen sieht man das schon wieder anders. 144-147*

> Lewis: *"The decision is not that impactful, I have to say, that it would be a personal burden. For example I have never sold someone Lehman-funds or anything or a certificate on which someone's entire retirement provisions were based and who is now sleeping under a bridge. Such extreme cases don't happen und wouldn't happen to me."* [158]

Again, Lewis points out that he would not do something that would harm someone considerably. There are two sides to this statement. Firstly, there are things he would not do, if he perceives great harm to the customer by doing them. The second side is that as long as Lewis considers the consequences of siding with the company as not really harmful to the customer, they cause him no emotional pain and or go against his conscience.

Others also give examples for actions they would perceive as unethical and therefore not do, often using a moral language. Charles is a very good example of this. Talking about situations in which his superior expects him to sell certain products and achieve certain sales levels, he recounts the following:

> Charles: "*There are ranking lists and my boss, whom I hate, (...) he stands for the exact opposite of what I believe. He doesn't care, whatever, just out with the products. (...) He really wouldn't understand my qualms at all, he really wouldn't understand. 'Why? Don't you want money at the end of the year?' he would ask. 'Others do it, so why don't you?' And if I put something in a customer's investment account that runs ten years and the customer is 80 years old, than in my eyes that is a crime. And there you have to be incredibly careful and with such things, you go a few steps too far and I will not do that."*[159]

Charles represents something that the company, his boss, expects him to do as a crime, a morally reprehensible action and something he does not want to do and avoids as much as he can. He also speaks of going too far, of crossing a boundary, and reiterates that he will not do so. The idea of certain aspects of his job and actions he feels his company wants him to do being morally reprehensible is repeated several times in his interview. He reiterates that he would not recommend long-term investments to elderly clients, seeing it as an abuse of the trust

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[158] Lewis: *So stark ist dann diese Entscheidung auch nicht, sag ich ganz ehrlich, also dass mich das jetzt persönlich belastet. Also ich hab zum Beispiel niemals jemandem Lehman-Fonds irgendwie oder ein Zertifikat verkauft, der seine gesamte Altersvorsorge darauf aufgebaut hat und schläft jetzt unter der Brücke. Also solche Extremfälle passieren nicht und würden mir auch nicht passieren. 162-168*

[159] Charles: *Es gibt Ranglisten und unser Chef, den ich hasse, der neue, der ist von [anderes Finanzinstitut] gekommen, und der verbrieft genau das Gegenteil von mir. Dem ist alles völlig wurscht, egal, einfach rein damit, ne. (...) Also der würde überhaupt nicht verstehen, was ich für Bedenken habe, das würd der überhaupt nicht verstehen, der würde überhaupt nicht verstehen. ‚Wieso, wollen Sie jetzt kein Geld am Jahresende haben?', würde der fragen. Und ähm ja: ‚Andere machen das doch, warum Sie nicht? Das passt doch in das Kundendepot rein', und wenn ich was in ein Kundendepot rein pack, was zehn Jahre läuft und der Kunde 80 Jahre alt ist, dann ist das für mich schon ein Verbrechen. Und da muss man höllisch aufpassen und solche Sachen, da geht man schon ein paar Schritte zu weit, und die gehe ich nicht. 402-415*

placed in him (712-715). The idea that such behavior is criminal or morally corrupt can also be seen well in the following comment:

> Charles: *"If something is there, if one of the products is good, building projects aren't always bad, so if you put that in there, fine, but at the end of the day the customer has to make as much money from that as we do. And if that is the case, OK. I would say that is fine. But that we do something and the customer gets nothing out of it. Outrageous. That happens as well."*[160]

The word Charles uses for outrageous is "frevelhaft", which comes from "Frevel" and refers to a moral outrage or sacrilege. Again, he paints the behavior he sees his company advocate and demand at least some of the time, as being morally corrupt. A clash between personal moral and ethical beliefs and the perception of what the company wants one to do can therefore lead to role conflict, role stress and impact the way situations are handled. In this case, the conflict between personal values and role expectations by the company lead Charles to not side with his company, but finding compromises (e.g. 338-347, 738 -750 767-786 and chapters 6.2.2, 6.2.5 and 6.2.6) or looking for other ways of handling the situation.

The importance of not abusing the trust that customers place in him is also stressed by Andrew:

> Andrew: *"For me personally it is like this - if I have someone who trusts me, then I can't pull a fast one on them. That just doesn't go."*[161]

The conflict can also be between personal values and role demands and expectations by customers. David for example recounts situations in which he felt he was being lied to by customers who tried to use him to take advantage of the company.

> David*: "And I like it when customers are honest when filing an insurance claim. That is not always the case. Some of the stuff I get is just ludicrous. I pass them on of course. Because it is the customer's decision, if he wants to try and defraud the company, let him try. But I am not helping him".*[162]

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[160] Charles: *Wenn mal was dabei ist, was eben unter den Produkten geht, Bauprodukte, die müssen nicht immer schlecht sein, aber wenn er das da rein packt, okay, aber unter'm Strich muss der Kunde genauso viel dran verdienen wie wir auch. Und wenn das gegeben ist, okay. Dann würd ich sagen ist das in Ordnung. Aber dass wir etwas machen und der Kunde verdient gar nichts dran. Frevelhaft. Das gibt es sicherlich auch. 760-766*

[161] Andrew: *Bei mir persönlich ist das so: Wenn ich jetzt jemanden hab, der mir vertraut, dann kann ich den nicht übers Ohr hauen, das geht einfach nicht, ne? 181-183*

[162] David: *Und ich finde es gut, wenn also ein Kunde zunächst mal mit der Schadenmeldung ehrlich ist. Das ist nicht immer der Fall. Wenn ich manchmal einige kriege, da sträuben sich mir die Nackenhaare. Ich gebe sie trotzdem weiter, natürlich. Weil das ist die Entscheidung des Kunden, wenn er, ich sag das mal in Anführungsstrichen, etwas betrügen möchte, dann soll er das tun. Dann helfe ich ihm dabei nicht mit. 312-330*

David also gives several other examples of the importance of honesty (e.g. 345-361, 539-542) and his refusal to aid anyone he feels is being dishonest.

In some cases frontline employees expressed strong feelings for certain moral concepts and beliefs and felt that these were also important aspects of their work as well as of who they were as a person. Particularly salient examples of this are given by George, Brian and Phoebe. George emphasizes the importance of social justice and solidarity in general, but particularly in the insurance system.

> George: *"What has always fascinated me in work was the idea of solidarity: the healthy for the sick, the old for the young, and so on. Those without fam-, without children pay for those with children. And when people needed you, you could speak for them."*[163]

The idea of solidarity, of looking after and helping each other, is very important to George and he repeats it several times in the interview (e.g. 61-62, 216-222, and 371-373). He feels strongly about situations in his work that violate his sense of solidarity, for example the expectation or demand of his company to deny customers certain services, access to certain products or to refuse claims. For example, he complains that older customers would be offered unattractive terms when renewing contracts, regardless of how long they have been customers or how few claims on their insurance they have made in the past, simply because of their age (216-224).

> George: *"Those at the top who never worked at the bottom, they have ideas such as: ‚We'll make the contracts attractive to those people we want: young, healthy, 25-year-olds, and as for the others we do not care, if the 78-year-old leaves because he is unhappy, even if he's been with us for 30, 40 years. 78-year-olds, they are the ones that have more accidents, we want to get rid of them'. So the offers can be unattractive. That is the feeling I have, when they do such things. And I have no understanding for that."*[164]

In role conflict situations involving such violations of George's sense of solidarity and justice, he sides with the customer trying to help. For example:

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[163] George: *Was mich sehr fasziniert hat bei der Arbeit war der Solidaritätsgedanke: der Gesunde für den Kranken, der Alte für den Jungen usw. Wer keine Fam-, keine Kinder hat, zahlt für den, der Kinder hat, mit, und wenn Leute einen brauchten, hat man sich für sie eingesetzt. 5-8*

[164] George: *Von den Quereinsteigern oben, die nie unten gearbeitet haben, die kommen so mit Ideen "wir machen das interessant die Verträge für Leute, die wir haben wollen: junge, gesunde, muntere über 25". und bei den anderen ist es uns doch egal, wenn der 78Jährige daraus geht, weil der mit uns unzufrieden ist, auch wenn der schon 30, 40 Jahre bei uns versichert war, 78 das sind die, die mehr Unfälle haben und älter, den wollen wir loswerden. Also können die Angebote da uninteressant sein, das ist so ein Gefühl, was ist dabei habe, wenn die das machen. Und, wo ich aber auch so gar kein Verständnis für habe. 225-231*

George: "*If I thought the benefit was justified, because I knew the person and because I knew [company name] did not want to grant so many stays in health facilities anymore, so that the premiums would not have to be raised again and we won't lose even more of the healthy, young, and well-earning, so it was made difficult for people. But if for me that was a case, I'd talk to the people and told them 'We are going to refuse this now. I have to do this because of such and such a reason'. I was open about it with those I had trust in. Then I said: 'And when you have that letter, then we will sit down. I will write the objection for you.' And that went through and was accepted. That is often done, whatever insurance or retail company, you try to keep the other side quiet by refusing. If you refuse 100 people, then maybe only ten will object, so you saved yourself 90 people. And I'm not doing that for people who are really only looking for a cheap holiday.*"[165]

George felt that his company's strategy of refusing applications for a stay in a health facility was unfair on those who really needed this stay, so he would help them write the objection to get the claim granted. He also did so openly in front of the customers, letting them know that he, as a member of the organization, would help them repeal a decision made by the organization.

In situations where he felt that customers' claims were not justified, that they went against solidarity by asking for help that he felt was not medically necessary, he had no problem siding with the company in situations of role conflict ("I'm not doing that for people who are really only looking for a cheap holiday", 167). Talking about breast augmentation, he said:

George: *"If there are medical reasons (...) then that is not a problem. But it has to be for medical reasons and you can often tell with the people who apply for that that it isn't. That it is for fashion reasons. And if that is the case, I don't feel under any obligation to help. Fashion is not what insurance is for."*[166]

Brian uses concepts such as being an honorable businessman and a man of his word to explain some of his reactions to situations of conflicting interests.

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[165]George: *Wenn für mich diese Leistung sinnvoll war, weil ich die Person kannte und weil ich wusste, dass [Unternehmensname] jetzt bei den Kuren nicht mehr so viel Kuren haben wollte, um die Beiträge nicht noch einmal erhöhen zu müssen, damit uns noch mehr Gesunde, Junge, Gutverdienenende weggingen, dann wurde es den Leuten schwerer gemacht. Wenn das aber für mich ein Fall war, ich habe dann mit Leuten gesprochen und denen gesagt, "wir lehnen das jetzt ab. Muss ich aus den und den Gründen", ich habe mit denen auch offen geredet, zu denen ich Vertrauen haben konnte. Dann sag ich: "und wenn Sie das Schreiben haben, dann setzen wir uns hin. Ich schreibe Ihnen den Widerspruch". Und der ist dann durchgekommen. Das ist in vielen Fällen so, dass egal welche Versicherung, oder welcher Einzelhändler, man versucht erst mal mit irgendeiner Ablehnung den anderen ruhig zu stellen. Lehnt man 100 Leute ab, legen vielleicht nur 10 Leute Widerspruch ein, da hat man schon mal 90 Leute gespart. Und da habe ich keine Lust zu, wenn das jetzt wirklich einer war, der nur billigen Urlaub machen wollte. 464-474*

[166] George: *Wenn es medizinische Gründe sind, (...) dann ist das gar keine Frage. Es muss aber eine medizinische Begründung sein und man merkt Leuten, die sowas beantragen an, dass das keine sind. Das es modische Gesichtspunkte sind. Und wenn das sie sind, dann habe ich nicht das Gefühl, denen helfen zu müssen. Weil für die Mode ist die Krankenkasse nicht zuständig. 489-496*

Brian: *"I am a businessman and when I make a statement I stand by it. Now it can happen, and has happened several times, that you may (...) have a liability case and I give the customer my assurance that one way or another we will take care of it, and then suddenly the company cuts payment by 100, 200 Euro. Then I'll pay the resulting loss to the customer out of my own pocket because I said I gave my word to the customer. (...) There I feel more responsible to the customer than the company, so that I have to pay that out of my own pocket."*[167]

In this example, Brian is willing to pay a customer out of his own pocket to make up for a perceived shortcoming of his company (this case has also been discussed in chapter 6.2.7 – Using Personal Resources). The reasons he gives for his behavior include personal and moral beliefs, namely that a business man should stand by his word.

Phoebe emphasizes the importance of empathy, of treating people as individuals and not simply as cases. She also sees it as very important to be humane, to show kindness and understanding. Because these values are so important to her, empathy with the customer can lead her to side with the customer (see also chapter 6.2.2), seek a compromise (358-372, see also chapter 6.2.3) and lie if necessary to hide her behavior from management (130-145, see also chapter 6.2.6).

Phoebe: "*And then of course you have ... if you act according to regulations, no room for discretion. Of course the case is ... that ... sometimes you do ... well, let's say, the human aspect, let's call it sympathy, or ... well, whatever, for the customer, that you might turn a blind eye, even though you are not allowed, that you say: ‚Yes, I understand your situation'."*[168]

In the cases recited above, the frontline employees' reaction to role conflict was influenced by how well that reaction fitted with their personal beliefs or the degree to which they felt following a role demand would violate them. A further aspect that emerged from the interviews had to do with how the interviewees saw themselves. It was important to them that they could feel honest and deserving of the trust placed in them by their customers. The imagery of being able to look at oneself in the mirror or to look a customer in the eyes was used frequently.

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[167] Brian: *Ich bin halt Kaufmann, und wenn ich eine Aussage treffe, dann muss ich dazu stehen. Jetzt kann es passieren, ist auch schon häufiger vorgekommen, dass Sie jetzt, (...) einen Schadensfall haben oder ich mache dem Kunden eine Zusage, so oder so übernehmen wir das, und [das Unternehmen] kürzt auf einmal um 100, 200 Euro. Dann zahle ich aus eigener Tasche diesen entstandenen Schaden den Kunden weiter, weil ich gesagt habe, ich steh dem Kunden gegenüber im Wort. (...) Aber da fühle ich mich dem Kunden mehr verpflichtet als dann der Gesellschaft, so dass ich das dann aus eigener Tasche das zahlen müsste. 172-182*

[168] Phoebe*: Und da hat man natürlich, ... wenn man vorschriftsmäßig handelt, gar keinen Handlungsspielraum. Natürlich ist es so, ... dass ... man an der einen oder anderen Stelle dann doch, ... ja, sagen wir mal, wo dann vielleicht die menschliche Seite, nennen wir es Mitleid, oder… ja, wie auch immer, hat man dann mit dem Kunden, dass man dann vielleicht ein Auge zudrückt, obwohl man es nicht dürfte, dass man sagt, ja ich verstehe jetzt ihre Situation. 105-109*

Andrew: *"Finally, I think it is important to leave the decision up to the customer. So that he cannot later turn around and say this and this, because I then know, if he comes again and it went down the drain,* ***then I can look him in the eyes and he can look in mine****."*[169]

Fred: *"In the end, as a salesperson you can make almost any product attractive. By now I could easily sell an endowment policy, but you have a responsibility towards people. Especially if you know them personally. And* ***then to be able to look him in the eyes in ten years*** *and still say, I enjoyed advising you and I gave you good advice. That is important to me."*[170]

Lewis*: "I would always ensure that* ***you can look in the mirror****. Definitely be honest to the customer and I always try to point out what makes success sustainable. Being open and honest with people."*[171]

Being able to look someone in the eyes or being able to look in the mirror are metaphors used to convey having a clear conscience. This again implies that the frontline employees see ethical boundaries as to what is morally acceptable and what is not.

Conflict between personal beliefs and moral values and the tasks and expectations of work roles is addressed by different concepts in the literature. The first is the person-role conflict construct, defined by Katz and Kahn (1966) as conflict that occurs when the requirements of a role and the needs and values of the person carrying out the role are not compatible.

While this dimension of role conflict is one of four dimensions of role conflict as originally conceptualized by Kahn et al (1964), it is not well reflected in their operationalization of role conflict (Kahn et al. 1964, Katz and Kahn 1966, Pandey and Kumar 1997, King and King 1990). Kahn et al. (1964) focus on an objective measure of role conflict, gained by asking for a list of role expectations from the various role senders connected with a focal person. This has been shown to have a low correlation with subjective, or perceived, role conflict (Kraut 1965, in Pandey and Kumar 1997). Other conceptualizations and operationalizations (such as the one developed by Rizzo et al. 1970, one of the most commonly used role conflict scales in marketing research; see also chapter 3.3.1) focus almost entirely on other facets of role con-

[169] Andrew: *Letztendlich, find ich, ist es wichtig, dass man den Kunden nachher die Entscheidung überlässt. Dass er dann nachher nicht sagen kann so und so , weil dann weiß ich auch, wenn er das nächste Mal kommt, es ist in die Buchse gegangen, dann kann ich auch ihm in die, in die Augen gucken und er mir auch. 265-269*

[170] Fred*: Weil im Endeffekt kann man als Verkäufer fast jedes Produkt schönreden. Ich kann eine Kapitallebensversicherung könnte ich mittlerweile genau so verkaufen (...), aber man hat natürlich die Verantwortung den Leuten gegenüber, gerade, wenn man sie persönlich kennt. Und dem dann noch in zehn Jahren in die Augen zu schauen und zu sagen: ‚Ich habe dich gerne beraten und ich habe dich gut beraten', das ist halt das Wichtige für mich. 421-427*

[171] Lewis*: Ich würd immer das so machen, dass er selber noch in den Spiegel schauen kann, also auf jeden Fall, dass er ehrlich ist gegenüber dem Kunden und ich würd ihm immer versuchen zu vermitteln, was nachhaltigen Erfolg ausmacht. Ehrlich und offen mit den Menschen umzugehen. 314-317*

flict, particularly on intra- and intersender conflict, or on a conflict between resources and demands (e.g. Singh 2000).

Pandey and Kumar (1997) developed a new measure of role conflict to better capture the dimensions originally developed by Kahn and al. (1964) and to address the shortcomings of the various operationalizations developed since then (see also chapter 3.3.1). They define person-role conflict as "*experienced by the role incumbent when the expectations associated with the work role is incompatible with his or her needs, aspirations, values, or ethics. This definition clearly identifies the conflict to be between the person and the work role only. A marketing manager who believes that making untested claims about a product is unethical but whose work role requires him to do it is likely to experience person-role conflict"* (1997, p. 198).

While their example clearly refers to a conflict stemming from personal values and role expectations, their measurements also pertain to different aspects of person-role conflict. Of the nine item measure developed by Pandey and Kumar (1997, p. 205-206), four items address conflict between personal ambitions and goals (e.g. "*My job does not provide me with opportunities for career advancement"*) and two deal with feeling that one's knowledge and abilities are not used for the job (e.g. *"I do not enjoy my work since my training and expertise are not being utilized"*). Only two items directly address values:

- *"The values at my workplace are in accordance with my personal values".*
- *"My idea of what my job should be is very different from what it really is".*

This illustrates that while the conflict between personal values and role expectations is part of the person-role conflict, the construct itself is broader and includes other facets such as career orientation and aspects of feeling valued or job satisfaction. Person-role conflict is also sometimes used in terms of emotional labor (Hochschild 1983), as employees may have to act against their own beliefs and show emotions different from those that are actually felt.

So, while person-role conflict in part addresses differences in beliefs and role expectations, the definitions and measurements used in research capture a much broader scope of issues. As most studies on role conflict use measures that either do not or only partially address conflict between personal beliefs and role expectations, it is difficult to assess how applicable their findings on antecedents (see chapter 3.3.4) and consequences (see chapter 3.3.3) are.

A second area of literature that may be useful in gaining deeper insights on how differences in personal beliefs and role expectations impact employees is research on person-organization fit (PO-fit; Chatman 1989; O'Reilly III, Chatman, and Caldwell 1991). PO-Fit is part of the larger area of research on person-environment fit (PE-fit), that also looks at person-job fit, person group-fit and person-supervisor fit amongst others (Cable and DeRue 2002; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson 2005).While there are different conceptualizations of PO-fit, the most commonly used definition sees PO-fit as the level of congruence between employees' personal values and those of the organization (Cable and DeRue 2002; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson 2005). This is sometimes described as supplementary PO-fit (Kristof 1996). Other definitions include a complementary PO-fit, which looks at whether the employee and the organization fulfill each other's needs (Carless 2005; Kristof 1996).

PO-fit based on value congruence between employee and organization has been shown to be positively related to organizational identification, perceived organizational support, citizenship behaviors and decisions to stay with an organization (Cable and DeRue 2002; Saks and Ashforth 1997). Studies have also shown a strong correlation with job satisfaction (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson 2005; Lauver and Kristof-Brown 2001) and job performance (Lauver and Kristof-Brown 2001).

PO-fit focuses on the values held by both employee and organization and not directly on the fit between employee values and role expectations by role partners such as the organization (as person-role conflict does). There is, however, a much larger body of research available looking at PO-fit than research looking at the values aspect of person-role conflict. Furthermore, most research on PO-fit uses perceived PO-fit (Cable and DeRue 2002; van Vuuren et al. 2007). It is likely that there will be a high correlation between the PO-fit perceived by an employee and fit between the employee's own values and those reflected in the role expectations sent by his or her company.

The results in this chapter, however, highlighted cases in which employees felt a conflict between their personal values and the role expectations of either company or customer. As PO-fit correlates with job satisfaction, organizational identification and citizenship behaviors (Cable and de Rue 2002), low levels of PO-fit should indicate low levels of these variables. This in turn should decrease the likelihood of attitudes and behaviors in line with the expectations of the role sender with the differing values. Put simply, a low level of fit between the employees' values and the expectations of their company, should lead to less pro-organizational behavior and attitudes towards the company and therefore decrease the likelihood of siding with the company. Conversely, a low level of fit between employee values and customer expectations should decrease the likelihood of pro-customer attitudes and behavior and thus the likelihood of siding with the customer.

This is reflected in the results of this study. When organizational role expectations contravened personal beliefs, the frontline employees were more likely to side with the customer, seek a compromise or apply some other alternative to siding with the company. When customer expectations where contrary to the values of the frontline employee, they were more likely to side with the company.

This leads to the following propositions:

- The higher the conflict between personal values of the employee and role expectations of the company, the higher the likelihood that the employee will choose alternatives to siding with the company in situations of role conflict.

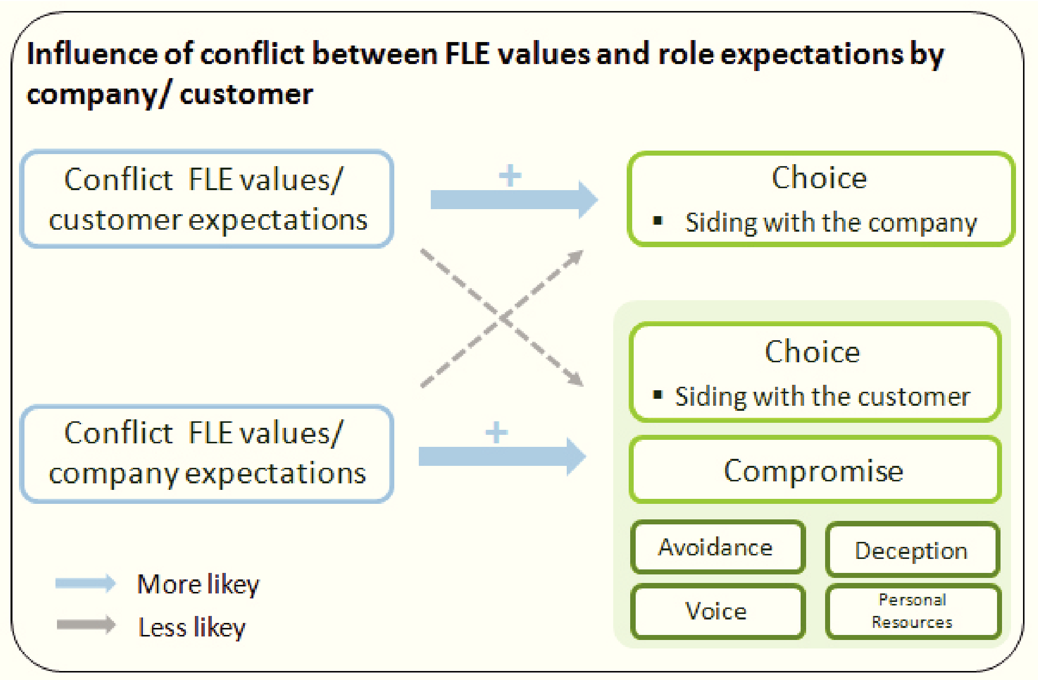
And conversely:

- The higher the conflict between personal values of the employee and role expectations of the customer, the higher the likelihood that the employee will side with the company in situations of role conflict.

In other words, in situations of role-conflict, frontline employees will strive to behave according to their personal moral and ethical values, they will use them as a guideline to choose between options of behavior and they will side with the one role-partner whose values differ less from their own.

These propositions are depicted in figure 29:

Figure 29: Influence of Difference in Role Perceptions



6.3.3. Influence of Instrumental Motives

As discussed in chapter 4.1.3, instrumental motives such as advancing one's career, improving one's standing in the company or financial gain may influence frontline employees' decision on how to react to role conflict situations. There is some support for this in the findings of this study. A few of the frontline employees interviewed cited instrumental reasons for siding with the company in cases of conflicting demands and interests by company and customer. A particularly illustrative case is Lewis:

> Interviewer: *"And are there customer situations in which you might direct the situation more in the interests of the company or more in the interests of the customer? Or do they not differ?"*
>
> Lewis*: "I'm sure it differs sometimes. But I'd say I direct it in my interests und not in the company's."*
>
> Interviewer: *"And what is in your interests?"*
>
> Lewis: *"Well, at the end of the day I want to earn money and be able to earn a living. And I am in the happy position to not work on a commission basis, but nonetheless I am measured by my success. And, in the end a company that earns money with such services pays me from that. You are aware of that and it is important that I am successful, and also if I, well, if you want to have a successful career you need to be successful somehow."*[172]

Lewis makes it clear that in a situation of role conflict he acts according to what is in his own interests, not the company's. Following this statement, he points out that acting in the company's interests is also in his own: he wants to earn money and have a successful career and thus it is important that he is perceived as being a successful and valuable employee by his company. He also relates deciding whether to side with the company or the customer with career consequences at another point in his interview. He speaks of not pushing for sales when he perceives that the customer cannot afford to make such a purchase at that time, or may not be able to afford the subsequent payments in the near future. He does however point out that if he were under more pressure to sell, he would probably act differently, and that the decision not to sell could negatively impact his career prospects:

> Lewis*: "I'm currently a lot in the Rhine-Ruhr area and there is a lot of short-time working. They don't have any money and so on. And if someone is threatened by short time work, or may lose his job, well, then I won't sell them anything. Then I*

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[172] Interviewerin: *Und gibt es da Kundensituationen, in denen du das vielleicht mehr im Interesse des Unternehmens steuerst oder mehr im Interesse des Kunden oder geht das nicht auseinander?*

Lewis: *Das geht sicherlich mal auseinander. Ich würd dann aber eher sagen, dass ich das in meinem Interesse steuer, und nicht im Unternehmensinteresse.*

Interviewerin: *Was ist dann dein Interesse?*

Lewis: *Naja letztendlich möchte ich irgendwie auch Geld verdienen und muss davon leben, und ich bin in der glücklichen Situation, dass ich nicht provisionsabhängig arbeite, aber nichtsdestotrotz werde ich auch irgendwo auch am Erfolg gemessen. Also letztendlich ein Unternehmen, was mit solchen Dienstleistungen Geld verdient, bezahlt mich auch letztendlich davon. Das ist ja einem bewusst und es ist auch schon wichtig, dass ich erfolgreich bin, außerdem wenn ich, naja, wenn man irgendwann mal Karriere machen möchte, muss man auch irgendwo erfolgreich sein. 195-205* *tell them straight that it doesn't make any sense at the moment, as the future is so uncertain. There is no point talking about insurance if they don't know what they will be doing in half a year's time. Well, and you can only do that, I have to say, if you don't have a lot of sales pressure behind you."*

Interviewer: *"And otherwise you would?"*

Lewis: *"Yes, I assume so. Yes. I don't have to sell something. I want to make that clear. Still, my success is defined by my sales. I may have no financial loss if I do not sell something, but career-wise there might be."* [173]

Financial interests, impression management or career orientation can thus be valid motives for frontline employees to side with the company, as long as they perceive their needs to be best met while doing so.

The financial motive behind siding with the company is underlined by Nicolas and Thomas. Nicolas, a manager in the telecommunication industry who looks after frontline employees, sees financial motives as central in the decision.

Interviewer: *"Do employees sometimes tell you that it is difficult for them?"*

[Note: being between conflicting customer and company interests]

Nicolas: *"(...)Yes, but then this is the wrong place for them. That has to be said. This is a tough business. If someone has moral qualms, then they should do something else. Or you convince them, because for most, their pay depends on it. You get paid according to the sales you generate."* [174]

***

Interviewer: *"How do you think companies can ensure that the frontline employees side more with the company?"*

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[173]Lewis*: Ich bin momentan viel im Ruhrgebiet unterwegs und da gibt es Kurzarbeit. Die haben kein Geld und so weiter. Und dann, wenn einer von Kurzarbeit bedroht ist, vielleicht seinen Job verliert halt oder so, dann naja dann verkauf ich dem nix. Dann sag ich ihm klipp und klar: ‚dann macht das keinen Sinn, weil momentan deine Zukunft so ungewiss ist. Da macht das keinen Sinn über Versicherung zu reden, wenn du nicht mal weißt, was im halben Jahr ist'. So, und das kann man auch nur machen, muss man auch ganz klar sagen, wenn man nicht so eine hohen Verkaufsdruck hat.*

Interviewerin*: Ansonsten würde man …?*

Lewis*: Ja, geh ich von aus. Ja. Ich hab's halt einfach nicht nötig was zu verkaufen, muss klar gesagt werden. Trotzdem definiert sich mein Erfolg natürlich auch wiederum über den Verkauf. Ich hab wirtschaftlich keine Nachteile, wenn ich nichts verkaufe, karrieremäßig denke ich aber schon. 218-228*

[174]Interviewerin: *Sprechen Sie denn die Mitarbeiter manchmal darauf an, dass das schwierig für sie ist?*

Nicolas*: (...) Ja, aber dann sind die hier schlecht aufgehoben. Das muss man ganz klar sagen. Es ist halt ein hartes Geschäft. Wenn einer da moralische Bedenken hat, dann soll er leider etwas anderes machen. Oder man überzeugt ihn halt, weil ich meine, die meisten, ihr Gehalt hängt ja auch davon ab. (...) Er wird ja danach bezahlt, wie viel Umsatz er auch selber generiert. 148-154*

> Nicolas: *"That is very easy. We have lists of points in each of our stores and that works best, that an employee, if he reaches 100% of his target, then everything above that is paid exponentially higher. So 101% target attainment gets paid with 116%. So you use the financial road to motivation, and that you offer people a higher position."* [175]

Financial and career motivations are described as strong motivators, and Nicolas' company uses both as an incentive to raise sales levels. Nicolas believes both to be good reasons for siding more with the company than with the customer, even deriding choosing to side with the customer as not being tough enough for the business. Thomas also connects siding with the company rather than the customer with a financial motive - the fact that his company pays him and therefore the company's success is important to him (157-169). This is linked to other aspects as well - such as company loyalty and values, but it does indicate that getting paid by the company can be a reason for siding with it.

Sarah gives slightly different reasons for siding with the company, but they still have to do with her own interests being best served by siding with the company. Customers who make an appointment with her have to pay a cancellation fee if they cannot make the appointment for any reason. Many customers are upset by this, as the fee has to be paid even if the reason for having to cancel the appointment is outside their control, such as a sudden illness or accident. Sarah acknowledges that this fee is not in the interests of the customers and that it can be harsh on them, but sees it as protecting her own interests as well as following company guidelines.

> Sarah: *"I always find that difficult because it is very much against the interests of the patients, but it is part of the rules here. And really, it makes sense for me as well, as I benefit from that as well, as I would otherwise lose out completely, if all of a sudden no one would be coming, and I have arranged my appointments, and then no one comes. In the end it ensures you have a base income."* [176]

> Sarah: *"And therefore I find that to be in my interests too and a good preparation for later, to face that conflict. And my company also wants me to do this, and I*

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[175]Interviewerin: *Wie glauben Sie, dass das Unternehmen dafür sorgen kann, dass Leute am Point of Sale diesen Spielraum, den sie haben, stärker in Richtung Unternehmen ausnutzen?*

Nicolas*: Das ist ganz einfach, es ist ja so, dass wir mittlerweile haben, es gibt ja Punktelisten, in den Filialen und das funktioniert am besten, dass ein Mitarbeiter, wenn er seine 100% Zielerreichung hat, alles was da drüber hinausgeht exponentiell höher bezahlt wird. Das heißt bei 101% Zielerreichung werde ich mit 116% bezahlt. Also so über die monetäre Schiene über Motivation, dass man den Leuten dann halt die Aussicht stellt eine höhere Position zu bekommen. 229-236*

[176]Sarah: *Das finde ich immer schwierig, weil das sehr gegen die Interessen des Patienten geht, was wir hier aber als Regelung haben. Was eigentlich für mich gesehen auch schon Sinn macht, weil ich auch was davon habe, weil ich habe ja sonst auch einen kompletten Ausfall, wenn dann auf einmal alle am nächsten Tag nicht zur Arbeit kommen, und man hat sich Termine gelegt, dann kommt gar keiner. Und im Grunde sichert das ja eine Basiseinnahme so ein bisschen. 319-324*

can understand that, and it really is something you always hear from customers as something they really dislike." [177]

Sarah says that it would be easy for her to side with the customer, that she would simply have to not report the late cancellation and pretend the appointment had been cancelled in time. She sees reporting the late cancellation and therefore the fee being charged as her own decision to side with the company, when she could easily have sided with the customer.

On the face of it, impression management motives, career orientation and financial self-interest are reasons to side with the company in situations of conflicting customer and company expectations. This is true if siding with the company best serves those interests. In other cases, siding with the customer may better serve the frontline employee's self-interest. Many frontline employees describe being dependent on customer good-will for long-term success, and that short-term gains attained by siding with the company will often be offset by long-term costs caused by damage to the customer relationship.

Several of the interviewed frontline employees pointed out the importance of good long-term relationships with customers for their own success. The reasons given for this can be grouped loosely into two categories. The first is the importance of satisfied customers in acquiring new customers through positive word of mouth. This was often described as the best and most successful way of gaining new customers and building one's customer base.

> Brian: *"I don't want to lose a customer because you wouldn't believe how hard it is to find new customers. I tried advertising, letters, adverts in newspapers and the yellow pages ... people are swamped with advertising. So the advertising factor is out. So, the best thing that can happen to me is that Mr. A. tells his neighbor Mr. B.'I feel in good hands there', Mr. B comes here and I can advise him well, that is the optimal way."* [178]

***

> David: *"The company has changed its approach over the years. There used to be more direct advertising, using newspapers, journals and so on. And we got people coming to us over that. That isn't the case as much anymore and I have always tried to win customers using my customers. Because if someone is satisfied and*

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[177] Sarah: *Und insofern finde ich das für mich auch sinnvoll und auch vorbereitend auch für später, sich dem Konflikt mal zu stellen, und das Unternehmen will das ja auch von mir und das verstehe ich ja auch. Und das wirklich was, dass man von den Kunden so mitkriegt, wie blöd die das eigentlich finden. 330-332*

[178] Brian*: Ich möchte ja keinen Kunden verlieren, weil, Sie glauben nicht, wie schwer es ist, überhaupt Neukunden zu gewinnen. Also, ich hab's mit Werbung probiert, mit Briefen, mit Zeitungswerbung, und gelben Seiten ... die Leute sind zu mit Werbung. Also das, der Werbefaktor ist außen vor. Deswegen, was mir passieren kann, ist dass Herr A Herrn B, seinem Nachbarn erzählt: ‚Da bin ich gut aufgehoben', Herr B kommt hier hin und ich kann ihn gut betreuen, das ist der optimale Weg. 227-232*

can recommend me, I think that is the best recommendation I can have in the market and that is why I trust in that." [179]

***

Interviewer: *"How is customer contact usually established?"*

Fred: *"There are two different categories. One is my own contacts, that I always try to make and build using long-term approaches, but what really works very, very well for me is looking after existing customers in a long-term and sustainable way. I try to do that in such a way, in a charming manner, that recommendations come automatically. (...) When customers are satisfied they are much more likely to tell a friend: 'Listen, I solved that there, I was really satisfied with him, you can contact him if you like'. And that is the long-term strategy that I follow. Then someone, who after two years says: 'This was great' (...) you get a lot of recommendations, long-term and continuously. A lot of recommendations."* [180]

Charles speaks of not being able to invest as much time in customer acquisition as before after he was promoted to the position of director. He points out that positive word-or-mouth helped a lot with finding new customers during that time.

Charles: *"That was a huge drawback and during that time I could do little in the way of acquisition. But I didn't have to, because that went from mouth-to-mouth, that was the best acquisition that I could have had."* [181]

The link between customer satisfaction, positive word-of-mouth and customer acquisition is supported by empirical research (Nam, Manchanda, and Chintagunta 2010; von Wangenheim and Bayón 2007).

[179] David*: Das Unternehmen hat also sein Verhalten im Laufe der vielen Jahre auch ein klein wenig verändert. Es hat früher mehr direkte Werbung gemacht, über Zeitungen, Zeitschriften, etc. Und da haben wir also da Zuläufe bekommen. Das ist heute nicht mehr so der Fall und ich habe also immer versucht, über meine Kunden wieder Kunden zu gewinnen. Denn wenn jemand zufrieden ist und mich weiterempfehlen kann, finde ich ist das die beste Empfehlung, die ich haben kann am Markt und deswegen vertraue ich darauf. 7-13*

[180] Interviewerin*: Wie kommt es denn üblicherweise zu Kundenkontakt?*

Fred*: Es gibt halt zwei verschiedene Kategorien, zum einen halt eigene Kontakte, die ich halt immer versuche zu knüpfen oder aufzubauen über längerfristige Vorgehen und halt, was aber ganz, ganz stark bei mir ist, über langfristige nachhaltige Betreuung von alten Kunden, da versuch ich halt, das so zu machen, oder so charmant zu lösen, dass automatisch Empfehlungen kommen. (...) Wenn ein Kunde zufrieden ist, dann sagt der halt viel eher einem Freund Bescheid: ‚Pass auf, ich habe das Ganze da gelöst, mit dem war ich super zufrieden, da kannst du dich gerne mal melden'. Und das ist eher die langfristige Strategie, die ich da in der Richtung fahre. Denn jemand, der halt nach zwei Jahren sagt: ‚Irgendwie eigentlich war das toll' (...). Da kommen dann auch nachhaltig, längerfristig auch Empfehlungen. Ganz viele Empfehlungen. 62-76*

[181] Charles*: Das war eben ein Riesennachteil und in dem Augenblick konnte ich wenig Akquisition machen. Aber das brauchte ich auch nicht, weil das von Mund zu Mund dann ging, das war die beste Akquisition, die ich haben konnte. 251-253*

The second positive effect of positive customer relationships and satisfied customers is that dealings with existing customers become easier, more profitable and more pleasant.

> Brian: *"The customer has to be satisfied, that is the main thing, no matter how I achieve that. And if the customer is happy, then he will stay with me, is happy to pay five Euros more, is willing to talk if I have an offer and so on. If the customer is angry, I can't get to the table, he closes the door, puts down the receiver, and that is that."* [182]
>
> ***
>
> Interviewer: "*What are the advantages of having friends become customers and customers become friends? What are the advantages of customer relationships with a basis in friendship?"*
>
> Fred: *"Because it's much, much nicer to go to people. I don't go there with a stomach ache because I'm thinking: 'They're going to beat me around the head with some contracts or something'. Instead I can say I really enjoy being there, they are happy to see me, they don't look at it as a sacrifice of free time but think it's nice to see an acquaintance. You're much more likely to get a service appointment and can then talk openly. (...) That is just the advantage of having a good relationship."* [183]
>
> ***
>
> Ian: *"There are just some with whom you get along really, really well, and they're very cooperative then. That always makes it easier."* [184]

Conversely, the frontline employees see a negative impact on their future success through dissatisfied customers and negative word of mouth.

> Brian: *"My town is a village. Everyone knows everyone. And the very worst thing for me would be if someone were to cast a bad light on my name. Because the cus-*

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[182] Brian*: Es geht in erster Linie immer darum, der Kunde muss zufrieden sein, egal wie ich das erreiche. So, und wenn der Kunde zufrieden ist, bleibt er bei mir, zahlt auch gerne fünf Euro mehr, ist gesprächsbereit, wenn ich ein Angebot habe, etc. Ist der Kunde sauer, komme ich gar nicht mehr an den Tisch, er macht die Tür zu, legt den Hörer auf, und das hat sich erledigt. 157-161*

[183] Interviewerin: *Du hast gesagt, du hast Freunde, die Kunden geworden sind, und Kunden, die Freunde geworden sind, was sind denn da die Vorteile, wenn man diese Geschäftskontakte mit freundschaftlicher Basis hat?*

Fred*: Ja, weil man da viel, viel lieber zu Leuten geht. Da sagt man: ‚Da geh ich nicht mit Bauchschmerzen hin, weil ich wieder denke, der haut mir irgendwelche Verträge um die Ohren', sondern ich kann da einfach sagen, ich bin da total gerne da, die freuen sich, dass ich komme, die sehen das halt nicht als Aufwand an, oder als Opfern von Freizeit, sondern denken sich, da kommt halt ein Bekannter, da freuen die sich. Dann kriegt man ja auch viel eher einen Servicetermin wieder und dann kann man auch lockerer reden (…). Das ist einfach der Vorteil daran, wenn das ein nettes Verhältnis ist. 355-366*

[184] Ian*: Also es gibt wirklich welche, mit denen versteht man sich sehr, sehr gut und die sind auch sehr kooperativ dann auch. Dann klappt das eigentlich immer besser. 81-82*

> *tomer - good news you tell three times, bad ones nine times. Or something like that. And if the customer then talks bad about me: 'Mr. X said it is like that and then it wasn't. And he didn't help'. That would be the very worst, that would make the rounds, all my customers that live here would hear about it and then I would have real problems selling any insurances."* [185]

In other words, frontline employees stand to gain a lot from good relationships with their customers and lose much from having dissatisfied customers. This can become problematic when short term success, such as making a sale and increasing profits, would negatively impact the customer relationship and customer satisfaction in the long term. This could for example be the case if a frontline employee felt pressured to push for a sale knowing that the customer may regret the sale, or that the product does not suit the customer's needs, a situation that would arise when the company expects the frontline employee to sell a product the employee believes to be wrong for the customer. Such situations have been discussed in chapter 6.1 and throughout the rest of chapter 6.

The frontline employees interviewed acknowledge this conflict, with some interview partners feeling that these situations are becoming more common.

> Andrew: *"There are banks that have a clock on the wall and appointments are not allowed to last longer than thirty or forty-five minutes. Or at least not last before a deal is closed. If you can see closure being reached, then of course you can take longer, but if after half an hour it becomes clear that nothing is going to happen with the customer, then it's broken off. And I do feel like it is going more and more in that direction, that there is more and more pressure on sales, profits and so on, that you have no chance to build a relationship with the customer, as otherwise the pressure on you personally gets too much."* [186]

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[185] Brian*: Meine Stadt ist ein Dorf. Da kennt jeder jeden. Und das Allerschlimmste für mich wäre, wenn hier irgendwie mein Name in schlechtes Licht gerückt wird. Weil der Kunde, gute Nachrichten erzählt man dreimal weiter, schlechte neunmal. Oder so. Hab ich mal irgendwann gehört. Und wenn der Kunde dann irgendwo in einer Kneipe erzählt: ‚Der Herr X hat gesagt, so ist das und es war nicht so. Und er hat sich gar nicht bewegt', wär das Allerschlimmste für mich. Weil das würde die Runde machen, die Kunden hätten alle, über den ganzen Bestand, die in meiner Stadt wohnen, würden das irgendwie mitkriegen und dann hätte ich ein Riesenproblem, um überhaupt noch Versicherungen zu verkaufen. 186-193*

[186] Charles*: Es gibt Banken, die haben eine Wanduhr und länger als 30 Minuten, 45 Minuten darf so ein Gespräch nicht dauern. Beziehungsweise nicht dauern, bis es zu einem Abschluss oder so kommt. Wenn dann absehbar ist, es kommt ein Abschluss, dann natürlich auch länger, aber wenn nach einer halben Stunde jetzt raus kommt, da passiert nichts mit dem Kunden, dann wird abgebrochen. Und ich habe so ein bisschen das Gefühl, es geht so langsam in diese Richtung, dass es immer mehr Richtung, Richtung Verkaufen, Ertrag und so weiter, dass man keine Chance mehr hat, Kundenbeziehungen aufzubauen, weil sonst der, der Druck auf einem persönlich auch zu hoch wird. 273-280*

Brian: *"The company wants to make as much profit as possible, that is certain, but first and foremost, you can only look after a customer well and in the long run if the customer is satisfied."* [187]

Several of the frontline employees report that they aim to put the long-term satisfaction of the customer before short-term successes, such as higher sales, and that not to do so is counter-productive.

Fred: *"I'd rather win one customer less, or a customer for a lower amount of savings, than sell someone rubbish in the long run. To find out then that the customer is disappointed after two or three years."* [188]

Harry: *"And that is exactly the point, where we say that we'd rather advise our customers properly, even if from a short-term point of view that is disadvantageous for us. But in the long-term it is more sensible, when the customer knows he continues to get good advice, that is not just good for us but really suits him."* [189]

***

Lewis: *"I think to have sustainable success in this business, not just short-term, but sustainable continuous success, you need to be honest, because otherwise you burn yourself."*

Interviewer*: "You said you burn yourself. What do you mean by that?"*

Lewis*: "I just think the customer can judge whether you're taking him for a ride or being honest. Things can go wrong, that has to be said, things can always happen where something is not regulated in line with the customer's interests and does not go according to his wishes. But the customer knows whether the consultant was honest or dishonest and he remembers that."* [190]

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[187] Brian*: Dass das Unternehmen natürlich darauf achtet, möglichst viel Umsatz zu machen, das ist überhaupt keine Frage, aber in erster Linie - man kann einen Kunden nur lange gut und glücklich betreuen, wenn der Kunde zufrieden ist. 71-73*

[188] Fred*: Lieber einen Kunden weniger gewinnen, oder einen Kunden gewinnen mit etwas weniger Sparvolumen, als einem Kunden langfristig Quatsch zu verkaufen. Und dann halt festzustellen, der Kunde ist nach ein, zwei, drei Jahren enttäuscht davon. 14-21*

[189] Harry*: Und das ist genau der Punkt, wo wir dann lieber sagen, wir beraten unsere Kunden lieber vernünftig, auch wenn es mal im ersten kurzfristigen Blickfeld vielleicht für uns nachteiliger wäre. Aber langfristig ist das ganz sicher für uns sinnvoller, wenn der Kunde merkt, er hat auch weiterhin eine sehr gute Beratung, die nicht nur auf uns, sondern halt wirklich auf ihn zugeschnitten ist. 348-382*

[190] Lewis*: Ich glaube, um nachhaltig Erfolg zu haben, in dem Geschäft nachhaltig, nicht jetzt kurzfristig, sondern für den nachhaltigen Erfolg muss man ehrlich sein, weil sonst verbrennt man. (...)*

Interviewerin*: Du hast gesagt man verbrennt? Was meinst du denn damit?*

Lewis*: Ja ich glaub halt der Kunde weiß sehr wohl einzuschätzen, verarscht der mich auf gut Deutsch oder ist er*

Siding with the customers, finding a compromise or some solution to a role conflict situation other than siding with the company can therefore be very much in the frontline employees' own interests. There is a trade-off to be made in cases where frontline employees feel that their company expects behaviors of them that favor short-term success such as higher sales or profit margins. Fulfilling these expectations when the frontline employee perceives them to be detrimental to the customer relationship makes it more difficult for him or her to be able to fulfill these same expectations later in time. In other words, higher profits now can mean lower profits later, if these profits are made at the cost of the customer relationship.

Protecting their customer base and their relationship with customers to be able to continue being successful at their job can therefore be a self-centered, instrumental motive for siding with the customer. And it is one that can be found in the interviews. For example, the instance in which Brian chooses to use his personal resources to fulfill both his company's and his customers' expectations.

> Brian: *"Now it can happen, and has happened several times, that you may (...) have a liability case and I give the customer my assurance that one way or another we will take care of it, and then suddenly the company cuts payment by 100, 200 Euro. Then I'll pay the resulting loss to the customer out of my own pocket because I said I gave my word to the customer. And again, to not anger the customer. I make a projection, is it worth my while to pay out the 200 Euros, so that he is satisfied, and the next 100 years, I'm exaggerating, he is going to stay insured with me. So that is something to be taken into account. (...) There I feel more responsible to the customer than the company, so that I have to pay that out of my own pocket."*[191]

Here, Brian openly discusses the instrumental motive behind paying the customer out of his personal funds to make up for cutbacks set down by the company. The extra expenditure now is worth it because of the future benefits of the continued customer relationship. This motive is mentioned alongside other, less instrumental motives such as wanting to keep his word (discussed in chapter 6.3.2).

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ehrlich mit mir. Es kann was schiefgehen auch, muss man auch ganz klar sagen, es können immer Sachen passieren, wo es nicht im Kundeninteresse reguliert wird, wo es nicht so läuft wie er möchte usw. Aber der Kunde weiß ganz genau, war der Berater ehrlich mit mir oder war er unehrlich. Das merkt er und das merkt er sich auch. 172-185

[191] Brian: *Jetzt kann es passieren, ist auch schon häufiger vorgekommen, dass Sie jetzt, (...) einen Schadensfall haben oder ich mache dem Kunden eine Zusage, so oder so übernehmen wir das, und [das Unternehmen] kürzt auf einmal um 100, 200 Euro. Dann zahle ich aus eigener Tasche diesen entstandenen Schaden den Kunden weiter, weil ich gesagt habe, ich steh dem Kunden gegenüber im Wort. (...) Und auch wieder, um den Kunden nicht zu verärgern. Mach ich auch wieder eine Hochrechnung, lohnt sich das für mich, dem Kunden die 200 Euro zu erstatten, damit er zufrieden ist, und die nächsten noch 100 Jahre, ich übertreibe, aber bei mir versichert zu bleiben. Da kommt dann auch wieder die Rechnung. Aber da fühle ich mich dem Kunden mehr verpflichtet als dann der Gesellschaft, so dass ich das dann aus eigener Tasche das zahlen müsste. 172-182*

These points are also well illustrated in a quote by Charles:

> Charles: *"If I knowingly did that, where I know that something is going to fail, then I would be shooting myself in the foot. Because, if that goes wrong and the customer then approaches me, what do I get? An unhappy customer who is not going to do anything else in that direction, he is not going to do anything with products that sound similar or anything, he is not going to do that. He doesn't trust me anymore. You can always say such things can happen, but if you did that two or three times, then I don't think any customer is going to believe anything I say. And therefore I wouldn't do that out of self-interest, when I know something can go wrong."*[192]

He would not include products in a customer's investment account or portfolio that would potentially harm the customer, or result in him (or her) being taken unfair advantage of, in other words profit far less from the deal than the company does. He goes on to say that selling something he believes will result in customer dissatisfaction would be harming himself. The resultant detrimental effect on the customer relationship and on trust would reduce his chances of success in future encounters.

There are some factors common to all the situations described in the interviews in which instrumental motives favored siding with the customer. The first is that the employees pointed out that their long-term job success and satisfaction was dependent on the trust and goodwill of their customers and that positive word-of-mouth by satisfied customers was highly important in attracting new customers. Conversely, dissatisfied customers would lower their chances of later sales or other successful transactions, and may harm their reputation and thus new customer acquisition. The second is that the role conflict situations involved company expectations or company interests that the employees saw as detrimental to the customer and the customer relationship. These factors promote the likelihood of siding with the customer or choosing other alternative reactions. These can include compromise and using personal resources, and possibly deceit as a supplementary approach (see chapter 6.2.7).

If these context factors do not apply, or the benefit to be gained by siding with the customers despite these factors is greater than that of siding with the customer, frontline employees' instrumental motives are likely to lead to siding with the company (see also figure 30).

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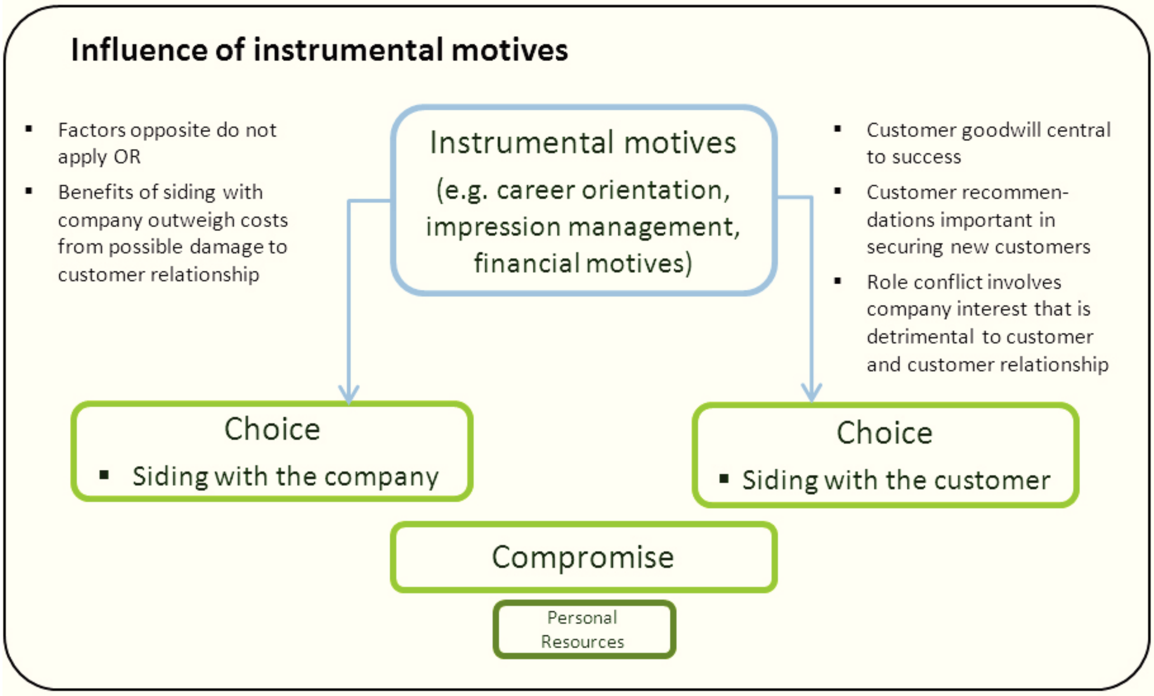
[192] Charles: *Wenn ich das schon sehenden Auges irgendwo, wo man ganz genau weiß, das geht in die Hose, dann würde ich mir ein Eigentor schießen. Weil, wenn das in die Hose geht und der Kunde kommt auf mich zu, was habe ich davon? Einen unzufriedenen Kunden, und der macht dann nichts mehr in der Richtung, der macht dann keine Produkte, die sich so ähnlich anhören, oder sonst irgendwas, der macht das dann nicht mehr. Der vertraut mir in dem Augenblick nicht mehr. Man kann immer einfach sagen, das kann ja mal passieren, aber wenn ich das zwei-, dreimal machen würde, ich glaub dann würd kein Kunde mir dann noch glauben. Und deswegen würd ich das aus Selbstschutz schon nicht so stark machen, dass ich das jetzt weiß, dass das in die Hose gehen kann. 585-593*

Figure 30: Influence of Instrumental Motives



6.3.4. Summary

This chapter concerned frontline employees' reasons for choosing a particular behavior to address a role conflict situation in which company and customer interests and expectations clash. More precisely, the chapter focused on reasons related to the frontline employee him- or herself. Three different categories of such factors were role perceptions (see chapter 6.3.1), moral and ethical values (see chapter 6.3.2), and instrumental, self-oriented motives (see chapter 6.3.3).

Looking at the differences in frontline employees' personal role expectations and those they felt their company to have, three groups could be identified. The first group reported a great similarity between their own personal role expectations and those of the company, with very few if any exceptions. They responded to role conflict situations almost exclusively by siding with the company.

The second group had a mostly similar view of their own and their company's role expectations, with more differences than in the first group. This group applied a broader range of behaviors, although siding with the customer was framed as more of an exception rather than a common experience. Siding with the company appeared to be the normal response to role conflict situations, with fairly strong reasons and circumstances needing to be present for other responses to be chosen. Compromises were also sometimes made, but considerably less so than in the third group.

This third group reported strong differences between their own role perceptions and those they believed their company to have. All six interview partners in this group described sometimes siding with the customer in role conflict situations. These behaviors were generally not presented as exceptions, but as something comparatively common. Other forms of dealing with role conflict situations such as avoidance and deceit were also common.

In this group, a particular salient difference the frontline employees perceived between their own and their company's expectations concerned the level of customer orientation involved. These employees generally saw themselves as far more customer oriented than their companies. Protecting customer interests and looking after customers was a commonly cited reason for siding with the customer. So in situations in which frontline employees believe their own customer orientation to be much higher than that of their company, they are more likely to side with the customer.

The second set of frontline employee-related factors regarding the decision of how to respond to role conflict situations involved employees' moral and ethical values. Moral beliefs were frequently cited in connection with drawing a line between what a frontline employee would and would not do. Employees used examples of behavior represented as immoral to show that they would not go that far, and that their normal behavior was within the boundaries of moral behavior.

Frontline employees also described situations in which they felt their companies' or their customers' expectations to be dishonest, immoral or even criminal (see chapter 6.3.2). Some employees expressed a strong belief or dedication to certain moral concepts, such as professional honesty, solidarity or empathy and understanding. They tried to uphold these values in their decision on how to deal with role conflict situations.

Employees' view of themselves and a clear conscience were also important, reflected by phrases such as "being able to look him in the eyes" (Fred, 426) and being able to "look in the mirror" (Lewis, 317).

The incongruence between personal values and role expectations is addressed under person-role conflict in the literature (see for example Kahn et al, 1964 and Pandey and Kumar, 1997). However, while this construct includes conflict between ethical values and role expectations, it usually encompasses other aspects as well, such as conflicts between personal ambitions (e.g. career) and whether or not personal skills are used or not.

Another construct in the research literature that looks at this topic is person-organization fit (PO-fit; Chatman 1989; O'Reilly III, Chatman, and Caldwell 1991), usually defined as the level of congruence between employees' personal values and those of the organization (Cable and DeRue 2002; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson 2005). Empirical studies have shown that PO-fit is positively related to organizational identification, perceived organizational support, citizenship behaviors and decisions to stay with an organization (Cable and DeRue 2002; Saks and Ashforth 1997). Links have also been made between PO-fit and job satisfaction as well as job performance (Lauver and Kristof-Brown 2001).

This study indicates that there is also a link between PO-fit and frontline employees' reactions to role conflict situations. The greater PO-fit, the greater the likelihood that frontline-employees will side with the company. Conversely, the lower the PO-fit, the greater the likelihood that frontline employees will side with the customer.

The final set of factors related to frontline-employees that influences their decision in situations of role conflict concerns instrumental or self-oriented values, such as career orientation, impression management motives or financial motives. Such motives can increase the likelihood of frontline employees siding with the company, so that they are perceived as being more successful, improve their career chances and gain other monetary and non-monetary benefits offered by the company.

However, there can also be instrumental and self-oriented reasons for siding with the customer. In situations in which employees long-term job success and satisfaction hinged on customer goodwill and good customer relationships, or in which the acquisition of new customers depended heavily on customer recommendations and other forms of positive word of mouth, siding with the customer may serve the frontline employee's interests better in the long run. This is the case in role conflict situations, in which frontline employees perceive fulfilling the company expectation to be potentially damaging to customer satisfaction in the future. If these circumstances do not apply, or the benefit to be gained by siding with the company despite these factors is greater than the benefit of siding with the customer, instrumental motives are likely to tip the balance in favor of siding with the company.

6.4. Influencing Factors Related to the Company

During the interviews, the frontline employee's relationship with their company was a prominent topic. This chapter will look at the various ways in which an employee's relationship with his or her company could influence his reaction to role conflict situations relating to contradictory demands from company and customers.

Important themes relevant to the employee-company relationship that recurred throughout the interviews were perceived organizational support and job satisfaction. Other aspects included turnover intention and whether or not the frontline employees viewed their company as customer-friendly. Perceived organizational support can be defined as the „extent to which employees perceive that their contributions are valued by their organization and that the firm cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger et al. 1986, p. 501; see also chapter 4.1.1). Perceived organizational support has been linked to pro-organizational behaviors, increased work effort and higher organizational commitment (Aselage and Eisenberger 2003; De Coninck and

Johnson 2009; Eisenberger, Fasolo, and Davis-LaMastro 1990; Fu, Bolander, and Jones 2009; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). As discussed in chapter 4.1.1, the relationship between perceived organizational support and a variety of pro-organizational behaviors and feelings is often explained using social exchange theory (Blau 1964; Homans 1958). The basic rationale behind this explanation is that people in an exchange relationship will try to balance what they put into and what they get out of the relationship. So employees in an exchange relationship with their company will try to repay their company for the tangible and intangible rewards they feel they received (Bettencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie 2005). Perceived organizational support is such a relationship reward, so that high levels of organizational support are likely to motivate the employee to offer support to the company in turn.

Job satisfaction can be seen as an assessment of all the rewards received in an employment relationship (Bettencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie 2005). High levels of job satisfaction indicate a high level of satisfaction with the relationship rewards received and therefore a higher propensity to give back to the company in the form of pro-organizational behaviors. This is supported by empirical findings in the literature, linking job satisfaction to better job performance, citizenship and other pro-organizational behaviors (Anton 2009; Bettencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie 2005; Fu, Bolander, and Jones 2009; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne 1998; Podsakoff et al. 2000; Williams and Anderson 1991).

To summarize, social exchange theory predicts that high levels of perceived organizational support and job satisfaction lead to employees wanting to give back to the organization and show pro-organizational behaviors and feelings. This could also be expressed in a greater willingness to support and side with the company in situations of role conflict.

There is some tentative support for this proposition in the findings of this study, although there are contradictory and ambiguous findings as well. Table 24 below assesses the level of perceived organizational support and job satisfaction felt by the interview partners.

Table 24 : Perceived organizational support and job satisfaction reported by interview partners

Frontline Employee	Perceived organizational support (POS), job satisfaction (JS) and other elements of the employee-company relationship	Level of POS and JS
Andrew	Reports sales pressure from company (89-97; 270-283), but feels that his supe-	Low POS, though un-

	riors are on his side and support him. Andrew: *"The branch managers themselves get a lot of pressure from the top. They are more, I'd say they are a little on the side of the consultant. The important thing is that you have a contract."*[193] Does not directly address organizational support, but emphasizes pressure to sell and focus on profit by his company and the problems this can leave him with several times (81-88; 89-97; 270-280). Also does not address job satisfaction.	clear JS unclear
Brian	Company offers tools, trainings and other means of support (35-36). Speaks well of his company, sees it as generally customer-friendly and believes his personal goals and those of his company align (58-65; 83-85). Describes some situations in which he did not feel supported by his company (95-118). Does not directly address job satisfaction.	High POS in general, though problematic situations
Charles	Has been with company for a long time – 40 years plus (11-15) Does not feel supported by his company, does not feel valued. Examples showing this include: ▪ After early success in his company and a leading management position (branch manager), feels he was demoted during restructuring of company. Charles: *"Since 1999 this whole thing, I managed it for about five, six years, this whole thing was gone after a restructuring within the company, the whole position was gone and I could choose whether to rejoin the rank and file or look after special customers (...) The title director I could keep, they don't take that away, but still it was, well I wasn't directing anything, nothing. (...) I fell back into consulting. Yes, that is the way it is. You'd have to really try to sell yourself that idea to understand it. (...) I have had no management position since 1999."*[194] ▪ His boss asked him to write a short paper on current situation on the stock market. This was well received by his boss and colleagues; he received a lot of praise. But the top management told him to desist from writing such advice immediately and he even received a warning (173-195). Charles: *"Well, you take something into your own hands, do something, show a bit of initiative, and well that was not good. As well as*	Low POS Low JS

[193] Andrew: *Die Filialleiter selber, die kriegen den Druck ja auch nur von oben weiter, ne? Die sind ja eher, ich sag jetzt mal auch so ein bisschen auf der Seite des Beraters. Wichtig ist, dass man irgendwo einen Abschluss hat. 153-155*

[194] Charles: *Seit 1999 ist dieses Ganze, ich habe das also praktisch fünf, sechs Jahre geleitet, dieses ganze große Gebilde und dann wurde das durch eine Strukturänderung im Unternehmen gab es das auf einmal nicht mehr, die ganze Position war weg. Ja, und dann konnte ich mir aussuchen, ob ich dann wieder ins Glied reingehe oder ob ich dann besondere Kunden eben betreue. (...) Den Direktor habe ich natürlich noch behalten, den nehmen sie einem ja nicht weg, aber trotzdem war es irgendwo, ich habe ja nichts mehr geleitet, gar nichts mehr, ne. (...) Ja, ich bin also im Grunde genommen in die Beratung zurückgefallen. Ja, ja, ist schon so richtig zu sehen. Aber das musste man sich schon selber richtig schön reden, wenn man das verstehen wollte. (...) Aber ich bin seitdem, seit 1999 habe ich keine Leitungsfunktionen mehr gehabt.139-169*

	the fact that one was sent back from the management position, which I had all that time, to the rank and file."[195] Charles also mentions that he hates his current boss (404-405), feels that his company does not listen to his concerns (407-413), and that it has been more and more difficult for him to do his job well due to company demands and expectations (670-674; 738-750). He mentions very little in the way of support from his company, apart from a few trainings at the beginning of his career (27-34). He describes his current job situations as stressful. He mentions that colleagues have had psychological problems; he himself has health problems and as a result is going into early retirement (700-703; 751-755).	
David	Feels well supported by his company, cites regular trainings, information packages, access to experts and supporting software offered by his company (23-43; 109-127; 160-177, 395-417). Reports that the support by his company also allows him to offer better customer service (38-43). Sees his company guidelines as being generally pro-customer, offering good products and services, although he also criticizes their expectations as being less customer-friendly. When talking about the company in general, David shows it in a very positive light, but answers a direct question about their expectations more critically: Interviewer: *"What do you think the company expects from you in meetings with customers?* David: "*Well, I'd say the company … the company expects erm…, that you keep your customer base and expand it. That is it really. The, erm … the human elements, often don't count any more today. (…) Every month statistics are generated. So they are always, the company management, informed about things concerning the individual employees. So, I think, they don't think about the individual persons, but it is all about numbers and only about numbers"*[196] Focus of company lies on numbers, on statistics. Also criticizes company for not having helped a valuable customer due to a minor mistake on that customer's side and his having subsequently lost the customer (438-471). Speaks well of his company and of his job, although no explicit references to job satisfaction are made.	High POS, but also criticism High JS

[195] Charles: *Also, dann nahm man mal was in die Hand, hat was gemacht, ein bisschen Initiative gezeigt, und ich mein, ... war, war nicht gut ... Und die Tatsache, dass man eben wirklich von der Führungskraft, die man die ganze Zeit über war, war das im Grunde genommen, wieder zurück ins Glied. 175-194*

[196] Interviewerin: *Was glauben Sie erwartet das Unternehmen von Ihnen in Kundengesprächen?*

David: *Tja, ich sag mal das Unternehmen, das Unternehmen erwartet ... äh ... von allen Mitarbeitern, dass sie ihre Bestände halten und ausbauen. Das ist im Prinzip alles. Da, ähm... das Menschliche, das zählt heute häufig nicht mehr. (…) Da werden jeden Monat Statistiken erstellt. Die sind also jederzeit, die Unternehmensleitung, informiert über das, was die einzelnen Mitarbeiter des Unternehmens anbetrifft. Also, ich glaube, die machen sich heute über die Personen keine Gedanken, sondern da geht es um Zahlen und nur noch um Zahlen. 373 -385*

Eric	Does not feel supported by his company, felt unprepared by company at the beginning of his job. Interviewer: *“Are there guidelines by your company on how to handle the conversations with customers?”* Eric: *“No, not really, we were thrown into the deep end. When I started there four years ago, it was: ‘There is the phone; this is how you register claims’. (...) In the end, it is left up to us how to handle it.”*[197] Describes his job as a high stress job several times during the interview. Company offers no free time between calls, next call may come through straight away. This means that sometimes employees are still taking notes or filling in information on a previous call while already having to take on the next call (66-72). The main other stressors mentioned are angry, loud and disrespectful customers (76-86, 150-153, 273-282).	Low POS Low JS
Fred	Feels well supported by his company, cites training, sales material and access to other resources that help him in his job (56-61; 109-124; 127-134). Had a mentor at the beginning of his career, found this very helpful in getting started (158-173). Speaks well of his company, always describes it in terms of offering good services and supporting him well (e.g. 109-124; 284-299; 300-314). Describes his job satisfaction as very high, enjoys his job very much (77-88; 367-376). Interviewer: *“Do you enjoy your job?”* Fred: *“Totally.”* Interviewer: *“Is there something you particularly enjoy?”* Fred: *“Yes, being able to always meet new people. And that friendships can form from that. There are several customers where I would say that they’re friends as well as customers now.”*[198]	High POS High JS
George	Presents his company in a positive light, proud of his company’s achievements (539-552). Speaks well of his company, defends it if others criticize it (343-373; 403-419). Felt supported by trainings and courses offered by company (110-122).	High POS, though ambivalence about com-

[197]Interviewerin*: Gibt es denn Vorgaben von dem Unternehmen wie das abzulaufen hat, wie so ein Gespräch gestaltet sein sollte?*

Eric*: Nein, nicht wirklich, also wir wurden dort ins kalte Wasser rein geschmissen. Ich habe zu seiner Zeit vor 4 Jahren angefangen, dort hieß es: ‚Da ist das Telefon, so werden die Schäden aufgenommen‘. (...) Also, im Endeffekt, sind wir dort selbst auf uns gestellt wie wir das dann handhaben. 21-29*

[198]Interviewerin: *Macht dir dein Job Spaß?*

Fred*: Total.*

Interviewerin*: Gibt es etwas, das dir besonders Spaß daran macht?*

Fred*: Ja, dass man immer wieder neue Menschen kennenlernen darf, kann. Und da womöglich auch Freundschaften entstehen. Es gibt auch schon etliche Kunden, wo ich auch sage, dass es eigentlich auch mittlerweile Freunde statt Kunden geworden sind. 77-82*

	Does however criticize the change he feels his company has undergone in recent years. Criticizes that top management no longer has frontline experience, is less understanding for frontline employees (135-141). Feels his company is less customer-oriented and more efficiency- and profit-oriented. George: *"And so, in recent years, that is being changed more and more. You don't have the same contact person, the same clerk, who is responsible for everything. (...) These days it's all spread out. (...) You don't have the same contact to people anymore and I would find that difficult."*[199] George: *"Success mostly means that the customer base is kept and extended. That there are limits at some point is an idea that no management of any insurance has anymore, although it is getting more and more specific: have the good ones, we don't want the bad ones."*[200] George: *"These days, because of computer technology it's more and more the case. And for me, the treatment of the insured is less personal. What I said before, this one you have to call three times a year, that one once, , that one not at all. It has something to do with costs and the interest in the insured. It did not use to be like that."*[201] So, while in general he talks well about his company and states feeling supported by it, he does not agree with several changes in policy and the treatment of customers that have come into effect in recent years. He enjoyed his job describes it as interesting (29-30).	pany in recent years High JS
Harry	Special case - Harry is managing director of his company as well as working on the frontline. Speaks very well of his company, sees it as very customer-friendly and supportive of employees (34-44, 313-318, 400-404).	High POS
Ian	Speaks well of his company (332-354), feels responsible to company. Mentions little support by company, reports feeling unprepared for first customer contacts. Interviewer: *"Are there talks about how the customer contact goes? Are there procedures that are specified or do you just go to a customer*	Low POS but high commitment High JS

[199] George*: Und so, in den letzten Jahren, das wird immer mehr, wird das alles im Prinzip umgestellt. Man hat nicht mehr den gleichen Ansprechpartner, einen Sachbearbeiter, der für alles zuständig ist. (...) Heute ist alles gestreut. (...) Man hat nicht mehr den Kontakt zu den Leuten und das ist, was mir heute schwer fallen würde, heute. 9-14*

[200] George*: Erfolgreich heißt überwiegend, dass der Mitgliederbestand bestehen bleibt, besser gesagt, wächst. Dass irgendwo mal Grenzen da sind, die Idee gibt es bei keiner Geschäftsführung bei irgendeiner Versicherung mehr. Wobei es jetzt immer spezifischer wird: die Guten haben, die Schlechten wollen wir nicht. 234-237*

[201] George*: Ach ja, heute, durch diese Computertechnik ist das auch mehr und mehr da. Und für mich wird eigentlich die Behandlung der Versicherten unpersönlicher. Was ich am Anfang schon so gesagt habe, den soll man dreimal im Jahr anrufen, den zweimal, den einmal und gar nicht. Das hat eigentlich mit den Kosten und dem Interesse an dem Versicherten zu tun. Das gab es früher nicht. 660-663*

	and what happens is totally open?" Ian: *"Yes, you are thrown into the deep end a little. You have an audit manager, who sort of manages the team locally, but yes, you do go to the customer without any real guidelines to follow."*[202] Reports liking his job, customer contact described as fun (294-295).	
John	Does not feel well supported by his company, particularly by the company management. Feels that the management expects trainers to carry out too many, in part conflicting roles. John reports that his job is not only training customers, but fetching keys, taking on administrative tasks, serving refreshments and similar customer service jobs (296-304; 311-326). He also has to talk to customers about outstanding membership fees (274-295). John feels this makes it very hard to concentrate on what he sees as his main job - to ensure the health and safety of his customers (254-262; 274-295). Feels his company management's main concern is a high membership rate, not the quality of the service offered to existing customers (254-262). John: *"What is a bit of a mistake here is that we, that the fulltime employees, that they have to take on administrative tasks as well, and that the training methods fall by the wayside. Because they then don't have to do only trainer things but also catering, which takes away from looking after customers in the training area. So we are back at how to save money, and I can save money if the trainer works behind the bar as well every now and again. Which ends up not only being every now and again but a considerable amount of time, where I have to say the trainer should be in the training area and train, maybe not all the time, that is not necessary, but more frequently than is the case with us."*[203] Feels well supported by his immediate superior, but let down by the company. (254-262). Enjoys his job (184-190; 346-348).	Low POS High JS
Lewis	Mentions support and training aids for employees (65-71). Otherwise mentions company very little, but does point out that he wants to have a career and wants his company to evaluate him positively (199-204). Does not directly refer to job satisfaction.	High POS

[202]Interviewerin*: Gibt's da vorher Gespräche darüber wie der Kundenkontakt abläuft? Gibt's da Abläufe, die irgendwie spezifiziert werden oder geht man einfach zum Kunden und dann ist alles ganz offen was passiert?*

Ian*: Ja, also da wird man schon ein bisschen ins kalte Wasser geworfen. Man hat so seinen Prüfungsleiter, der quasi das Team dann auch vor Ort leitet, aber man geht da schon jetzt ohne große Vorgaben zum Kunden. 20-30*

[203] John*: Was bei uns auch noch ein bisschen ein Fehler ist, dass wir die Hauptamtlichen, also die gerade auch diese kaufmännische Tätigkeit mit übernehmen, und dass die Trainingsmethode in dem Fall ein bisschen auf der Strecke bleibt. Weil die dann nicht nur die Trainersachen zu erledigen haben sondern auch noch die Gastronomie übernehmen, was halt ein bisschen unter der Betreuung auf der Fläche leidet. Ja jetzt sind wir wieder bei dem Thema, wo kann ich Geld sparen, und Geld kann ich dann sparen, wenn ich sage: ‚Ah der Trainer kann ja auch mal zwischendurch da an die Theke gehen'. Was dann auch nicht nur zwischendurch ist, sondern ein großer Teil der Zeit, wo man dann aber auch sagen muss, der Trainer sollte eigentlich auf der Fläche sein und trainieren, vielleicht nicht permanent, das muss auch nicht sein, aber vielleicht öfter, als es bei uns gegeben ist. 296-304*

Matthew	Speaks very little of his company. Does not feel well supported, criticizes a number of company policies, actions or management behaviors. Matthew describes these mainly in terms of how they impact his own work and whether they cause him extra effort or other forms of inconvenience. For example, he complains 0about projects in which he is left alone in an office at the customer company and has to go to lunch alone, or cannot learn anything new (160-172) or that he has to adjust his working hours to project partners' preferences (85-92). Does not directly mention job satisfaction, but spends much time in the interview complaining about various facets of the job.	Low POS Low JS
Nicolas	Special case as he is store manager as well as working on frontline. Sales trainings provided to help frontline employees, company has its own training academy, new employees sent to special stores where they are offered continued training and advice (60-71). Does not directly address job satisfaction.	High POS
Olivia	Speaks much of commitment and responsibility towards company, of protecting company from fraudulent customers (62-75). Does not directly address POS, but does speak of a lot of conflict between her work - assessing frontline employee decisions and green lighting or overturning their decisions regarding customers (e.g. whether a credit is granted) - and the frontline employees. Does not directly address job satisfaction.	POS and JS unclear, but high commitment.
Phoebe	Does not feel well supported by the company, gets difficult and emotionally draining tasks and feels the company does not care how they are done. Phoebe: *"We have weekly team meetings and there the numbers, the statistic, as well as the objectives are announced. They buy, the company buys vocational training places and those are then presented by the team leaders. And then it is a case of: 'There are so and so many places and now make sure that you fill those places by that and that time'."*[204] Speaks of her job as being stressful, particularly as being emotionally draining (170-172).	Low POS Low JS
Quinn	Complains of little organizational support, particularly after recent management change (47-59; 201-211; 212-225). Quinn: *"Well I can definitely say that the atmosphere was a thousand times better when I started working here than now. I think it has to do with the management change two years ago, we have a much higher work load, before we used to have a little time between calls, so you could drink something, or read something. We have always had telephone queues, but now you log in and then you are on the phone for five hours nonstop without the calls letting off a bit in-between, be-*	Low POS Low JS

[204] Phoebe*: Also es gibt ja wöchentliche Teamsitzungen und da werden neben Zahlen, also statistischen Zahlen auch immer diese Vorgaben bekannt gegeben. Da kauft … ja, das Unternehmen Maßnahmen ein und dann werden die vorgestellt durch die Teamleiter und dann wird halt gesagt: ‚So und so viele Plätze in der Maßnahme so, so und so viele in der und jetzt seht zu bis zum soundsovielten müssen die Plätze dann vergeben sein'. 86-92*

	cause the work load has just been upped so much. And that is definitely a point where, not just me, but many of us think, no that is just stupid and very annoying."[205] Also reports that regulations have got stricter and that supervisors have also been told to be stricter (212-225). Quinn says that she used to enjoy working but now just makes sure she gets through her work (225-266). She also reports that she does not really believe management statements any more. Quinn: *"It really is the work load and that just really is no longer, well they always present it nicely with their numbers and try to sell it to us during the staff meetings but at some point you just don't really want any more."*[206] She also reports that she does not feel appreciated by her company (312-336), that she no longer likes working there and will be leaving soon (267-271) and that she no longer has a good opinion of the company (271).	
Rebecca	Does not feel supported by her company, assumes her boss would not stand by her and help her in case of difficulties (216-226; 230-235; 281-303; 423-433; 576-597). Rebecca: *"I think it is a feeling of loyalty, because with my boss I just don't have the feeling that he is loyal to me, I don't feel that if I had a problem he would have my back. So I think I would feel more loyal if I thought the other person felt that way as well. That he looks out for my interests even if it is difficult for them. (…) And a little more apprecia-tion, more consideration, I don't think they do that at all here."*[207] Has the feeling that employees often take on extra work to balance organiza-tional difficulties. Believes the high intrinsic motivation of her colleagues and herself often lets the company look better in front of customers than it actually is (391-411). Rebecca: *"I think it is also good for him [her boss], because I think most people that work there (…) are fairly intrinsically motivated, they have a relationship with people [the customers] and like them, so that I think when push comes to shove they do whatever it is that shows the*	Low POS High JS, despite some difficulties

[205] Quinn*: Also ich kann auf jeden Fall sagen das Klima, als ich bei dem Unternehmen angefangen habe, war tausendmal besser als wie es jetzt ist, hat glaub ich auch mit diesem Managementwechsel zu tun, der vor zwei Jahren war, also wir haben viel mehr Auslastungszeiten, also früher hatte man mal zwischen den Anrufen meis-tens noch ein bisschen Zeit, wo man was trinken konnte, oder auch was lesen konnte. Diese Warteschleifen gab es schon immer (…), aber mittlerweile ist es so: man loggt sich ins Telefon ein und telefoniert dann fünf Stunden am Stück durch, ohne dass es mal eben ein bisschen weniger wird, weil die Auslastung immer höher gefahren wurde. Und das ist auf jeden Fall ein Punkt, wo viele, jetzt nicht nur ich, wo wir denken, nö also das ist jetzt einfach blöd und echt nervig. 201-211*

[206] Quinn*: Ist halt wirklich diese Auslastung und das ist halt einfach nicht mehr irgendwo - also klar, die stellen das mit ihren Zahlen immer schön dar und so und versuchen das auf der Betriebsversammlung immer gut und schön zu reden, aber irgendwann hat man echt keine Lust mehr. 259-261*

[207] Rebecca*: Ich glaub halt auch so ein Gefühl von Loyalität, weil ich hab einfach bei meinem Chef nicht so das Gefühl, dass der zu mir loyal ist, ich hab einfach nicht das Gefühl, wenn ich jetzt in der Klemme wäre, dass der sich für mich stark machen würde. So also ich glaube ich würde mich loyaler fühlen, wenn ich das Gefühl hätte, der andere tut es auch. Also er vertritt irgendwie meine Interessen auch, wenn es für ihn vielleicht auch unbe-quem ist. (…) Und ich glaub halt schon auch mehr Wertschätzung, also mehr Rücksicht, das finde ich halt ma-chen die überhaupt nicht. 587-594*

	company in a good light. I do think that leads to the therapists [the employees] carrying a lot of weight on their own shoulders, so that they do extra hours or finish writing an application [for therapy sessions] on the weekend."[208] Says that her company has unfair regulations regarding sick leave, and that most employees are only there a short time (the company also is a training facility, so most employees leave after completing a two year training course). She believes this benefits the company, as there are few problems with sick leave or burnout of employees (412-422). *Rebecca: "And of course that means that if something goes wrong he [her boss] is not informed immediately and that he isn't really confronted with everything that makes people unhappy. And I think that because people are only here for such a short time and we have such shitty policies for sick leave"* *Interviewer: "So short means?"* *Rebecca: "Two years or so (...) so you don't have these problems with burnout, that people call in sick, we have such a shitty sick leave policy, so I think on the whole he [the boss] is doing fine out of it."*[209] Feels let down by the company in a situation where a mistake by both her and the company led to difficulties with a customer. Felt she had to sort this problem out by herself and that her company accepted no responsibility for their mistake (281-303, see also chapter 6.2.7). Rebecca reports enjoying her job on the whole, despite some difficulties. Enjoys working with people, likes her colleagues and the flexibility her job offers (612-624).	
Sarah	On the whole feels well supported by her company, feels that the rules set up by the company make sense for her as well and generally work in her interests. *Sarah: "On the whole I find it, well it makes sense to me too, that everything is documented properly, that I keep to my times (...) that is a*	High POS

[208] Rebecca*: Ich glaub schon ,dass es auch gut für ihn ist, weil ich glaube die meisten Leute, die da arbeiten (...) sind ziemlich intrinsisch von sich aus motiviert und haben auch eine Beziehung zu den Leuten und mögen die Leute, so dass man glaub ich im Zweifel, dann schon das macht , was das Unternehmen ganz gut dastehenen lässt. Also ich glaub das führt schon dazu, dass man, dass halt die Therapeuten relativ viel auf den eigenen Schultern ausbaden so, also dass man dann Überstunden macht oder was für die Leute macht, das man eigentlich nicht machen müsste oder den Antrag am Wochenende schreibt. 391-411*

[209] Rebecca*: Und klar, natürlich führt es dazu, dass wenn was schief läuft, er nicht sofort informiert wird und es führt jetzt schon auch dazu, dass man ihn halt echt nicht so richtig konfrontiert mit dem, was alles unzufrieden macht. Aber ich glaube, dadurch dass die Leute nur so kurz hier sind und wir so Scheiß-Regelungen mit Kranksein haben*.

Interviewerin*: So kurz bedeutet?*

Rebecca*: Zwei Jahre oder so (...), dadurch hat man jetzt nicht so diese Probleme mit Burn-Out, dass die Leute sich dann krank melden, wir haben so eine Scheiß-Krankheitsregelung, also ich glaub eigentlich ist er im größten Teil fein raus. 412-420*

	bother for me too, looking at my time management, so I would not say that I disagree."[210] *Sarah: "Well, I would say that I sympathize more with the customer, but I think that if I deviate from the rules I am supposed to stick to, that my employer gives me, I think that works out really stupidly for me."*[211] On the whole speaks well of her company, although she does sometimes feel embarrassed in front of customers because of problems with her company's procedures or the rooms she works in (190-222). Does not directly refer to job satisfaction, but speaks well of her job.	
Thomas	Speaks of responsibility towards the company, feels he owes the company loyalty as they pay his salary. Thomas*: "My employer directly pays for my wages and the customer only indirectly, really. And therefore the profit of my own company comes before the profit of, well, profit might be too monetary a term, but let's say the company I work for comes before ... well that is simply a decision on principles."*[212] Unclear if he feels supported by his company. Reports not having liked his job as a frontline employee because he felt he was always doing the same routine tasks and he found his work emotionally draining, but not cognitively challenging. Has since switched to another position with the same company (68-79).	POS unclear, but expresses feeling of loyalty. Low JS

Roughly half of the interview partners reported high levels of perceived organizational support (ten of nineteen), with the other half reporting low levels of perceived organizational support. In many cases the level of perceived organizational support corresponded to the level of job satisfaction, but there were also several exceptions. Sometimes the level of job satisfaction was unclear in the interview, in other cases it was opposite to the level of perceived organizational support (for example, Rebecca had a low level of perceived organizational support, but a high level of job satisfaction).

The tables below (tables 25 – 27) group the interview partners according to the reported levels of perceived organizational support and job satisfaction and give an overview of the ways in which frontline employees responded to role conflict situations.

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[210] Sarah: *Aber im Großen und Ganzen finde ich schon, also für mich macht das ja auch Sinn, dass das ordentlich dokumentiert wird, sonst, oder dass ich meine Zeiten einhalte (...) , das ist ja für mich auch blöd, von meiner zeitlichen Planung her eigentlich, also würde ich jetzt nicht sagen, dass ich denen so widerspreche. 110-112*

[211] Sarah: *Also ich würd schon sagen, dass ich eher mit den Kunden sympathisiere, wobei aber wenn ich wirklich jetzt von Regeln, die ich einhalten sollte, abweiche, die der Arbeitgeber mir setzt, das glaube ich ist für mich persönlich immer eigentlich blöd.288-290*

[212] Thomas: *Mein Arbeitgeber ist mein direkter Zahler meines Gehalts und der Kunde ist ja nur der indirekte eigentlich. Und deswegen steht für mich eigentlich der Profit des eigenen Unternehmens über dem des, okay, Profit ist vielleicht zu monetär gesagt, aber sagen wir mal, das Unternehmen, für das ich arbeite, steht über denen.....ja und das ist einfach eine grundsätzliche Einstellung. 166-169*

Table 25 : Ways of Dealing with Role Conflict by Frontline Employees with High Levels of Perceived Organizational Support and Job Satisfaction

	Siding with company (see also chapter 6.2.1)	**Compromise** (see also chapter 6.2.3)	**Siding with customer** (see also chapter 6.2.2)	**Other approaches to role conflict** (see also chapter 6.2.4 - chapter 6.2.7)
FLEs with **high levels** of **perceived organizational support** and **job satisfaction**				
David	Reports siding with the company, a need to adhere to rules, even when unfair to customer. Especially likely to do this if he thinks customer is unfair to company.	Aims to find solution that is satisfactory for company and customer.	Reports trying to help customers in role conflict situations, if he perceives customers as honest and 'deserving'.	Avoidance - withdrawal from situation, passing on responsibility for deciding on how to handle the situation to the company.
Fred	Reports generally siding with company, but also sees company offers as usually fair.	-	Will not offer products his company is pushing to customers, if he does not see them as good for customers.	Invests extra time in checking services offered to customers that are personally important to him.
George	Generally sees company to be in the right – will side with company.	-	If he feels customers' claims or interests to be legitimate, will side with them. Goes as far as openly siding with customer against company.	Deceit – helps customers write an objection to company decision (without company knowledge). Avoidance - passes on some decisions to company.

David, Fred and George all made statements in their interviews that can be linked to high levels of perceived organizational support and job satisfaction. Based on the social exchange theory arguments made at the beginning of this chapter (see also chapter 4.1.1.), this should result in a greater readiness to show pro-organizational behaviors and feelings. Siding with the company in situations of role conflict could be one such pro-organizational behavior.

The results however, offer little support for this proposition. What is noticeable is that all three frontline employees will side with the customer if they feel that the customer's interests are fair and legitimate or that supporting the company over the customer would be unfair. When siding with the company, this is also explained mainly in terms of whether or not they believe the company's interests or claim to be legitimate or fair. This aspect has already been discussed in chapter 6.3. on factors relating to the frontline employees themselves, particularly in the chapter on personal values (6.3.2.). There is however no clear indication that high perceived organizational support and job satisfaction lead to a greater likelihood of siding with the company.

The next table (table 26) looks at frontline employees with high levels of perceived organizational support and unclear or low levels of job satisfaction.

Table 26 : Ways of Dealing with Role Conflict by Frontline Employees with High Levels of Perceived Organizational Support and Unclear or Low Job Satisfaction

	Siding with company (see also chapter 6.2.1)	**Compromise** (see also chapter 6.2.3)	**Siding with customer** (see also chapter 6.2.2)	**Other approaches to role conflict** (see also chapter 6.2.4 - chapter 6.2.7)
Frontline employees with **high levels** of **perceived organizational support** and **unclear or low levels** of **job satisfaction**				
Brian (JS unclear)	Reports generally keeping to company rules and guidelines.	-	-	Voice- addresses certain role conflict situations with company to try and change the situation. Using personal resources to be able to fulfill both company and customer expectations.
Harry (JS unclear)	Almost always sides with company, sees company interests as fair and legitimate.	-	-	Avoidance - passing on responsibility for decision to customer
Lewis (JS un-	Selling more products, different products to what he believes	Resorts to compromise sometimes to try and make situation	Will side with the customer if he feels doing otherwise would be	Distancing - emotionally from customer, "just the way

clear)	would be best for customer (235-244),	easier for customers.	immoral.	it is" attitude. Deceit - presenting information to customer in such a way as to create impression that interests have been looked after more than actually the case.
Nicolas (JS unclear)	Mostly sides with the company, believes loyalty and self-interest of frontline employees best served this way.	Compromise also addressed, by trying to find win-win situations for customers and company.	-	-
Olivia (JS unclear)	Generally adheres to rules, even when unfair to customer. Rules seen as necessary and in her own and other customers' interests. Especially likely to side with company if she thinks customer unfair or unpleasant.	-	Sides with customer in exceptional cases if she feels company rules would be highly unfair to customer and that the risks the rules are designed to protect against do not apply.	Avoidance - aims to distance herself emotionally from customers to protect objectivity, to enable her to do her job well.
Sarah (JS unclear)	Reports generally keeping to company rules and guidelines.	Resorts to compromise sometimes to try and make situation easier for customers (e.g. 361-383).	Reports having sided with customer once in order to help customer, when she did not see company rule as sensible and saw no real harm to company interests (223-232).	Avoidance - distances herself from conflict situations emotionally, "just the way it is" attitude.
Thomas (JS low)	Reports looking after company interests more than customer interests (160-	-	Only rarely, only when in long-term interests of company (140-156).	-

	163).			

The findings presented in this table are more supportive of the proposition that high perceived organizational support leads to a greater likelihood of siding with the company. Four of the seven frontline employees in this table report generally siding with the company with few exceptions. Brian and Harry generally side with the company or use additional strategies, such as voice, avoidance and using personal resources to solve a role conflict. They do not report using either compromise or siding with the customer. Nicolas also mainly sides with the company or looks to make a compromise that still offers both company and customer a benefit. Thomas reported only one example in which he sided with a customer, believing it to be in the best interests long-term for the company. The other three frontline employees with high perceived organizational support, Lewis, Olivia and Sarah, show a wider variety of behaviors in role conflict situations, but still report siding with the company as their main strategy. Compromise and siding with the customer are presented more as exceptions than the rule. These exceptions are often explained in terms of fairness or personal values (see 6.3.2.).

Considering that only Thomas reported low job satisfaction and that the level of job satisfaction for the other six interview partners could not be clearly established, it makes sense to look at the data presented in tables 25 and 26 together. For seven of the ten frontline employees with high perceived organizational support, siding with the company was the main strategy for dealing with role conflict, with few exceptions. This indicates that there may be a positive relationship between perceived organizational support and siding with the company, but that several other factors (such as the perceived fairness or legitimacy of a claim) also play an important role. This relationship could be explored more in further research, possibly using quantitative methods.

Turning to the frontline employees that reported low levels of perceived organizational support, social exchange theory predicts that these employees will try to lessen their input into the exchange relationship. Low levels of perceived organizational support indicate that the employees feel they are getting less out of the relationship, and therefore will try to restore a balance by in turn reducing their input (Blau 1964; see also chapter 4.3).

This could involve reducing work effort, being less willing to engage in pro-organizational behaviors and more willing to engage in behaviors that are harmful to the organization as well as reduced feelings of organizational identification. While much of the empirical research focuses on the outcomes of positive organizational perceptions (such as perceived organizational support, organizational justice, etc.; for example (Aselage and Eisenberger 2003; Bettencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie 2005; De Coninck and Johnson 2009; Moorman, Niehof, and Organ 1993; see also Gibney, Zagenczyk, and Masters 2009) there is also some support for the proposition that negative employee perceptions of an organization lead to negative behaviors. For example, research by Gibney, Zagenczyk, and Masters (2009) found that perceived organizational obstruction, which refers to an employee's belief that the organization hinders the achievement of personal goals and is detrimental to his or her well-being, was significantly related to employee loyalty and strongly related to job neglect. Job neglect involves reduced effort and emotional involvement in the job (Rusbult, Zembrodt, and Gunn 1982). Perceived organizational obstruction was also found to lead to lower organizational identification (Gibney et al. 2011)[213]. Ambrose, Seabright and Schminke (2002) found that organizational injustice was a strong predictor for sabotage behaviors, including those targeting the organization.

In terms of this research project, low perceived organizational support could lead to siding against the company as a form of retaliation or sabotage, or lower the likelihood of siding with the company as a way of reducing pro-organizational behavior. However, other scenarios are also possible. As pointed out above, low perceived organizational effort can also result in job neglect (Gibney, Zagenczyk, and Masters 2009), involving reduced effort and emotional involvement. If siding with the company is the easiest way of resolving a role conflict, involving the least effort on the side of the employee, then low perceived organizational support may actually increase the likelihood of siding with the company. If low perceived organizational support also leads to lower emotional investment in the job (Gibney, Zagenczyk, and Masters 2009) and a distancing from the organization (Gibney et al. 2011), then this could also result in less role conflict. Lower empathy with the customer has been shown to reduce role conflict (Varca 2009), so that other forms of less emotional involvement could also do so.

Table 27 gives an overview of the ways of dealing with role conflict reported by frontline employees with low levels of perceived organizational support.

[213] It should be pointed out that Gibney, Zagenczyk and Masters (2009) differentiate between low perceived organizational support and perceived organizational obstruction. In other words, they discriminate between neutral or unsupportive relationships, in which employees do not feel supported, and negative relationships, in which employees feel in some way harmed by the organization. In their study they found that employees do differentiate between perceptions of organizational support (or lack thereof) and organizational obstruction. In this study, perceived organizational support and obstruction were not treated as separate constructs, as often the information in the interviews was insufficient to do so and interview partners related both instances of a lack of support as well as instances in which they felt harmed or mistreated. In the context of this study, therefore, low perceived organizational support can refer to neutral assessments of the support as well as negative ones.

Table 27 : Ways of Dealing with Role Conflict by Frontline Employees with Low Levels of Perceived Organizational Support

	Siding with company (see also chapter 6.2.1)	**Compromise** (see also chapter 6.2.3)	**Siding with customer** (see also chapter 6.2.2)	**Other approaches to role conflict** (see also chapter 6.2.4 - chapter 6.2.7)
Frontline employees with **low levels** of **perceived organizational support** and **low levels** of **job satisfaction**				
Charles	Reports feeling he sometimes has to side with the company, against his inclination (319-324).	Reports compromising often to try and address interests of both customer and company.	Reports not offering certain products to customers if he feels they are not in the customers' interests.	Deceit - selectively presenting information from company on how role conflict was handled.
Eric	Reports generally keeping to company rules and guidelines. Balancing interests of customers and company. Also decides against unfriendly or aggressive customers (261-271).	-	-	Withdrawal – Emotional withdrawal from customer main method of coping with role conflict reported (175-193;237-247;291-293). Invests extra time into cases of customers in some instances (mainly due to empathy; 248-260)
Matthew	Selling more than the FLE feels the customer needs.	-	-	-
Phoebe	Reports sometimes siding with the company, need to adhere to rules even when unfair to customer	Resorts to compromise sometimes to try and make situation easier for customers.	Sides with customer when she feels compassion to be important. Wants to keep "human" side in her job.	Deceit - hiding information from company on how role conflict was handled.
Quinn	Reports generally adhering to rules.	-	Works with customer to exploit or sidestep com-	Avoidance - distances herself emotionally from com-

			pany rules.	pany.
Frontline employees with **low levels** of **perceived organizational support** and **unclear or high levels** of **job satisfaction**				
Andrew (JS unclear)	Reports sometimes siding with the company.	Reports compromising often to try and address interests of both customer and company.	Reports not offering certain products to customers if he feels they are not in the customers interests.	Avoidance - passing on responsibility for deciding on how to handle the situation to the customer.
Ian (High JS)	Reports always following company guidelines .	-	-	-
John (High JS)	Reports usually adhering to company rules and guidelines			Voice – addresses problems and conflict situations with both company and customers. Avoidance - emotionally distances himself from conflict situations.
Rebecca (High JS)	Reports generally adhering to rules.	Resorts to compromise sometimes to try and make situation easier for customers.	Sides with customers when she feels protecting or looking after customer to be more important.	Deceit - hiding information from company on how role conflict was handled. Uses personal resources to fulfill both rules of company and expectation of customer. Voice - informing customer of potential conflicts.

Charles, Phoebe and Quinn, all with low levels of perceived organizational support and job satisfaction, report several instances of siding against the company and with the customer. Charles also reports using compromise frequently as a method of dealing with role conflict. Eric however reports usually siding with the company, using avoidance to help cope with role conflict situations. Matthew always sides with the company and reports no other strategies. Ian and John have low levels of perceived organizational support, but report high levels of job satisfaction. Both always side with the company, with John reporting voice and avoidance as additional strategies. It is possible that job satisfaction here takes the place of perceived organizational support. However, Rebecca also reports high job satisfaction despite low levels of perceived organizational support. Her strategies for dealing with role conflict are much more varied. Finally, Andrew's case supports the prediction that low perceived organizational support makes not siding with the company more likely.

All in all, of the nine frontline employees reporting low levels of perceived organizational support, five can be said to be less likely to side with the company and instead use other strategies such as compromise or siding with the customer. Of the four employees reporting usually siding with the company, two report high job satisfaction, which indicates that they view the overall exchange relationship as positive. However, the other two, Eric and Matthew, report both low levels or perceived organizational support and job satisfaction.

The findings therefore indicate that knowing the level of perceived organizational support in itself is not sufficient to be able to predict employees' behavior in role conflict situation. High levels of perceived support do seem to increase the likelihood of siding with the company, but other factors such as the employee's perception of the fairness of legitimacy of the demands of the involved parties also play an important role.

Looking at individual cases rather than an overall picture, there is some indication that perceived organizational support and the relationship to the company in general can influence the decision of how to react to a role conflict situation. Some of the interviewed frontline employees cited their relationship with their company as a reason for deciding for - or against - siding with the company.

In those cases where a positive relationship with the company was used to explain why frontline employees side with the company, feelings of loyalty and a sense of responsibility and obligation were most often discussed. For example, Ian, who works for an auditing firm, explains that one of the reasons he sides with the company and keeps to company regulations in situations of role conflict, is the responsibility he feels towards his firm.

> Ian: *"... there is a responsibility to shareholders to really ensure that everything is in order. That really is my responsibility towards myself, but also towards others, such as shareholders or stakeholders. That is a responsibility that I bear. And of course also for the name of my company for which I work, there is a responsibility that the job done in the name of my company is done well.* [214]

[214] Ian: *Jetzt gegenüber den Aktionären, das ist schon die Verantwortung, die man hat, dass man sich also wirklich davon überzeugen muss, dass alles in Ordnung ist. Also das ist schon so meine Verantwortung, die ich mir dann selber und vielleicht gegenüber Dritten, wie Aktionären dann auch zum Beispiel auch noch sehr, dass sie oder den anderen Shareholdern, oder Stakeholdern, da ist schon die Verantwortung, die ich dann da, die ich*

Olivia also speaks of feelings of loyalty and responsibility towards her company that lead to her siding with the company when looking at potentially conflicting interests and demands of company and customer.

> Olivia: *"By approaching things in a more critical manner, because in the end I have to be loyal to my employer and identify risks, check things and find discrepancies. (...) So you have to approach every case being very critical, no matter how fine it looks. To protect your employer."*[215]

Thomas explains the fact that he almost always sides with the company with the fact that they pay his wages. This involves self-interest, as his firm's financial well-being can impact his own (see chapter 6.3.3), but possibly also a sense of obligation. His firm is paying him for his work; therefore he looks out for their interests.

> Thomas: "*Essentially I would say I represent my company's interest more than those of the customer, for every customer. There are exceptions, as I said, but really it is the case for all customers. (...)My employer directly pays for my wages and the customer only indirectly, really. And therefore the profit of my own company comes before the profit of, well, profit might be too monetary a term, but let's say the company I work for comes before … well that is simply a decision on principles."* [216]

There were also cases where a negative relationship with the company was cited as a reason not to side with the company, or even to actively side against it. The two cases in which this was most clearly articulated were those of Rebecca and Quinn. As described in table 27, Rebecca does not feel well supported by her company. She assumes her superior would not help and support her in case of problems or difficulties (Rebecca 216-226; 230-235; 281-303; 423-433; 576-597). When asked what she believes companies can do to encourage frontline employees to take their side in situations of role conflict, she responds that companies should instill feelings of loyalty by being loyal. She states that she believes she would act more loyal towards the company, if she felt surer of similar behavior by the company.

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dann trage. Andererseits natürlich auch im Namen meiner Firma, für die ich ja agiere, da ist natürlich die Verantwortung, dass ich den Job im Namen der Firma vernünftig mache. 332-347

[215] Olivia: *Wenn man an die Sachen auch kritischer rangeht, weil im Endeffekt muss ich ja meinem Arbeitgeber gegenüber ja loyal sein und Gefahren aufdecken, und nachgucken und Unstimmigkeiten finden. (...) Also man muss an jeden Fall, auch wenn er noch so rosa aussieht, halt eben kritisch ran gehen. Irgendwie auch, um halt eben seinen Arbeitgeber zu schützen. 63-73*

[216] Thomas: *Also im Grunde genommen ist es, dass ich die Interessen meines Unternehmens vertrete eher als die des Kunden, bei jedem Kunden. Es gibt Ausnahmen, wie ich es gerade gesagt habe, aber eigentlich ist es bei allen Kunden. (...) Mein Arbeitgeber ist mein direkter Zahler meines Gehalts und der Kunde ist ja nur der indirekte eigentlich. Und deswegen steht für mich eigentlich der Profit des eigenen Unternehmens über dem des, okay Profit ist vielleicht zu monetär gesagt, aber sagen wir mal das Unternehmen, für das ich arbeite, steht über denen.....ja und das ist einfach eine grundsätzliche Einstellung. 160-169*

Rebecca: *"I think it is a feeling of loyalty, because with my boss I just don't have the feeling that he is loyal to me, I don't feel that if I had a problem he would have my back. So I think I would feel more loyal if I thought the other person felt that way as well. That he looks out for my interests even if it is difficult for them. (...) And a little more appreciation, more consideration, I don't think they do that at all here."*[217]

Quinn feels badly treated by her management. She states that changes in management have made her work and the situation for employees in general more stressful and difficult.

Quinn: *"Well I can definitely say that the atmosphere was a thousand times better when I started working here than now. I think it has to do with the management change two years ago, we have a much higher work load, before we used to have a little time between calls, so you could drink something, or read something. We have always had telephone queues, but now you log in and then you are on the phone for five hours nonstop without the calls letting off a bit in-between, because the work load has just been upped so much. And that is definitely a point where, not just me, but many of us think, no that is just stupid and very annoying."*[218]

She states that she used to have five minutes of paid break time every hour, as a chance to go to the toilet, drink something or simply recuperate a little. She goes on to say that that time is not available to the employees any more, and that she and other employees make an effort to find such time for themselves to balance the situation a little (Quinn, 221-225). She also says that the changes in her work situation due to a new management lead her to side more with the customer.

Quinn: *"So you sort of have to act a little, I don't know if it's crappy, but there is a reason for it, the atmosphere just isn't what it used to be. Also our superiors,*

[217] Rebecca*: Ich glaub halt auch so ein Gefühl von Loyalität, weil ich hab einfach bei meinem Chef nicht so das Gefühl, dass der zu mir loyal ist, ich hab einfach nicht das Gefühl, wenn ich jetzt in der Klemme wäre, dass der sich für mich stark machen würde. So also ich glaube ich würde mich loyaler fühlen, wenn ich das Gefühl hätte, der andere tut es auch. Also er vertritt irgendwie meine Interessen auch, wenn es für ihn vielleicht auch unbequem ist. (...) Und ich glaub halt schon auch mehr Wertschätzung, also mehr Rücksicht, das finde ich halt machen die überhaupt nicht. 587-594*

[218] Quinn*: Also ich kann auf jeden Fall sagen das Klima, als ich bei dem Unternehmen angefangen habe, war tausendmal besser als wie es jetzt ist, hat glaub ich auch mit diesem Managementwechsel zu tun, der vor zwei Jahren war, also wir haben viel mehr Auslastungszeiten, also früher hatte man mal zwischen den Anrufen meistens noch ein bisschen Zeit, wo man was trinken konnte, oder auch was lesen konnte. Diese Warteschleifen gab es schon immer (...), aber mittlerweile ist es so: man loggt sich ins Telefon ein und telefoniert dann fünf Stunden am Stück durch, ohne dass es mal eben ein bisschen weniger wird, weil die Auslastung immer höher gefahren wurde. Und das ist auf jeden Fall ein Punkt, wo viele, jetzt nicht nur ich, wo wir denken, nö also das ist jetzt einfach blöd und echt nervig. 201-211*

they all have been given much stricter guidelines on how they have to deal with what and that does lead you a bit more to the customer."[219]

A little later in the interview she says she finds it easier now to side with the customer. When customers call before midnight for next day's special offer, she is now much more inclined to take the order on, rather than tell the customer to call again after midnight, like she is supposed to.

> Interviewer: *"So it does happen, that you feel emotionally closer to the customer, feel more committed toward the customer than your company?"*
>
> Quinn: *"Yes. But as I said, that is the situation. Before I don't think I would have said it like this, but by now it really is the case that you'd rather do something nice for the customer than the company."*
>
> Interviewer*: "And that did not use to be the case? When the management was good, when it was fun, it was not like that?"*
>
> Quinn*:"No, exactly."*
>
> Interviewer*: "And can you see that in your own behavior, that you feel more likely to do so?"*
>
> Quinn*:"Yes, I think so. Before, you really said: 'No, it is not possible, please call again after midnight' or something like that. You would have said that probably. And now it is a case of:'Yes, just do it'. I would say that that is the case."*[220]

When asked what she thinks her company should do to ensure that employees are likely to take their side in a situation of role conflict, she says that the company should treat employees better and make them valued again. There is a definite sense of disappointment in how the

[219] Quinn*: Also man muss sich da so ein bisschen, ja was heißt doof verhalten, aber es hat schon so seinen Grund, oder das Klima ist einfach nicht mehr so wie früher. Auch mit den Vorgesetzten, die haben alle viel strengere Angaben mitbekommen, wie sei mit was umgehen müssen und das führt einen doch eher zum Kunden so ein bisschen. 222-225*

[220] Interviewerin*: Das heißt es kommt durchaus vor, dass man sich dem Kunden emotional näher fühlt, stärker dem Kunden verbunden fühlt als dem Unternehmen?*

Quinn*: Ja. Aber wie gesagt es ist durch das Umfeld. Früher hätte ich das glaub ich auch nie so gesagt, aber mittlerweile ist es echt so, dass man eher dem Kunden etwas Gutes tun würde, als jetzt so dem Unternehmen.*

Interviewerin*: Und das war früher nicht so? Also als das Management gut war, als es Spaß gemacht hat, war es nicht so?*

Quinn*: Ne, genau.*

Interviewerin*: Kannst du das auch an deinem eigenem Verhalten spiegeln, merkst du, dass du eher bereit bist?*

Quinn*: Ja also ich denke schon. Früher, da war es wirklich so, dass man gesagt hat: ‚Es ist jetzt nicht möglich und dann rufen sie bitte nochmal nach null Uhr an' oder sowas. Also hat man dann schon eher gesagt und jetzt ist es schon, ja mach mal einfach. Das würde ich schon sagen. 300-311* new management has changed the working atmosphere and conditions and in how she as an employee feels valued and treated by the company.

> Interviewer*: "What would the company have to do to prevent that happening in future?*
>
> Quinn*:"Well, I think that, as I said, to give people a little more rest, to show them, well, that they belong to the company, that is also gone lost a little I think, this feeling of belonging. You used to really feel that this job was important to the company somehow, because all the orders come in through us and that is just gone. You just feel like the small and stupid ones in the company, the lowest level. It's like: 'Yes, we need them, but it isn't like we show them that we appreciate their work'. That is totally gone. So you really just come to work and 'bye' and go home again. Before you used to go to the supervisor, and they would always deal with any questions or so and there was a good relationship, and I think it is important that the relationship improves again, and as I said the work load is sometimes just annoying. That would have to be gotten under control a little bit again."*[221]

In Quinn's case it can be said that she feels disappointed and angry at how the management has treated her. While the company was legally perfectly within its rights to change work regulations and their behavior regarding employees, there is a sense of feeling let down by the company in Quinn's descriptions. This fits well with the literature on breach of psychological contracts as an antecedent of deviant behaviors.

As outlined in chapter 4.3, a psychological contract refers to an individual's beliefs about the terms and reciprocal obligations of a particular exchange relationship (Morrison and Robinson 1997; Rousseau 1989). It is by definition informal and held solely by the employee (Morrison and Robinson 1997), existing only "in the eye of the beholder" (Rousseau 1995, p. 6). The organization and its agents, such as management, can be unaware of these expectations or

[221] Interviewerin*: Was müsste denn das Unternehmen tun, um zu verhindern, dass sowas in Zukunft passiert? Dass Sie eher die Seite zum Unternehmen hin wählen?*

Quinn*: Ja, ich denke mal, wie gesagt, wirklich den Leuten so ein bisschen mehr eher Ruhe sag ich mal geben, ein bisschen zeigen, dass man zum Unternehmen gehört, also das ist auch so ein bisschen verloren gegangen finde ich, diese Zugehörigkeit. Also früher hatte man wirklich das Gefühl gehabt, diese Stellen sind auch irgendwie wichtig für das Unternehmen, weil bei uns gehen nun mal die ganzen Bestellungen ein, und das ist irgendwie verloren gegangen. Man hat nur noch das Gefühl, man ist nur noch die Kleinen, Blöden im Unternehmen, also die unterste Stufe, ‚Die, ach ja die brauchen wir ja, aber die sind jetzt nicht so, dass wir denen jetzt auch mal zeigen, das wir irgendwie anerkennen die Arbeit', das ist halt schon überhaupt nicht mehr da. Von daher - man geht wirklich nur noch hin zur Arbeit und ‚Tschüss' und geht wieder. Früher ist man echt, dann zu denen, vorne sind halt immer die Supervisoren auch, und die kümmern sich immer, wenn Fragen sind oder so und hatten eigentlich immer ein recht gutes Verhältnis, also ich denke das ist doch wieder wichtig, dass das Verhältnis ein bisschen besser wird und wie gesagt, von diesen Auslastungen, das ist teilweise einfach nur nervig. Das müsste man auch wieder so ein bisschen in den Griff kriegen. 312-326* choose not to recognize them. If an employee feels his or her company has violated such an expectation, a breach of psychological contract can be said to have occurred (Rousseau 1995).

Breach of psychological contracts has been linked to work deviant behaviors (Bordia, Restubog, and Lang 2008; Jensen, Opland, and Ryan 2010), in other words to behaviors violating important organizational norms in a way that is potentially harmful to the organization or its members (Robinson and Bennett 1995). This can be seen as a way of restoring the balance or fairness of the relationship, in line with social exchange theory or as a form of revenge (Bordia, Restubog, and Lang 2008).

Siding against the company can be seen as a form of work deviant behavior, such as Quinn's violation of company regulations regarding ordering a special offer for a certain day on the day before.

In summary, it can be said that frontline employees' relationship with their company can influence their decision on how to deal with role conflict. Three of the interviewed frontline employees, Ian, Olivia and Thomas stated feelings of responsibility or loyalty towards their company as reasons for siding with the company. Rebecca and Quinn explained decisions of not siding with the company with feeling a lack of support and appreciation from their company. Both reported siding with the customer in situations of role conflict, Quinn even stating that she would rather side with customers than with the company. This fits well with what social exchange theory (Blau 1964, see also 4.1.1 and 4.3) would predict, in that positive perceptions of the employee-company relationship lead to pro-organizational behaviors, negative perceptions lead to counterproductive or harmful behaviors. However, when dividing the interview partners into groups according to whether they report feeling supported by their company or not, the results are ambiguous. Some employees describe both high levels of perceived organizational support and job satisfaction, yet also describe siding with the customer and other ways of dealing with role conflict than siding with the company. Conversely, only about half of the interview partners who described low levels of perceived organizational support frequently sought other ways of dealing with role conflict than siding with the company.

The relationship with the company can therefore be an important influence factor on the decision process of how to deal with role conflict, but by itself this information is insufficient to predict behaviors. What is clear is that for some frontline employees a positive relationship greatly increases the likelihood of siding with the company and protecting its interests above those of the customer. Negative perceptions of the relationship, such as a lack of support, increase the likelihood of not siding with the company and looking for alternative resolutions to role conflict.

This leads to the following propositions:

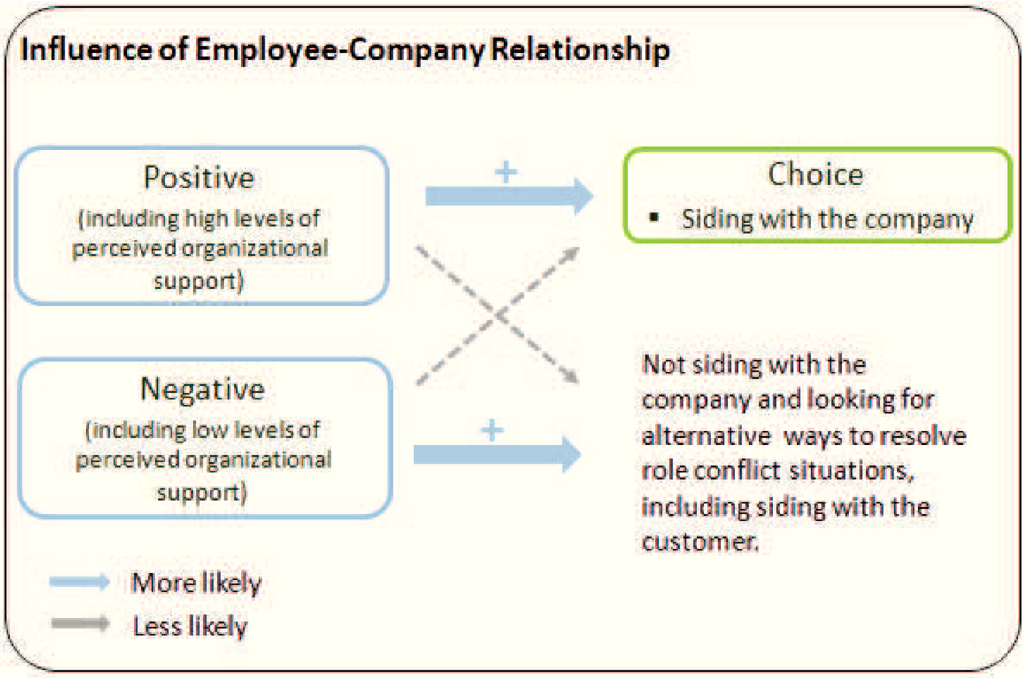
- Positive perceptions of the employee-company relationship increase the likelihood of frontline employees siding with the company in situations of role conflict.

And conversely:

- Negative perceptions of the employee-company relationship decrease the likelihood of frontline employees siding with the company in situations of role conflict.

These propositions are depicted in figure 31:

Figure 31: Influence of Employee-Company Relationship



6.5. Influencing Factors Related to the Customer

Employees' relationship to and perception of customers were an important aspect when interviewees discussed how they dealt with role conflict situations and their reasons for doing so. These aspects can be broadly divided into factors that make it more or less likely that frontline employees side with the customer or try to help in other ways, such as finding a compromise or using personal resources. The following two chapters will look at the factors influencing employees' decisions on dealing with role conflict that increase the likelihood of pro-customer decisions (6.5.1) and those that decrease it (6.5.2).

6.5.1. Influencing Factors Increasing the Likelihood of Pro-Customer Decisions in Role Conflict Situations

As part of the interview frontline employees were asked what customers should do or be like to increase the likelihood of the employees choosing to side with them or find other ways of helping them (see interview guide, chapter 5.3.1). Not only in answer to that direct question the interview partners described several aspects of the employee-customer relationship that impacted their decision. Four themes emerged during the analysis of the interviews:

- positive feelings towards the customer - including liking the customer, sympathy, empathy, rapport and friendship,
- perceiving customer interests as just and legitimate,
- feelings of responsibility towards the customer, particularly when customers trusted the frontline employee and/or there was a strong information asymmetry between the customer and the frontline employee, and
- feelings of obligation towards a customer due to benefits offered by that customer.

Liking someone, rapport, and friendship as influencing factors

By far the most common reason given by frontline employees for siding with customers or trying to protect their interests in a role conflict situation in some other way were feelings of rapport, sympathy and empathy. Over half of the interviewed employees mentioned positive feelings towards the customer as a reason for siding more with the customer.

In the interviews, the term used for this by the employees was the German expression "Sympathie". translate translation is difficult as there is no one English term that captures all of its meanings and connotations. In interpersonal relationships, "Sympathie" refers to feeling positively disposed towards someone due to an affinity or similarities between people (Duden, 2012). "Sympathy" is also often based on first impressions, although it can of course change in the course of further interactions.

The English term rapport comes close to the meaning of "Sympathie". Gremler and Gwinner (2009, p. 92) define employee-customer rapport in service relationships as: "*a customer's perception of having an enjoyable interaction with a service provider employee, characterized by a personal connection between the two interactants*" (see also Macintosh 2009 and chapter 4.2.2). The two components of rapport can thus be seen as enjoyable interaction and a personal connection, which in the context of this study are looked at from the employee's point of view rather than the customer's. Although the term comes close to what is usually implied by the use of "Sympathie", a personal connection is not always necessary. The term is also used to simply express that one finds someone likeable.

In the interviews, both aspects of "Sympathie" are touched on. In several cases the interviewees described feelings of rapport as reasons for siding with the customer or trying to find other ways of helping the customer in situations of role conflict. For example, Eric describes a case in which a customer had a motorcycle accident and he felt emotionally very involved due to being a motorcyclist himself.

Interviewer: "*Can you remember a situation in which it was very difficult for you personally to find a middle road, where it was difficult to find this balance [note: between company and customer interests]?"*

Eric: *"Yes, well, if you have an insurance case, I am a motorcyclist myself and you get a motorcycle accident where someone took the right of way with their car and put the motorcyclist in a wheel chair and then the ... injured party calls and then talks to you, that is pretty tough. Afterwards there was a lawyer involved, so that the emotional side was left out more because you are talking to the lawyer and he stays with the facts. But that first conversation – that was tough for me as a motorcyclist myself as well as because I felt sorry for him."*[222]

While here Eric doesn't state that this feeling of a personal connection led him to side with the customer, he does say that this makes it harder for him to balance customer and company interests. A clearer case is that of Phoebe, who states that she empathizes more strongly with people she finds likeable and has a strong connection to and that she is more likely to side with such customers.

Interviewer: *"How would I have to be as a customer to make it more likely that you side with me in cases where there was room for decision, where you decide in favor of the company or the customer?"*

Phoebe: *"Well, I'd say you can't discount the likeability factor, which shouldn't have any impact, but no one can tell me that likeability isn't a decisive factor. If I have a grumpy face sitting across from me, that stinks of alcohol and cigarettes and is unfriendly, he can say whatever he wants, I will be harder on him than if I have a customer, a likeable woman of my age, maybe with a similar history or something, that I might say, I have been in her situation. Or maybe when I have people sitting there that tell me things that sound familiar, that I can relate to. (...) There I would be more likely to go somewhat in the direction of the customer."*[223]

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[222] Interviewerin*: Kannst du dich denn an einen Fall erinnern, in dem es für dich persönlich besonders schwer war, diesen Mittelweg zu finden (...) ?*

Eric*: Ja gut, wenn man jetzt so einen Schadenfall hat, ich bin selber Motorradfahrer und kriegt so einen Motorradunfall mit, wo jemand mit seinem Auto die Vorfahrt genommen hat und den Motorradfahrer in den Rollstuhl gebracht hat und wenn der ... Geschädigte anruft und mit einem spricht, das ist dann natürlich eine besonders harte Sache. In Nachhinein war dann ein Rechtsanwalt drin, dann hat man wieder die emotionale Sache ausgespart im Endeffekt, weil der Rechtsanwalt dann mit einem redet und der auch sachlich bleibt. Nur dieses erste Gespräch, das war hart für mich; natürlich selber als betroffener Motorradfahrer, als auch, weil er mir einfach nur leid tat. 194-203*

[223] Interviewerin*: Wie müsste ich denn als Kunde sein, um es wahrscheinlicher zu machen, dass in Situationen, wenn Entscheidungen auf der Kippe stehen, wenn du mehr für das Unternehmen oder mehr in Richtung Kunden entscheiden könntest, dich für mich entscheidest?*

Phoebe*: Also ich sage mal diesen Sympathiefaktor kann man natürlich nicht verhehlen, der sollte keine Rolle spielen, aber das kann mir keiner erzählen, dass nicht Sympathie ein entscheidender Faktor ist. Also wenn mir*

A common background or experience, or something else that helps forge a connection between her and a customer is a reason for Phoebe to be more inclined to help the customer, to decide in his or her favor. Brian expresses similar sentiments. When asked why he sometimes recompenses customers using his personal resources in situations of role conflict between customer and company interests (see also chapter 6.2.7) he names rapport with the customer as one reason.

> Interviewer: *"Is that just business, or does likeability also play a role?"*
>
> Brian: *"Yes, of course, that is also important; perhaps gut feeling plays the most important role."*
>
> Interviewer: *"Where does that gut feeling come from?"*
>
> Brian: *"That depends on the person, what the relationship is like. It starts with small things, you go somewhere and are offered coffee, which is by no means a given, you wouldn't believe ... but that is how it starts. You have a pleasant atmosphere for discussion, that is ... many, many, very many soft factors, that come together well and that is, we get on well with each other, we exchange information and you're on the same line and said OK, ... it just fits.*[224]

Brian addresses both enjoyable interaction ("pleasant atmosphere for discussion", he is shown hospitality by being offered coffee) and personal connection (they "get on well", they are "on the same line"). Rapport with the customer was an important reason for using personal resources to resolve a role conflict situation.

When Eric, Phoebe and Brian speak of "Sympathie" as an important factor in determining how they deal with role conflict, they can be said to speaking of rapport. As well as mentioning an enjoyable interaction with a likeable customer, they also feel a personal connection. Others used the term "Sympathie" in connection with amiable, likeable customers but without

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da schon so ein Griesgram gegenüber sitzt irgendwie, der wer weiß wie nach Alkohol und Zigaretten stinkt und noch motzig ist oder so, der kann mir noch so viel erzählen, da bin ich dann eher härter, als wenn ich vielleicht einen Kunden, sympathische Frau in meinem Alter, vielleicht noch ähnlichen Werdegang oder so, dass ich so sag: ‚Ach ja, ich war auch mal in einer so ähnlichen Situation'. Ja vielleicht, dass wenn mir Leute gegenübersitzen, die was erzählen, was mir sehr bekannt vorkommt, also bezogen auf meine Person. (...) Da würde ich vielleicht ein Stück weiter in Richtung Kunde gehen. 288-302

[224] Interviewerin*: Ist das jetzt rein wirtschaftlich, oder spielt Sympathie auch eine Rolle?*

Brian*: Ja natürlich, das spielt mit noch, das spielt, ja wahrscheinlich Bauchgefühl mit die größte Rolle noch.*

Interviewerin*: Was macht denn dieses Bauchgefühl aus, wo kommt das denn her?*

Brian*: Kommt auf die Person an, wie das Verhältnis ist. Das fängt mit so Kleinigkeiten an, Sie kommen irgendwo rein und kriegen Kaffee angeboten. Das ist heute nicht mehr selbstverständlich, also, Sie glauben gar nicht ... aber, damit fängt es an. Sie haben , sprich eine angenehme Gesprächsatmosphäre, das ist ... sind ganz, ganz viele, ganz viele weiche Faktoren, die gut zueinanderkommen und das ist dann so, wir haben uns gut verstanden, ausgetauscht und man ist auf der gleichen Linie geschwommen und hat gesagt, alles klar, ähm ... es hat halt gepasst. 251-259* the focus on a personal connection. Simply the fact that the customer is pleasant, friendly and likeable can be a reason for frontline employees to side more with the customer than the company.

> Interviewer: "*You said that the first instinct is to help the insured. (…) What customer situation, what customers make it more likely that you try and find the best solution for the customer?"*
>
> Eric: *"Nice, likeable customers. That are nice, friendly and polite, that are nice to you on the telephone. (…) I sometimes notice that myself. If they come across as likeable, you just get more into the case and work on it … not more intensively but you do in way take more care."*[225]

Quinn and Rebecca also talk about customers being nice and likeable as a factor influencing their decisions in role conflict situations.

> Interviewer: "*How do I have to be as a customer to make it more likely that you do me a favor, even if that goes beyond what is allowed? How do I have to be?"*
>
> Quinn: *"Just normal really, as in nice. Many customers have a friendly voice and you just notice somehow that they are nice and then you really do it automatically. (…) It really is the niceness, the friendliness of customers on the phone."*[226]

***

> Rebecca: *"Well a lot depends on how I feel towards someone and when patients, we try to actively like them, maybe not all, but if you cannot empathize with someone and they have nothing that you like about them, then I don't think you can work well with them. So I think that likeability is a huge factor for me."*[227]

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[225] Interviewerin: *Du sagst ja auch, dass so der erste Instinkt ist, den Versicherten zu unterstützen. (…) Was für eine Kundensituation, was für Kunden machen es wahrscheinlicher, dass du da versuchst, für den Kunden die beste Lösung zu finden?*

Eric: *Nette, sympathische Kunden. Die dann nett, freundlich und höflich, die einem nett am Telefon entgegenkommen. (…) Also ich merke das manchmal auch selber. Wenn die sympathischer rüberkommen, entwickelt man mehr einfach mehr für die Sache und bearbeitet das (...) nicht intensiver, aber man kümmert sich schon irgendwie indirekt mehr darum. 221-240*

[226] Interviewerin: *Wie muss ich denn als Kunde sein, um das wahrscheinlicher zu machen, dass du mir einen Gefallen tust auch wenn er über das Erlaubte hinausgeht. Wie muss ich denn sein?*

Quinn: *Eigentlich nur ganz normal, also nett. Viele Kunden haben dann eine freundliche Stimme und man merkt irgendwie, wie gesagt, die sind nett und dann macht man das eigentlich schon automatisch. (…) Das ist dann wirklich die Nettigkeit, die Freundlichkeit der Kunden am Telefon. 272-279*

[227] Rebecca: *Also bei mir ist schon viel sympathiegesteuert und wenn Patienten, wir versuchen das ja auch aktiv, die sympathisch zu finden, vielleicht nicht unbedingt alle, aber wenn man jetzt sich gar nicht in jemanden hineinversetzen kann und irgendwie gar nicht irgendwas hat, was man an dem schätzt, dann kann man auch glaub ich auch nicht gut mit ihm arbeiten. Deswegen glaub ich es ist schon Sympathie bei mir voll der große Faktor. 581-586*

George (589-591), Lewis (229-234), Matthew (335-338), Olivia (320-328) and Thomas (201-211) also describe a positive disposition towards the customer ("Sympathie") as influencing their decision on how to deal with role conflict and inclining them more towards the customer than would otherwise be the case.

Empirical research on rapport in the employee-customer relationship focuses on the rapport felt by the customer towards the employee (Campbell, Davis, and Skinner 2006; Gremler and Gwinner 2000; Macintosh 2009; see also chapter 4.2.3). Studies specifically looking at the behavior of employees look at how rapport for the employee is created in the customer by such behaviors (Gremler and Gwinner 2008; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2006). Several positive outcomes of rapport felt by the customer for the employee have been found in the literature, such as higher customer satisfaction, likelihood of positive word-of-mouth (Gremler and Gwinner 2000; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2006; Macintosh 2009), and higher brand equity (Biedenbach, Bengtsson, and Wincent 2011).

Rapport felt by the employee for the customer however appears to be very little studied. Pro-customer feelings such as rapport can lead to pro-customer behaviors. In role conflict situations such as those that are in the focus of this research, this can mean that frontline employees act more in the interests of their customers than their companies. For this, not all aspects of rapport as defined by Gremler and Gwinner (2000) need be present; cases such as those of Quinn and Rebecca indicate that enjoyable interactions because of a nice customer may be sufficient without the need of forming a personal connection.

That pro-customer feeling leads to pro-customer behavior mirrors frontline employees' behaviors towards organizations in the case of pro-organizational behaviors (discussed in chapter 6.4). Similar theoretical explanations can be used - such as social exchange theory (Blau 1968). As discussed in chapter 4.1.1 social exchange theory postulates that partners in an exchange relationship, such as the employee-customer relationship, will try to balance in- and outputs. Positive relationship input, such as friendliness, is likely to lead to positive relationship outputs, such as pro-customer behavior.

The effect of pro-customer feelings has also been looked at in a study by Varca (2009). He has shown that feelings of empathy, defined as putting oneself in the other's situation and trying to understand how that other person feels, increases role conflict. As rapport is linked to empathy (Coan 1984; Smyth and Mitchell 2008), rapport is also likely to increase role conflict. Both rapport and empathy may make the relationship with the customer more meaningful to the employee, thus raising the importance of maintaining a good relationship. The findings of this study show that rapport and a positive disposition towards the customer increase the likelihood of pro-customer decisions in cases of role conflict.

Two of the interviewed frontline employees related that their being friends or well acquainted with customers influenced their behavior. George stated that if the customer is a friend or a good acquaintance, he may do more to try and help that particular customer. In the interview he describes that he passes insurance claims that seemed strange or incorrect to him on to his company (see also chapter 6.2.4 – Avoidance).

However, David states that he may choose a different course of action in the case of good friends and acquaintances.

> Interviewer: "*If you personally feel that a claim is a little strange, do you notify the head office?*
>
> David: *"No, that is what they do. They have sufficient experts; I don't have to point out such things to them. The only thing I do, if it is a friend or good acquaintance, who is my customer, then we may do things a little differently of course. If a claim looks a little borderline then I try to help him in a different way, by using my good and long standing contacts to the company, to the head office, I get an appointment with the heads of department or directors and then I break it up and maybe then, say, go for an amicable settlement. I say: 'I don't know how to handle this; you probable also have a problem paying for this in full, how about we settle this like so and so'. And then it can happen that a claim for 1.000 Euro is settled for maybe 800 or 750. Then the customer is satisfied, I am satisfied, the company is satisfied and everything goes on hunky-dory."*[228]

Here David describes that if an insurance claim strikes him as being dubious or in not entirely plausible, his behavior would be different for a customer who is also a good friend or a good acquaintance. He has said earlier in the interview that he normally passed on such claims to the head office for them to check and would otherwise not get further involved (204-209; 312-330). But for friends and acquaintances he uses his contacts within the company to try and achieve a settlement. The fact that he aims for a settlement, a compromise, implies that he does not believe the claim has a good chance at being paid in full. He also refers to the claim

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[228] Interviewerin*: Wenn Sie persönlich nun das Gefühl haben, dass die Schadensmeldung ein bisschen seltsam ist, weisen sie dann die Direktion darauf hin?*

David*: Nein, die machen ja nichts anderes. Also, da sind Fachleute genug, die muss ich auf so was nicht hinweisen. Das Einzige was ich also habe, wenn ich da jetzt hier einen Freund oder guten Bekannten habe, der bei mir Kunde ist, dann machen wir das natürlich möglicherweise ein bisschen anders. Wenn dann also eine Schadenssache so wankelmütig anzusehen ist, dann versuche ich ihm anders zu helfen, indem ich dann, natürlich ob meiner guten Kontakte, langjährigen Kontakte zum Unternehmen, zur Direktion, das ich mir dann mit den Abteilungsleitern oder Direktoren einen Gesprächstermin geben lasse und das einfach verhacke, und möglicherweise dann, sagen wir mal, im Vorfeld einen Vergleich mache. Dass ich selbst sage: ‚Ich weiß nicht, wie ich mich verhalten soll, ihr habt sicherlich auch gewisse Probleme, das vollständig zu bezahlen, wie wäre es denn, wenn wir so und so das verhackstücken würden'. Und dann kann es durchaus passieren, dass aus einem Anspruch von 1000 Euro man sich dann irgendwo auf 800 oder 750 oder einigt. Da ist dann der Kunde dann häufig mit zufrieden, dann bin ich zufrieden, ist das Unternehmen zufrieden, und alles geht in Butter weiter. 331-344* as borderline (the actual expression used by David is “wankelmütig”, which can be taken to mean fickle, indecisive, unclear).

Elsewhere in the interview he makes it clear that he will not be part of an attempt to defraud the company, even in the case of a friend. He recounts the case of a friend filing an insurance claim after a robbery with all necessary information. Two weeks later the friend claimed that a valuable ring and cash had been stolen, even though this friend had earlier said that neither jewelry nor cash were missing (345-361). In this case David simply passed the claim on, refusing to assist the friend further. He also says that he no longer wanted that friend to be his customer and that “a certain bond had been cut”.[229]

So, while it appears that David would not be willing to help friends or good acquaintances in cases where he believes the claim to be false or fraudulent, there clearly are cases that are suspicious or in some way insufficient or unclear in which he is willing to help.

Fred also spoke about friends when discussing his reactions to role conflict, although the influence is less direct than in David’s case. Fred emphasizes the importance of good customer relationships for his success (see also chapter 6.3.3). Good customer relationships are described as a means for acquiring new customers (62-76; 169-173; 284-299), as important for being able to make sales in existing relationships (355-366) and also as important for his enjoyment of his job (98-108; 355-366). Fred describes how friends of his have become customers and how customers have become friends.

On friends becoming customers:

> Fred: *“And that then came automatically, that my best friend then said, well it makes a lot of sense and you seem to enjoy it and it seems to be competent through you, you could give me a few tips as well. So in the beginning I just gave tips and then a quarter of a year later he became a customer. And that continued in the form of a domino effect.”*[230]

On customers becoming friends:

> Fred: *“For example [name of a customer], I got him on account of a recommendation from another friend. I didn’t know him before and advised him, (...) I was there yesterday for dinner, but about four or five months ago, I can’t remember what exactly the occasion was, a Champions-League game or whatever, I invited*

[229] David: … da ist also irgendwo ein gewisses Band zerschnitten. 361

[230] Fred*: Und dann kam das irgendwie auch automatisch, dass dann mein bester Freund hat dann irgendwie gesagt: ‚Ja irgendwie macht das ja schon Sinn und du scheinst da ja auch Spaß dran zu haben und das scheint auch kompetent zu sein durch dich, du könntest mir ja auch mal ein paar Tipps geben‘. Und dann habe ich erst mal nur Tipps gegeben und ein Vierteljahr später ist er dann Kunde geworden. Und dann ging das so im Dominoeffekt weiter. 158-173*

him to my home on a private basis and we had some beers, so we drank a little, so you're more inclined to be honest and then you notice, oh, this is a friend now, no longer a customer, this is really a friend now."[231]

While Fred does not directly state that friendship with customers changes how he acts in cases of role conflict he does recount that the first time he advised a customer with whom he also had a close personal relationship, in this case his sister, he spent a lot of extra time on double-checking the offers and promises made by his company to ensure that he was actually offering a good product.

> Interviewer: "*Can you remember a situation in which you felt this conflict [note: between company interests and customer interests] particularly keenly, when it was particularly difficult?"*
>
> Fred: *"I wouldn't say particularly difficult, but the first time I really thought about it, whether what I was doing really was the best, was with my sister. When my sister said for the first time, it isn't sensible, why shouldn't you be my consultant, before somebody else is."*
>
> Interviewer: "*And why was that?"*
>
> Fred: *"Well, because there is a much, much closer connection, where you really want to know is this the very best I can do. And then you start really checking the products, whether the costs within a product maybe are higher than they would be with a different company. I always found that the products I sell really are good."*[232]

231 Fred*: Zum Beispiel der [Name eines Kunden], den habe ich halt auf Empfehlung auch von einem anderen Freund bekommen. Den kannte ich vorher gar nicht und habe ihn dann beraten, (...) da war ich jetzt wie gesagt gestern zum Essen auch da, aber vor ungefähr vier, fünf Monaten, ich weiß gar nicht was da war, ein Champions-League Spiel oder was auch immer, da habe ich ihn dann auch privat zu mir eingeladen, dann haben wir zusammen das Champions-League Spiel geguckt und das war dann auch mit Bierchen, wo man dann ja auch ein bisschen was getrunken hat, sagt man dann ja auch eher die Wahrheit und dann merkt man auch so: ‚Oh, das ist ja ein Freund, das ist keine Kunde mehr, das ist wirklich ein Freund geworden'. 469-477*

232 Interviewerin: *Gibt es eine Situation, an die du dich erinnern kannst, in der du diesen Konflikt besonders stark gespürt hast, als es besonders schwierig war?*

Fred*: Besonders schwierig kann ich gar nicht sagen, aber wo ich mir zum ersten mal richtig Gedanken gemacht habe, ob das denn auch wirklich das Beste ist, was ich da mache, war meine Schwester. Als meine Schwester zum ersten Mal gesagt hat, irgendwie macht das doch kein Sinn, warum solltest du mich nicht beraten, bevor das irgendjemand anderer macht.*

Interviewerin*: Und warum war das?*

Fred**:** *Ja weil da halt nochmal viel, viel engere Bande, wo man auch wirklich wissen will: ‚Ist das denn auch das allerbeste was ich tun kann?'. Und dann fängt man auf einmal auch da an wirklich die Produkte auch mal nach zu rechnen, ob die Kosten innerhalb eines Produktes nicht doch vielleicht höher sind als bei einer anderen Gesellschaft. Aber ich habe das bisher immer festgestellt, dass die Produkte, die ich da vermittel, wirklich auch gut sind. 315-326*

The personal importance of the relationship to him lead Fred to invest time to double check the offers and ensure that they really were as good as the company believed. In this way he was in a sense reducing role conflict, by reassuring that there was no conflict of interests between his company and his customer. Because the products really were good, he was not damaging his sister's interests by selling her a product from his company. Throughout the interview he repeatedly mentions how important it is to him to be honest to his customers and not to damage friendships through business interests.

> Fred: *"Because by now, everyone from my circle of friends is also my customer. And because I, there is this color scheme, which type of person you are, you can be red, yellow, green and blue, and I am the green, sociable buddy type of guy and as friendships to me are more important than making money, I would have betrayed myself otherwise."* [233]

Indeed, possible conflicts between his loyalties as a friend and his interests as a sales person meant that at the beginning of his career he was adamant not to have friends as clients (164-165). So while Fred does not explicitly state that being friends with customers changes his approach in role conflict situations, it does make him more acutely aware of possible role conflicts and meant he invested extra time and energy in reducing role conflict by double checking the products offered by his company.

Friendship in business relationships has been looked at from two different angles - friendships developing in and being bound to a business transaction context and friends entering business relationships as partners or one friend becoming the customer of another. The former has been looked at in the context of commercial friendships, a term coined by Price and Arnould (1999). These friendships involve affection, intimacy, social support, loyalty and reciprocal gift giving (Arnold, Nguyen, and Hartley 2011; Price and Arnould 1999; Rosenbaum 2009). Such friendships bear many similarities to friendship in a social, non-business related setting, including intimate disclosure, voluntary interaction, communal orientation and intrinsic orientation (Grayson 2007, see also discussion of commercial friendships in chapter 4.2.2). They are however usually confined to the business setting and are not carried over into the private sphere of the parties involved (Price and Arnould 1999). An example would be a hairdresser and his or her customer meeting as friends during a hairdressing appointment, displaying all the marks of friendship, but only ever meeting as part of the hairdresser-customer relationship.

[233] Fred: *Weil logischerweise mittlerweile mein gesamter Freundeskreis Kunde bei mir ist. Und da ich halt, es gibt ja diese Farbenlehre, welcher Menschentyp man ist, zum Beispiel rot, gelb, grün und blau, ich bin so dieser grüne, gesellige Typ, Kumpeltyp, und da für mich halt Freundschaften wichtiger sind als Geld verdienen, würde ich mich damit ja selber verraten haben. 334-338*

Commercial friendships have been studied in a variety of settings (see also chapter 4.2.2) and are generally linked to a variety of positive marketing outcomes, such as customer satisfaction, loyalty and word of mouth (Beatty et al. 1996; Bendapudi and Berry 1997; Price and Arnould 1999). Close personal relationships in business-to-business settings have also been shown to increase the efficiency and openness in interactions (Geiger and Turley 2003; Grayson 2007; Haytko 2004).

Rosenbaum (2009) has also explored reasons why employees in a service setting may engage in commercial friendships. He found that employees received emotional support and companionship from customers they were commercial friends with, and also more material gains such as increased patronage and loyalty (e.g. customers asking for a favorite waitress), increased tips and gifts. Customers in turn received emotional support and companionship, as well as individual attention, instrumental support and also gifts (Rosenbaum, 2009, p. 63).

As outlined in chapter 4.2.2, there are however also drawbacks to friendships in business or commercial settings. Business relationships differ from private social friendships in that they are inherently instrumental. The value of the relationship lies not in the relationship itself, but both sides pursue aims and benefits outside of the relationship (Grayson 2007; Mandel 2006). Friendships in social settings however, have a strong intrinsic orientation (Grayson 2007; Hays 1989), that is the relationship is upheld for its own sake, not for extrinsic benefits. People are often very sensitive to this aspect and if one partner is perceived to have an instrumental motive for the friendship, this is likely to damage the relationship (Allan 1979; Carrier 1999)

The different expectations arising from the business elements and the friendship elements of the relationship can lead to a form of role conflict, in which the role of business partner and friend clash (Grayson 2007; Swan et al. 2001). This conflict can reduce the positive outcomes of friendships in business settings, with some tentative empirical support that this effect is stronger for friendships existing prior to the business connection than those formed afterwards (Grayson 2007). This could explain why several studies on commercial friendships and other types of friendship in business settings have found that some people prefer to separate friendship and business and do not wish to have both spheres overlap (Geiger and Turley 2003; Goulter and Ligas 2004; Price and Arnould 1999).

The results of this research offer only tentative insights into how friendship between employees and customers may affect behavior in role conflict situations. Only two of the participants, David and Fred, spoke of the role of friendship for their work and for their decisions in role conflict situations in particular. David was willing to behave far more customer-oriented in role conflict situations which involved friends and good acquaintances, using his contacts within the organization to try and achieve a settlement of debatable insurance claims. Fred double-checked the products and advice offered by his company to try and reduce possible conflict between his role as a consultant and as a friend. These cases do suggest that friendship between the employee and the customer lead to more customer-sided decisions in role conflict, but further research is necessary to strengthen this finding.

The findings of this study also support the notion that some people are wary of the possible conflicting demands that can arise from business and friendship mixing in a relationship. As stated above, at the beginning of his career Fred was adamant that he did not want to have friends become customers, and it took him some time before he took on the first customers he was also friends with (159-174). Several other interviewees also addressed that there were situations in which they felt that an emotional connection to a customer left them open to manipulation and abuse.

Brian, Eric and Thomas point out that an emotionally more distant relationship with customers makes dealing with them easier.

> Brian: *"Well, for example I kind of prefer self-employed customers, preferably managing big companies. Because then the emotional stuff is almost gone, you talk almost exclusively about facts, that is the easiest. Those customers would never try to make a deal when something isn't covered, because that is what it says in the small print: it isn't covered. They just accept that."* [234]

Thomas raises a similar point, that it is easier dealing with customers when the emotional link to that customer is not too close, when everything can be dealt with on a more objective business level.

> Thomas: *"Well for me, if I personally got on well with a customer, it was easier to switch off the emotional side. I mean if he is in the right that is also difficult. Like I said just now, if you know for sure that this is the required way of doing this, but you also definitely know that it's the wrong way. Then I don't need a relationship to the end customer; that is difficult on the emotional side anyway. But if you also have a personal relationship with the customer concerned, that is even harder."* [235]

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[234] Brian: *Also zum Beispiel am liebsten habe ich fast schon Selbstständige, die möglichst große Firmen leiten. Weil, da ist das Emotionale fast weg, man spricht fast nur über Fakten, das ist am einfachsten. Die Kunden würden niemals verhandeln, wenn eine Leistung nicht ersetzt wird, weil es steht im Kleingedruckten drin: es ist nicht ersetzt. Dann geben die sich halt damit ab. 202- 205*

[235] Thomas: *Also was bei mir, wenn ich mich persönlich mit einem Kunden gut verstanden habe, war es schwieriger das Emotionale auszuschalten. Also da wiegt das Persönliche. gut und ich meine wenn er Recht hat, das ist auch schwierig. Also was ich ja eben gesagt, wenn man selbst genau weiß, gut das ist jetzt die Vorgabe wie man das macht, aber man auch ganz genau weiß, dass es der falsche Weg ist. Da brauche ich eigentlich gar keine Beziehung zum Endkunden haben, da wird es auch auf der emotionalen Seite schwierig. Wenn da jetzt noch zusätzlich dazu kommt, dass ich eine persönliche Beziehung zu demjenigen habe, dann wird das noch schwieriger. 205-211*

When Eric recounted his experience of talking to the motorcyclist who had an accident (see above) he also states that it was easier to talk to the lawyer, as the emotional side could be left away and the focus could lie on facts.

> Eric: *"And then the ... injured party calls and then talks to you, that is pretty tough. Afterwards there was a layer involved, so that the emotional side was left out more because you are talking to the lawyer and he stays with the facts."*[236]

Ian and Olivia voiced concerns that customers sometimes try to use an emotional connection between employee and customer to try to manipulate the employee.

> Ian: *"There are some [note: customers] with which you get on very, very well and they are very cooperative when you reach a certain level of rapport. That usually works best. But of course there are some that try and take advantage of that a little bit, try and convince you that not everything you want to check is necessary."* [237]

> Olivia: *"During my training I found that I am not suited for working behind the counter. Or for customer contact, because ... you need a certain hardness to say no to the customers. I trained in town X, and in town X 25% were unemployed. And then I was told 'My children have nothing to eat, my wife needs the pill, I need another 50 Marks' and so I did that on my own head. And paid out 50 Marks and then saw them buy one round of beer after the other at the local fair and I was always so annoyed that I gave him that money. Because it was given under very different assumptions and then I thought, I am not made for customer contact because I can't tell when I am being lied to and when it is a real emergency."*[238]

Thomas speaks of customers abusing a good relationship with him to try and intervene in his job, by getting him to look for less information or less closely than he feels he needs to as an auditor. Olivia recounts a situation in which a customer deliberately evoked pity and sympa-

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[236] Eric*: Und wenn der ... Geschädigte anruft und mit einem spricht, das ist dann natürlich eine besonders harte Sache. In Nachhinein war dann ein Rechtanwalt drin, dann hat man wieder die emotionale Sache ausgespart, im Endeffekt, weil der Rechtsanwalt dann mit einem redet und der auch sachlich bleibt. 198-201*

[237] Ian: *Also es gibt wirklich welche, mit denen versteht man sich sehr, sehr gut und die sind auch sehr kooperativ dann auch, so eine gewisse sympathische Ebene dann erreicht. Dann klappt das eigentlich immer besser. Es gibt natürlich auch welche, die versuchen das dann ein bisschen auszunutzen und dann einen dann sozusagen dann davon zu überzeugen, dass das ja nicht alles notwendig ist, was man finden möchte. 280-284*

[238] Olivia: *Also ich habe damals in meiner Ausbildung, habe ich für mich festgestellt, ich bin kein Mensch für den Schalter. Oder für den Kundenkontakt, weil ... man muss eine gewisse Härte haben, um dem Kunden gegenüber nein zu sagen. Und ich fand es ganz schlimm, ich habe in Stadt X gelernt, und in Stadt X waren 25% arbeitslos. Und dass dann da aufgetischt wurde, ‚Meine Kinder haben nichts zu essen, meine Frau braucht die Pille, ich brauche noch mal 50 Mark' und ja, das hat man dann noch mal auf seine Kappe genommen. Man hat dann noch mal 50 Mark ausgezahlt und haben die auf der Kirmes eine Runde Bier nach der anderen geschmissen und da habe ich mich immer wahnsinnig darüber geärgert, dass ich ihm das Geld überhaupt gegeben habe. Weil es unter einem ganz anderen Aspekt erschlichen wurde, und da habe ich mir gedacht, ich bin für den Kundenkontakt nicht gemacht, weil ich schlecht unterscheiden kann, ob ich gerade angelogen werde oder ob es wirklich eine Notsituation ist. 285-295*

thy in her to get her to extend his credit, which she did on her own responsibility. Later seeing that customer spend money freely on non-necessary items and thereby proving that the money he got out of her was not used for the previously stated purpose, made her angry and feel manipulated. Here, emotions are used by the customer to harm the company and manipulate the employee.

Legitimacy of claims as influencing factors

So far, feelings of rapport and sympathy as well as friendship between employees and customers have been discussed as possible reasons for frontline employees in role conflict situations to side more with the customer. Another category of influencing factors refers to the customer's interests or wishes themselves. When frontline employees felt the customer to be in the right and his or her interests and demands to be legitimate, they were more likely to side with the customer.

For example, George states that he is more likely to side with the customer if he believes that customers' need for a service to be legitimate.

> George: *"Maybe you do sort out the ones that just have a sense of entitlement, but aren't really sick, that just want a cheap holiday and then apply for treatment at a health facility, or people, where you can see from the overall picture of what services they received, that they really are sick. For those it was always easier for me to ensure that they got the health facility stay."*[239]

George often speaks of treating customers differently depending on whether he sees their need for a service as being legitimate or not. Examples for such statements include:

> George: *"It is important for me that those insured, that really (...) get sick, that they are really given help."*[240]

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> Interviewer: "*That means that when denying a claim, is there a real need, that plays a role?"*

> George: *"Yes, that plays a role, that is the most important thing. So not just getting a cheap holiday, even though he can only ask for a stay at a health facility*

[239] George: *Man sortiert vielleicht schon so ein bisschen die aus, die nur ein Anspruchsdenken haben, aber nicht richtig krank sind, die günstig einen Urlaub machen wollen und dann eine Kur beantragen oder Leute, die aus dem Gesamtbild der Leistungen, die sie bekommen haben, sieht, dass sie krank sind. Für die war es für mich immer leichter, dass sie auch eine Kur bekamen. 22-26*

[240] George: *Für mich ist es wichtig, dass die Versicherten, die wirklich (...) krank werden, dass denen wirklich geholfen wird. 313-315*

every three years or so. ... I don't know if I was ever taken advantage of or anything. But where I myself felt that I was not being used, I always helped."[241]

On health insurance paying for breast augmentation or reduction surgery:

> George: *"If there are medical reasons for it, if a woman is walking with a bent back because of the size, then that is not a problem. But it has to be for medical reasons and you can often tell with the people who apply for that that it isn't. That it is for fashion reasons. And if that is the case, I don't feel under any obligation to help."*[242]

These quotes underline that if George perceives the customers' needs to be real and their claims to be filed for a legitimate reason, he is more likely to take their side and help them get their claims accepted. Conversely, if he felt the claim was made for the wrong reason or the need behind the claim to be either not real or unjustified, he was less likely to exert himself to try and help them. This will be discussed further in the next chapter on why frontline employees may choose to not help customers and side with the company.

Legitimate claims as a reason for siding with the customer were also brought up by Ian, Rebecca and Thomas. For example, Ian states that:

> Interviewer: "*What do I have to be like as a customer, that you use your room for discretion in my favor, that maybe you don't inquire too often?"*
>
> Ian*: "Yes, well. You need good arguments why it is not that important. In the end everything is very much driven by facts, what you do when you're at the customer's. But if a customer has good arguments, or documents, or arguments which I could document, then there is more room for discretion for me to go in that direction. So when there are good reasons why something is not that important and he can convince me of that, then that is something that I can document and then it's no longer my responsibility, in a way. But if a customer just says it doesn't go*

[241] Interviewerin*: Das heißt so eine Ablehnung, gibt es da eigentlich wirklich Bedarf, spielt eine Rolle?*

George*: Ja, das spielt eine Rolle, das ist das Wichtigste. Also nicht nur damit der immer jedes Jahr einen billigen Urlaub machen kann, obwohl er nur alle drei Jahre eine Kur beantragen kann, oder so. ... Also ich weiß nicht, ob ich mal ausgenutzt worden bin, oder so. Aber wo ich von mir selber das Gefühl hatte, nicht ausgenutzt zu werden, habe ich dem anderen immer geholfen. 475-479*

[242] George*: Wenn es medizinische Gründe sind, dann also, wenn eine Frau schon krumm geht, weil sie so groß, dann ist das gar keine Frage. Es muss aber eine medizinische Begründung sein und man merkt Leuten, die sowas beantragen an, dass das keine sind. Dass es modische Gesichtspunkte sind. Und wenn sie das sind, dann habe ich nicht das Gefühl, denen helfen zu müssen. 492-495*

without giving reasons, then of course there is little room for decision, then maybe you just have to insist."[243]

Ian's remark highlights that legitimate reasons for siding with the customer can also make it easier to explain such a decision to the company and lessen the frontline employee's responsibility for a decision, or the risk he or she may take in siding with the company. Good arguments and legitimate reasons by the customer validate the decision to side with them.

Thomas states that role conflict situations are more difficult for him if he does not stand behind the position that the company takes, especially if he empathized with the other side and could understand their stance on the issue.

> Interviewer: *"Has it happened that, either in your current or former position that it is difficult for you when the customer has certain wishes and you know that this and this is the position of the company and you have to somehow accommodate both? Can that be difficult?"*
>
> *Thomas: "Yes, definitely." (...)*
>
> Interviewer: *"What makes it so difficult?"*
>
> *Thomas: "Well, it is particularly challenging that you represent the company but you don't necessarily share the opinion of the company. That happened frequently and was extremely difficult, not least because you could understand the other side and probably would have done the same thing in their shoes."*[244]

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[243] Interviewerin*: Wie muss ich denn als Kunde sein, damit du den Spielraum zu meinen Gunsten, also nicht so oft nachfragst?*

Ian*: (...) Da muss man vielleicht gute Argumente haben warum das nicht so wichtig ist. Also im Endeffekt ist ja schon sehr faktenbetrieben, was man vor Ort macht. Aber wenn ein Kunde gute Argumente hat, die dann, sage ich mal, auch Dokumente oder Argumente, die ich dokumentieren könnte. Dann kann natürlich dazu weiter Spielraum in die Richtung dann auswählen ganz klar. Also wenn's, wenn er mir irgendwelche guten Gründe gibt warum das jetzt nicht so wichtig ist und mich einfach von dem Gegenteil überzeugt, dann ist es ja was, was ich dokumentieren kann und dann bin ich ja auch wieder aus der Verantwortung raus, sozusagen. Also wenn jetzt einfach ein Kunde sagt es geht nicht, ohne Begründung, dann bleibt natürlich wenig Spielraum an der Stelle dann auch, dann muss man vielleicht dann doch darauf beharren. 312-322*

[244] Interviewerin*: Kommt es denn, entweder jetzt oder in deiner früheren Position, vor, dass dich sowas belastet, dass sowas belastend ist, wenn der Kunde mit bestimmten Wünschen kommt und man weiß, das und das sind die Interessen des Unternehmens und ich muss die unter einen Hut bringen. Kann sowas belastend sein?*

Thomas*: Ja auf jeden Fall. (...)*

Interviewerin*: Was daran ist denn so belastend?*

Thomas*: Ja ich meine besonders belastend ist es eigentlich, man vertritt das Unternehmen, aber vertritt persönlich nicht unbedingt die Meinung, die das Unternehmen vertritt. Das kam auch häufiger vor und das war halt extrem belastend, weil man sich auch, man hätte sich auch in die andere Seite hineinversetzen können und hätte das auch wahrscheinlich an deren Stelle auch so gemacht. 170-181*

While Thomas does not side with the customer in such situations (157-169; 183-185), he does state that agreeing with the customer more than with the company, perceiving their demands on him as more legitimate, makes role conflict situations more difficult.

When Rebecca decided to side with a customer and use her personal resources to secretly help a customer (see also chapters 6.2.6 on deceit and 6.2.7 on using personal resources), one reason for her decision was that she felt her customer had a legitimate claim on her.

> Rebecca: *"And the patient had just gone through a break-up, and it was important to her that we continue. And then [my boss] said I shouldn't see her because we had already done too many sessions. (...) I thought that was really unfair, as the patient felt everything was fine. I hadn't prepared her for it and she assumed that I send out the application for more sessions on time and that was my problem or more correctly the computer program had been crap. (...) To be honest I met her in secret, I gave her some sessions for free."*[245]

***

> Interviewer: *"What do I have to be like as a customer to make it more likely that you side with me in such conflict situations?"*
>
> Rebecca: *"Well, I think innocent, if I feel that I botched it up a little, because I didn't tell you the rules or as in this case, when I told the woman: 'Yes we have about 10 sessions to go, I'll write the application for more sessions'. So it's not something you can actively influence, but I think if I have the impression that I did something wrong, then I feel more responsible and try to balance it."*[246]

Speaking about another case in which she sided with the company and revealed a customer's former drug habit rather than keeping it secret and saving the customer a lot of trouble and embarrassment, she states that in future she would decide differently.

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[245] Rebecca: *Und die Patientin war frisch getrennt und der war schon wichtig, dass wir weiter machen und da hat [Chef] zum Beispiel schon gesagt, dass ich mich nicht mit ihr treffen soll, da wir schon so viele Stunden drüber gemacht haben. (...) Das fand ich zum Beispiel schon total unfair, weil die Patientin sich voll in Sicherheit gewogen hat. Ich hab die nicht drauf vorbereitet und sie ist davon ausgegangen, dass ich den Antrag rechtzeitig rausschicke und das war ja mein Problem bzw. das Computersystem war Scheiße. (...) Ich hab mich da auch ehrlich gesagt mit der heimlich getroffen, also der ein paar Sitzungen geschenkt. 281-303*

[246] Interviewerin: *Wie muss ich denn als Kunde sein, um es wahrscheinlicher zu machen, dass du dich in solchen Konfliktsituation auf meine Seite stellst?*

Rebecca*: Also ich glaub halt schon unschuldig, wenn ich das Gefühl hab, dass ich es auch ein bisschen verbockt habe, weil ich dir Regeln vorher nicht gesagt habe oder wie in diesem einen Fall, dass ich der Frau gesagt habe wir haben noch irgendwie ungefähr zehn Sitzungen, ich schreib jetzt langsam die Verlängerung und dann kriegen sie noch mal 15 Stunden, also so ich glaub das ist jetzt nicht unbedingt was, was man so aktiv beeinflussen kann, aber ich glaube, wenn ich den Eindruck habe, dass ich es falsch gemacht habe, dann fühle ich mich auch mehr verantwortlich das irgendwie wieder auszugleichen. 518-526*

Rebecca: *"And I think I would cheat if I felt that the rule the company imposes is totally unfair and makes no sense."*[247]

Rebecca's statements address two aspects. The first is legitimacy of the customer's demand or interest. In the first case, she strengthens the legitimacy of the customer's need - she had just gone through a break-up and the therapy was important to her and the problem existed through no fault of the customer. She then goes on to say that if she feels that the company's rules are unfair and not sensible, she would cheat (in the context of the case she was describing this would mean not disclosing a customer's former drug addiction and thereby going around company rules, see chapter 6.2.6). This does not directly address the legitimacy of the customer's concern, but lessens the legitimacy of the company's, making it more likely that the customer's demand would be seen as the more legitimate of the two.

The second aspect has to do with the responsibility towards the customer that Rebecca describes here. She describes the difficult situation with the customer as being her problem, her fault, stating that in that case she felt she and her company were in the wrong. This makes it more likely for her to side with the company. The issue of responsibility towards the customer will be discussed further a little later in this chapter.

To sum up, perceiving customers' needs, interests or demands to be legitimate, and in some cases more so than those of the company can increase the likelihood of frontline employees siding with the customer. It can also increase the level of role conflict felt if the frontline employee then does not side with the company.

The influence of the perceived legitimacy of a customer's demand on role conflict was studied by O'Brien, Hill and Autry (2009). They looked at the level of role conflict reported by frontline employees when faced with customer returning goods in a retail setting. They differentiated between normative, cognitive and rules based legitimacy. In their study they found that a normatively illegitimate claim, in which the customer violated normative rules (socially accepted norms) while trying to return goods, role conflict was lessened. This was explained by the authors by pointing out that the normative violation would be resented by the employees, making it easier to side with the company.

A cognitively illegitimate return attempt, in other words one in which the customer fails to give a sensible and comprehensible reason for the return attempt, was shown to increase role conflict. O'Brian and colleagues attribute this due to the employee trying to ensure that the return itself is not illegitimate and thus protecting his company from wrongful returns as well as trying to please the customer.

[247] Rebecca*: Und ich glaube ich würde dann schummeln, wenn ich das Gefühl hätte, dass die Regel, die das Unternehmen jetzt auferlegt total ungerecht ist für die Patienten und keinen Sinn macht. 487-489*

Rules-based illegitimacy, in which the return attempt did not comply with the company guidelines, was found to not influence role conflict. The given explanation was that this made it easier for employees to side with the company and stick to the rules and to explain to the customer why they did so (see also chapter 3.4.4., where the study is presented in more detail).

Reviewing the results of this research project in the context of O'Brian and colleagues (2009) study, the customer claims discussed were cognitively legitimate but not always rule-based legitimate (for example Rebecca secretly giving a customer extra therapy sessions against her company's rules). There is nothing in the quotes to suggest these claims were normatively illegitimate - i.e. went against socially accepted norms, which would for example have been the case with rude or aggressive customers. O'Brian and colleagues (2009) found that a cognitively illegitimate return attempt resulted in higher levels of role conflict that a cognitively legitimate one.

While the present study focused on the employees' approach to dealing with role conflict rather than the level of role conflict experienced, the results of the study do not unambiguously support this finding. Thomas reported higher levels of role conflict when he felt he agreed more with the customers stance than that of his company (the customer's claims were cognitively legitimate). Others reported that they were more likely to side with the customer in such situations - whether this increased or decreased their perceived level of role conflict in a particular situation is not clear. However, in the cases described above, George, Ian and Rebecca were faced with more effort if siding with the customer, than if they had sided with the company. George helps customers whose claims he sees as legitimate, to the point of writing customers' objection letters to company decisions (see chapter 6.2.2), Ian states he needs good and comprehensible arguments to document his decision if he deviates from company protocol (312-323) and Rebecca gives extra therapy sessions (281-303) and is also angry at the company for not supporting her more and feels obliged to help the customer with her own resources (281-303; 304-309). It is possible that increased levels of role conflict in situations in which customer role demands are perceived as cognitively legitimate (even if they are rules-based illegitimate) may push the frontline employees to reduce the pressure felt by siding against the company and with the customer. It is also likely that cognitively legitimate customer role demands especially increase role conflict if the employee cannot or will not side with the customer, as is the case with Thomas.

While O'Brian and colleagues (2009) do look at interaction effects between different types of legitimacy and illegitimacy, they do not look at cognitively legitimate and rules-based illegitimate return attempts. Drawing from the findings of this study, I propose that in such cases role conflict can be increased, as frontline employees empathize with the customer but would have to break rules to help the customer.

The study by O'Brian and colleagues (2009) looks at a very specific context and type of frontline employee-customer interaction - namely employees dealing with customers wishing to return goods in a retail setting. The context and nature of the frontline employee-customer interaction analyzed in the present study differs considerably, which may explain differences in findings. Further research on this topic is necessary to better understand the influence of perceived legitimacy of customer role demands on role conflict and role conflict outcomes. This is especially necessary, as there appears to be little research on this topic in the marketing literature so far. A search of databases EBSCO Business Source Premier, PsycArticles and PsycInfor[248]; EconBiz[249], and Emerald[250] turns up only the study of O'Brian and colleagues (2009) looking at frontline employees or the employee-customer interaction.

So far, in this chapter I have discussed feelings of rapport, sympathy and friendship towards customers as well as the perceived legitimacy of customer role demands as factors that may increase the likelihood of frontline employees siding with customers. Two more categories of influencing factors were found in the interviews analyzed for this study: feelings of responsibility towards the customer and a feeling of obligation to the customer.

Feelings of responsibility towards the customer

A feeling of responsibility has already been touched on earlier in the chapter. Rebecca described a feeling of responsibility towards a customer as a significant reason for her decision to side with that customer. When she felt responsible for having wrongly calculated the number of available sessions for the customer, she decided to go against what her company wanted her to do and gave the customer extra sessions in secret (see 6.2.7 and Rebecca's quotes earlier in this chapter). Responsibility towards customers was also given as a reason by other employees and generally described as either inherent to their role or as an important moral guideline. The former was discussed in chapter 6.3.1. Examples include Rebecca stating:

> Rebecca: *"I do have the feeling that it is my role to be caring and to somehow look after them (Note: talking about customers)."*[251]

Or a similar statement by Andrew:

> Andrew: *"Then, on the one side it would have been great for the company if I had closed that contract. On the other hand it was also somehow my, my job as, as consultant to not abuse the trust."*[252]

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[248] http://web.ebscohost.com

[249] http://www.econbiz.de/

[250] http://www.emeraldinsight.com/

[251] Rebecca: *Ich hab das Gefühl, dass so meine Rolle ist da auch fürsorglich zu sein und mich irgendwie um die zu kümmern. 630-631*

Moral decisions as influencing factors, including a feeling of responsibility towards the customer, were looked at in chapter 6.3.2. A sample statement by Andrew for example is:

> Andrew: *"For me personally it is like this - if I have someone who trusts me, then I can't pull a fast one on them. That just doesn't go."*[253]

While responsibility to customers has already been discussed in the chapters pertaining to influencing factors related to the frontline employee (chapter 6.3), it is also closely linked to the employee-customer relationship. There were three aspects that stood out: a lot of frontline employees pointed out that their customers trusted them, that they knew much more about the range of products or services than the customer and that these two aspects made it possible to influence customers. Trust by customers was described by Andrew, Charles, Fred, and Lewis.

For instance, Charles describes that there is a group of customers to whom products that are not in their best interests but are pushed by the company can be sold to again and again. The reason he gives for this is that the customers trust the frontline employees, believing that they act in their best interests. It should be noted here that Charles is adamant that he does not act in that way or abuse that trust.

> Charles: *"It is especially strange that you can always find the same customers with whom you can do that."*
>
> Interviewer*: "With what kind of customers can you do that?"*
>
> Charles*: "You could say, I've read that yesterday in the press, the so-called OS customers."*
>
> Interviewer*: "OS customers?"*
>
> Charles*: "Yes, but that is not something my company says, I just read it yesterday in the press. They are old and stupid."*
>
> Interviewer*: "Oh, okay."*
>
> Charles*: "Well, our customers are not stupid, I would not say that, but many do trust us. And that trust, that we are shown, is abused if you do that."*[254]

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[252] Andrew: *Dann, auf der einen Seite eben das Unternehmen, wär toll gewesen, wenn ich den Abschluss gemacht hätte. Auf der anderen Seite dann aber auch irgendwo meine, meine Aufgabe als, als Berater irgendwo das Vertrauen nicht zu missbrauchen. 128-130*

[253] Andrew: *Bei mir persönlich ist das so: Wenn ich jetzt jemanden hab, der mir vertraut, dann kann ich den nicht übers Ohr hauen, das geht einfach nicht, ne? 181-183*

[254] Charles*: Vor allem es ist immer das Seltsame, dass man immer die gleichen Kunden dann findet, mit denen man das machen kann.*

Interviewerin*: Mit was für Kunden kann man das denn machen?*

There are several points made in this quote: customers trust the frontline employees and this gives them the opportunity to sell products or services that are not in the customers' interests. It also shows that such customers can be treated with disdain by those who take advantage of them, labeling them as stupid because they believe what they are being told by the consultant. And finally, that Charles sees this as a violation of the trust placed in frontline employees.

Andrew has also made the point that it is his responsibility to not abuse trust place in him (128-130, see above) and that he cannot bring himself to do so (181-183, see above). Fred reports that some customers trust him and don't require further information on products from him.

> Fred: *"There are customers that say: 'Look, I don't care, I trust you'. And there are customers who want to check the figures, and if you are prepared to do so and to say: 'I'll explain everything down to the smallest details', customers like that a lot."*[255]

Like Charles, Fred points out that some customers trust in their frontline employee to do the right thing and offer them products that are in their best interests. They don't want to know about the details or check them for themselves.

An imbalance in the information available to customers and frontline employees and thus the reduced ability of the customer to make an informed decision is a further point mentioned in the interviews. David speaks about the differences in car insurance, and that customers often only look at the final cost of different products.

> David: *"But car insurance lives not only from the premiums but also from the scope of the insurance. (...) There are so many differences that the customer doesn't recognize because he doesn't have an understanding of the issue. He only looks at the bottom right for the price and thinks he has compared two offers. He has not. And he cannot. Sometimes I can't anymore either, because even the offers that are sent out are so extensive that such an offer, there is a brochure and when*

Charles*: Man könnte jetzt sagen, das habe ich gestern in der Presse gelesen, das sind die sogenannten AD-Kunden.*

Interviewerin*: AD-Kunden?*

Charles*: Ja, das ist aber nicht von meinem Unternehmen gesagt, sondern das habe ich gestern in der Presse gelesen. Die sind alt und doof.*

Interviewerin*: Ah okay.*

Charles*: Ja, unsere Kunden sind nicht doof, das will ich jetzt nicht sagen, aber viele vertrauen uns eben. Und das Vertrauen, was die uns entgegen bringen - und das missbraucht man dann, wenn man das tut. 701-713*

[255] Fred*: Es gibt Kunden, die sagen: ‚Pass auf, das ist mir alles egal, ich vertrau dir'. Und es gibt Kunden, die rechnen gerne nach und wenn man sich dazu bereit erklärt, sich darauf einzulassen und zu sagen: ‚Ich erkläre dir das bis ins Detail, das mögen Kunden sehr, sehr gerne'. 399-401*

you have read it through to the end you don't know what it said on the first page any more. It's just so broad."[256]

He also points out that customers often don't have a full understanding of their own needs and are unaware of many points they should take into consideration before deciding on an offer:

> David: *"Well let's say that the customer's specifications are often fairly simple because the customer is rarely well informed, very rarely well informed, he just sees a small area of his needs. With our explanations we often touch on things that the customer just hadn't thought of at all."*[257]

This imbalance of information and understanding is pointed out several more times by David (157-164) and by others, such as Brian (49-51), Eric (118-132), George (195-224), Harry (98-114; 279-309), John (206-222), Lewis (92-104; 115-130), and Matthew (47-51).

On the one hand there are customers who trust frontline employees implicitly and on the other hand frontline employees generally have a much better understanding of products and services and other issues relevant to the customer's decision. This offers an opportunity to employees to influence the customer. This is very succinctly pointed out by Lewis:

> Lewis: *"Of course you can steer the discussion to the point that you end up or at least have the chance to end up where you want to be. Because you're sitting in front of a layman, whom you are explaining things to and you know what the issue is about and therefore you can usually direct him."*[258]

Charles similarly points to the opportunity for manipulation:

> Charles*: "As a consultant you can be really manipulative."*[259]

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[256] David*: Aber eine Autoversicherung, die lebt nicht vom Beitrag, die lebt auch vom Versicherungsumfang. (...) Das sind so viele Unterschiede, die der Kunde gar nicht erkennt, weil er auch von dieser ganzen Materie nichts versteht. Der guckt nur ganz unten rechts auf den Preis und meint, er hätte dann zwei Gesellschaftsangebote miteinander verglichen. Hat er nicht. Kann er auch nicht. Kann ich manchmal nicht mehr, weil, selbst die Angebote die raus gehen, die sind so umfassend, dass ich also heute ein Angebot, da gibt es so eine Broschüre dabei, wenn Sie das alles durchlesen, dann wissen Sie zum Schluss nicht mehr, was Sie auf der ersten Seite gelesen haben. Das ist einfach so umfassend. 300-310*

[257] David*: Denn sagen wir mal so dieses Anforderungsprofil des Kunden ist relativ einfach, da der Kunde auch selten gut informiert ist, ganz selten gut informiert ist, hat er von seiner Anforderungen eher einen kleinen Bereich. Da kommen wir mit unseren Erklärungen häufig in Dinge, wo der Kunde überhaupt nicht dran gedacht hat.528-531*

[258] Lewis: *Ja also man kann natürlich seine Gesprächsführung irgendwo dahin lenken, dass man da auch landet vielleicht, oder dass man die Chance zumindest erlangt, da zu landen, wo man auch landen möchte. Weil man sitzt vor einem Laien, dem man etwas erklärt, und man selber weiß, worum es geht, also dementsprechend kann man den schon steuern. 186-193*

[259] Charles*: Also Sie können als Berater wirklich manipulativ tätig sein. 806*

For some employees, the trust their customers place in them as well as the opportunity for manipulation arising from that trust and the better understanding of the product or service offered can result in a feeling a responsibility towards customer-oriented behavior, towards protecting the customer's interests. This is shown in Charles condemnation of the abuse of customer trust (712-715) and Andrew's assertion that he could not abuse such trust:

> Andrew: *"For me personally it is like this - if I have someone who trusts me, then I can't pull a fast one on them. That just doesn't go."*[260]

Feelings of obligation towards the customer

Finally, the last category found during the analysis of the interviews had to do with obligations towards the customer - a tit for tat mentality in which a favor or some other positive behavior by the customer would be repaid by the frontline employee in form of pro-customer behavior in role conflict situations. A very good example for this is given by George. He is usually adamant that services offered by his company should be available to those in need and that he will help people who he deems to have legitimate needs and claims.

> George: *"Maybe you do sort out the ones that just have a sense of entitlement, but aren't really sick, that just want a cheap holiday and then apply for treatment at a health facility, or people, where you can see from the overall picture of what services they received, that they really are sick. For those it was always easier for me to ensure that they got the health facility stay."*[261]

The example with the stay in a health facility that was used by some as a form of cheap holiday at the expense of his company is used several times by George (482-486; 607-611; 630-632). He also said that his company wants to reduce the number of health facility stays it grants (464-467). However, he described one case in which he acted differently, because he felt an obligation towards that customer.

> Interview: *"Has it happened to you that you had a case in which you had to decide on the claim of an insured customer that you found yourself torn? When on the one side were the interests of the insured and on the other side the interests of your company, that you felt torn between them?"*

> George: *"There are sometimes cases where people do something for each other, for example by ensuring that all of the five trainees starting in their firm come to [George's insurance company]. In that way this person does something for me. If*

[260] Andrew: *Bei mir persönlich ist das so, wenn ich jetzt jemanden hab, der mir vertraut, dann kann ich den nicht übers Ohr hauen, das geht einfach nicht, ne? 181-183*

[261] George: *Man sortiert vielleicht schon so ein bisschen die aus, die nur ein Anspruchsdenken haben, aber nicht richtig krank sind, die günstig einen Urlaub machen wollen und dann eine Kur beantragen oder Leute, die aus dem Gesamtbild der Leistungen, die sie bekommen haben, sieht, dass sie krank sind. Für die war es für mich immer leichter, dass sie auch eine Kur bekamen. 22-26*

he then applies for a treatment at a health facility that he sees as more of a cheap holiday and does not actually need, well then I have to ask myself, what do I do? (...) If he does something for you, you have to make getting that treatment easier for him."There are sometimes cases where one does something for somebody, for example in a company, where someone ensures that all five trainees that start there every year go to my company. Then he does something for me. If he wants a stay in a health facility that really he views as a cheap holiday, then I'm faced with the question of what to do? I do have the problem that the stay at the facility not only involves the money of all the insured people, but also the advantage of the five trainees that he brings every year. They pay insurance premiums that benefit the entirety of the insured people as well. There you can end up in a discrepancy. For me it was always important to ensure that it didn't get out of hand and to think about the amount of that, what you're doing, the amount of money, that you don't fulfill utopian wishes (...). I compare everything in life with a pair of scales and the scales need to be balanced. They can stay this way for a few years and then something happens to balance it or it may stand like that for a year, but there is balance in the long run. (...) If he does something for you, you have to make getting the stay in the health facility easier for them."[262]

George weighs the contribution of the customer brings to himself and the company in the form of five new paying members every year with helping that customer receive a service by the company George doesn't really think the customer is entitled to. He believes the customer wants the stay in the health facility as a cheap holiday, an opinion that would normally lead him to not help that customer and probably end with the denial of the claim. But here he feels obliged to conform to the customers wishes because of the good he does the company. The stay in the health facility becomes a form of payment for the benefits the company and George receive from that customer.

George uses the image of a pair of scales that is to be kept in balance. He also describes assessing how much the customer should be offered for his service - he describes assessing the

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[262] Interviewerin: *Ist es denn mal vorgekommen, dass Sie in einem Entscheidungsfall bei einem Versicherten, so zwischen den Stühlen standen? Auf der einen Seite das Interesse des Versicherten gesehen haben, auf der anderen Seite das Interesse ihres Unternehmens, dass Sie zwischen den Stühlen waren und hin und her gerissen waren?*

George*: Es gibt manchmal in Bereichen, wo der eine was für den anderen tut, zum Beispiel in einer Firma, jemand dafür sorgt, dass alle fünf Auszubildende, die jedes Jahr dort anfangen, zu meinem Unternehmen gehen. Dann tut der was für mich. Wenn der eine Kur haben will, die er eigentlich als billigen Urlaub ansieht, die er eigentlich nicht braucht, dann bin ich halt in der Frage, was tue ich? Da habe ich aber auch das Problem, dass es sich bei der Kur nicht nur um das Geld der Versicherten der anderen handelt, sondern den Vorteil die fünf Auszubildenden, die er hier jedes Jahr bringt, dass das ja wieder Beitragszahler auch für diese Versicherten sind. Da kommt man schon mal in eine Diskrepanz. Für mich ist es dann immer wichtig gewesen, es nicht ausufern zu lassen und da richtig schon Gedanken über die Höhe von dem, was man da macht, von der Geldausgabe die Höhe macht, dass man nicht utopische Wünsche erfüllt. (...) Ich vergleiche eigentlich alles im Leben mit einer Waage, die Waage muss im Gleichgewicht sein. Die kann ruhig ein paar Jahre so stehen und dann passiert was, was zum Ausgleich führt oder es steht mal ein Jahr so, aber auf eine lange Dauer eine Ausgeglichenheit da ist. (...) Wenn der was für einen tut, muss man dem schon die Kur leichter machen. 420-439* amount of money that would be spent on the customer and comparing it to the money made from the five new members received every year. He also describes that he wants to ensure that it doesn't get out of hand, that the company does not pay for "utopian" wishes. It is therefore important to George to ensure that while the customer is repaid for his service, that this payment is not too much.

This fits very well with what social exchange theory would predict (Blau 1964). As described in chapter 4.1.1, social exchange theory postulates that members of an exchange relationship try to ensure that what they put into a relationship is balanced by what they get out of a relationship. Imbalances in the input-output relationship are corrected (Blau 1968; Lambe, Wittmann, and Spekman 2001). If a person feels that they are getting less out of relationship than they put in, they are likely to reduce their input. If they feel the other person puts in more than they do, if in other words their own relationship output is greater than the input, they will try to increase their input. Social exchange theory is often used to explain both positive and negativ employee behaviors in employee-company relationships (Bettencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie 2005; El Akremi, Vandenberghe, and Camerman 2010; Lambooij et al. 2007, see also chapters 4.1.1; 4.3 and 6.4).

Just as employees can by prompted to show pro-organizational behavior due to a positive evaluation of the relationship outcomes in their relationship with their company (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Fu, Bolander, and Jones 2009), the same could apply in a employee-customer relationship. If the employee feels that the relationship input by the other party, in this case the customer, outweighs the input by the employee, this may result in pro-customer behavior to restore balance.

George is the only frontline employee who explicitly describes having sided with the customer due to a feeling of obligation for what the customer has done or is doing. Other interview partners have described given respect or offering honesty in exchange for the same from the customer and in turning expecting the customer to be honest and respectful. But these expectations were not linked to behavior in role conflict situations. Examples include the following statements by David:

> David: *"I am honest towards the customer, tell him, what I can do, what the company can do, what the contract covers and in exchange of course I expect the customer to be honest and put all cards on the table and say what he wants and not to conceal anything, things that might have gone wrong."*[263]

[263] David*: Ich bin selbst ehrlich zu dem Kunden, sage ihm, was kann ich, was kann das Unternehmen, was kann der Vertrag oder was beinhaltet er und auf der Gegenseite erwarte ich natürlich von ihm auch, dass er zunächst mal mit offenen Karten spielt und sagt, was er haben will und nicht verschweigt, was eventuell schon vorher faul gelaufen ist . 191-195*

***

> Interviewer: "What do I have to be like as a customer that you stay with the 60 percent?"
>
> [Refers to an earlier quote in which David had said that he was 60% customer-oriented and 40% company-oriented.]
>
> David: *"If you are honest with your agency, the agency will always thank you by consulting you honestly."*[264]

Here David presents reciprocity as an important aspect, a tit for tat mentality. If he is honest towards the customer, he expects the customer to do the same. If the customer is honest towards the agency, the agency will be honest in turn. This supports the idea of pro-customer behaviors, such as honesty, as elements of a social exchange relationship, in which the exchange partners evaluate the relationship and, provided they wish they remain in it, may try to find a balance of inputs and outputs over time.

Chapter Summary

This chapter looked at what factors related to customers and customer behaviors increased the likelihood of frontline employees siding with customer and showing pro-customer behaviors in situations of company-customer role conflict. Four different categories of factors emerged during the analysis of the interviews:

- positive feelings towards the customer - including liking the customer, sympathy, empathy, rapport and friendship,
- perceiving customer interests as just and legitimate,
- feelings of responsibility towards the customer, particularly when customers trusted the frontline employee and/or there a strong information asymmetry between the customer and the frontline employee, and
- feelings of obligation towards a customer due to benefits offered by that customer.

Pro-customer feelings were by far the most commonly given reason for siding more with the customer than with the company during role conflict situations. "Sympathie", which can refer to simply taking a liking to someone or to feelings of rapport, was cited by eleven of nineteen interview partners. Eric, Phoebe and Brian address rapport, consisting of both pleasant interactions and a personal connection (Gremler and Gwinner 2000; Macintosh 2009), as influenc-

[264] Interviewerin*: Wie muss ich denn als Ihr Kunde sein, damit Sie bei den 60% bleiben?*

David*: Wenn Sie als Kunde ehrlich mit Ihrer Agentur umgehen, wird die Agentur Ihnen das immer danken, indem sie Sie auch ehrlich berät. 553-556* ing their feelings towards the customer. Phoebe and Brian explicitly give this as a reason for siding with the customer.

”Sympathie” in the sense of taking a liking to customer, finding that person to be likeable, is described more often. It was often given as an answer when asked what customers have to be like to make it more likely that the employees side with them. Eric and Rebecca gave it as a reason for investing more effort for that customer, not only but also in role conflict situations.

Two interview partners directly addressed friendship during the interviews. David describes acting differently for good acquaintances and friends, to the point of trying to help these customers achieve a settlement in the case of unclear or questionable claims. Fred also speaks about friendships with customers, both with customers who have become friends and friends who have become customers. Although Fred does not explicitly state that friendships make him more likely to side with a customer in role conflict situations, they do make him more aware of possible role conflicts. They also seem to raise the importance of protecting the customer interests of his friends and lead him to invest extra time and energy to double check the offers made by his company.

In summary, this study finds that pro-customer feelings lead to pro-customer behaviors. In role conflict situations this could result in the frontline employee being more likely to side with the customer or find alternative ways of helping the customer and protecting their interests. This would be in line with a large body of research showing that pro-company feelings lead to pro-company behaviors, such as citizenship behaviors and enhanced effort (for example Aselage and Eisenberger 2003; Bettencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie 2005; De Coninck and Johnson 2009; Fu, Bolander, and Jones 2009; Lambooij et al. 2007, see also chapters 4.1.1 and 6.4).

There is however little research on how employees’ feelings towards customers influence their feelings and behaviors. Varca (2009) has shown that empathy, which is linked to rapport (Coan 1984; Smyth and Mitchell 2008), increases role conflict. This maybe because empathy and other pro-customer feelings such as rapport make protecting the customer’s interests more important to the employee, resulting in higher role conflict if the employee also feels committed towards protecting his company’s interests. It could also increase the likelihood of the employee siding with the customer in situations of role conflict.

Findings of a study by Harris and Ogbonna (2009) on service sabotage support the link between pro-customer feelings and pro-customer behaviors. They found that frontline employees sometimes offered their friends and family free services and gifts without the company’s knowledge or consent, a behavior they refer to a sweethearting. Brady, Voorhees and Brusco (2012) look at the potential impact of sweethearting for companies as well as a variety of antecedents for such behaviors. While they do not directly address the relationship between the sweethearting employee and the sweethearted customer in their model, in their scale for measuring sweethearting two of the five items directly address giving free services and products to friends a third refers to helping people that the employee likes.

The findings of this research study therefore lead to the following propositions:

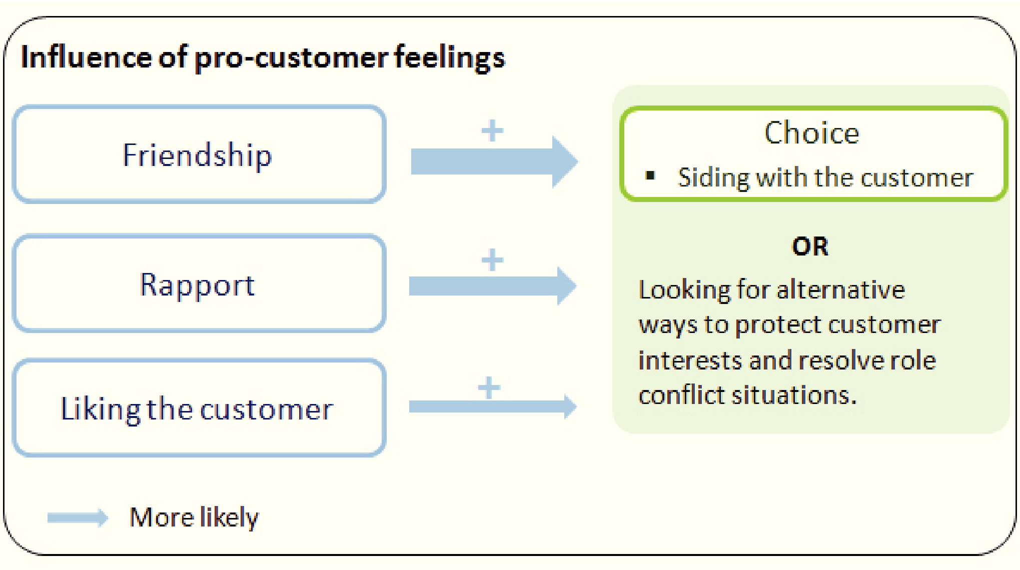
- Pro-customer feelings by the frontline employee, such as liking the customer, feelings of rapport, and friendship, increase the likelihood that they will side with the customer or try and protect the customer interests in other ways (such as looking for compromise).

It is also likely that the stronger the positive feeling for the customer, the more pronounced the increased likelihood for siding with the customer will become. Thus

- Customer-employee friendship will increase the likelihood of the frontline employee siding with the customer more than feeling of rapport. In turn, feelings of rapport are likely to cause a stronger increase than the employee simply liking the customer.

This is depicted in figure 32:

Figure 32: Influence of Pro-Customer Feelings



As well as pro-customer feelings the perceived legitimacy of customer interests and wishes appears to influence frontline employee behavior in role conflict situations. When frontline employees felt the customer to be in the right and his or her interests and demands to be legitimate, they were more likely to side with the customer. Conversely, if the claim was felt to be unreasonable or illegitimate, the frontline employees were less likely to side with the customer. Legitimacy in this context refers to the employee perceiving the claim, demand or interest to be understandable and comprehensible. O'Brien, Hill and Autry (2009) described this as cognitively legitimate. In their study on the impact of the perceived legitimacy of a customer's attempt to return a product on the role conflict felt by the employee they also looked at normative (in line with socially accepted norms) and rules-based (according to the rules set by the company) legitimacy.

O'Brian and colleagues (2009) found that a cognitively illegitimate claim resulted in a higher level of role conflict than a cognitively legitimate one. Their explanation for this was that the frontline employee tried to understand the reason for the claim, please the customer while at the same time protect their company from an attempt of fraud.

This study is qualitative and as such does not measure the level of role conflict felt by frontline employees in certain situations. It is therefore not easy to compare the results, but there are some findings that would contradict the O'Brian, Hill and Autry (2009) findings. For example Thomas stating that role conflict situations for him became more difficult when he could follow the customer's line of reasoning more than his own company's, suggesting that his level of role conflict is higher in the case of cognitively legitimate role demand. The results also suggest that perceiving customer role demands to be legitimate increases the likelihood of the frontline employee siding with the customer or looking for alternative ways to protect the customer's interests. Whether role conflict then increased or decreased would depend on the relative strength of the role demands by the company and the customer and the employee's ability to act in the way he or she feels to be right.

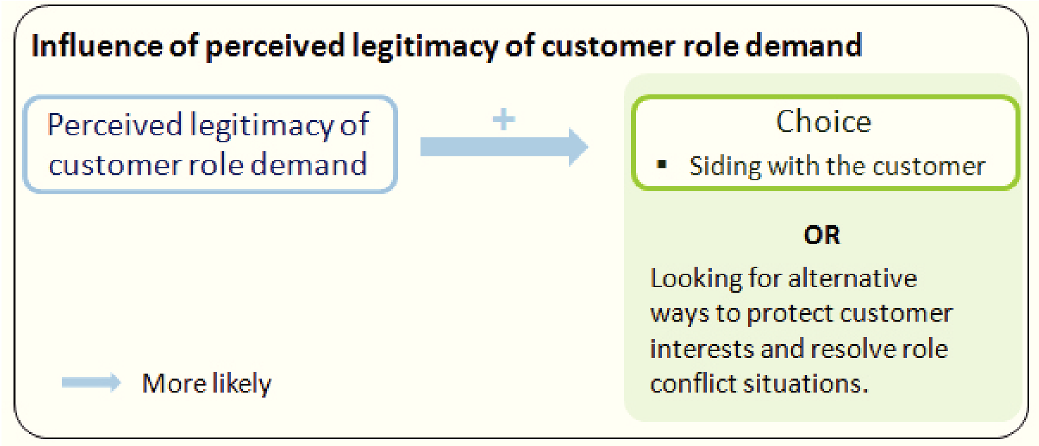
Role conflict may be especially likely to be increased in situations of rules-based illegitimate but cognitively legitimate customer role demands. In such situations frontline employees may empathize with the customer but would have to break rules to help him or her.

There is very little research available on the impact of the perceived legitimacy of customer role demands on the frontline employees' behavior. Further research is necessary to better understand this relationship. Based on this study, the following propositions can be made:

- Perceiving customer role demands to be (cognitively) legitimate increases the likelihood that frontline employees will side with the customer or try and protect the customer interests in other ways (such as looking for compromise).

This is depicted in figure 33:

Figure 33: Influence of Perceived Legitimacy of Customer Role Demand



The third category of factors increasing the likelihood of frontline employees siding with the company is responsibility felt towards the customer. Responsibility towards customer has been discussed in part in chapter 6.3.1 on employee role perceptions, as it was sometimes described as something employees saw as inherent to their job role. It was also discussed in chapter 6.3.2 as part of moral and ethical principles influencing employee behavior.

It is however also closely linked to the employee-customer relationship. With regards to responsibility towards customers, three aspects were particularly salient in the results. Many frontline employees pointed out that their customers trusted them, that they knew much more about the services and products offered than the customers and that these two aspects offered opportunities for frontline employees to influence, and perhaps even manipulate, customers.

This leads to the following proposition:

- A feeling of responsibility towards the customer increases the likelihood of frontline employees siding with the customer or try and protect the customer interests in other ways (such as looking for compromise).
  Feelings of responsibility towards the customer can arise from the customer trusting the frontline employee, the frontline employee knowing much more about the products and services on offer and thus the possibility of influencing or manipulating the customer.

Finally, the fourth category of factors increasing the likelihood of frontline employees siding with customers involves feelings of obligations towards the customer. This involves a tit for tat mentality, in which protecting the customers interests in a role conflict situations is offered in return for something the customer has done or can do for the employee or the company. An example for this is the behavior of George, who helps a customer get his claim for a stay at a health facility accepted by the company, even though George believes the claim to be illegitimate and just an attempt by the customer to have a cheap holiday. But because the customer brings five new customers to the company every year, George feels obliged to help this customer get his claim through. The stay in the health facility becomes a form of payment for the benefits the company and George receive from that customer.

In a similar line of reasoning, David explains that honesty by the customer is repaid in kind by an insurance agency. He also expects customers to be honest in return for his own honesty towards the customer. This is in line with what social exchange theory would predict for an ongoing exchange relationship. The following proposition can thus be made:

- A feeling of obligation towards the customer due to benefits offered by that customer increases the likelihood that frontline employees will side with the customer or try and protect the customer interests in other ways (such as looking for compromise).

After having outlined the factors increasing the likelihood of frontline employees siding with the customer, the following chapter will look at factors decreasing that likelihood.

6.5.2. Influencing Factors Decreasing the Likelihood of Pro-Customer Decisions in Role Conflict Situations

After looking at the customer-related factors that increase the likelihood of frontline employees favoring the customer in role conflict situations, the following chapter looks at the factors making it less likely that frontline employees behave in a pro-customer way. The themes that emerged during the analysis of the interview material in many ways mirror the factors increasing pro-customer behaviors. The themes are:

- Negative feelings towards the customer - including finding the customer to be unfriendly, off-putting or unlikeable in some other way, and
- perceiving customer interests as unfair and illegitimate.

Negative feelings towards the customer and negative customer behaviors

As was the case with factors promoting pro-customer decision, how the frontline employee felt towards the customer was by far the most commonly cited reason. Perceiving the customer as unfriendly, off-putting or taking a dislike to the customer for another reason was the main customer-related reason given for siding against the customer. Some of the interviewed frontline employees reported that they tried to reduce the amount of time and effort that they invested in unfriendly customers. When Andrew is asked what customers should be like to encourage frontline employees to take their side, he includes the following advice:

Andrew: *"Not too quiet, but not too domineering either. Because then you're not going to get your rights either, then the consultant just wants you to go and won't put in any effort."*[265]

Quinn and Eric describe similar sentiments. If a customer is rude and unfriendly, they try to end the contact quickly, will invest less effort and make less attempts to really help the customer.

Quinn: *"Of course, if someone calls and is like 'listen, lady', and 'no, no, no, everything here is really bad and awful', then of course one does not do that, then I would not say, I'll look for something else for you, then you say that is out of stock- end of story."*[266]

Eric*: "When people come across as really unfriendly, then you handle the case the way you have to handle it. The way you have to do it. What is necessary, without leaving yourself open to reproach."*[267]

Eric contrasts this with cases where he takes more time for a customer and really listens to the customer. In both these cases, Eric and Phoebe describe doing just enough for unfriendly customers, investing a bare minimum of effort rather than taking time to really try and help that customer.

The interview partners also described taking a harder stance with the customer, being less likely to try and help or to offer any favors.

Interviewer*: "What options do you have to go more in the direction of the customer?"*

Phoebe*: "I can finance certain things for him more readily. (...) I'm more likely to say, OK, I'll grant that, that is within my scope of discretion. I don't have to grant that, I can decide on a case-by-case basis. And I say, no, I'm not going to give him any money after he was so unfriendly and grumpy. Even though I'm sup-*

[265] Brian: *Also zum Beispiel am liebsten habe ich fast schon Selbstständige, die möglichst große Firmen leiten. Weil, da ist das Emotionale fast weg, man spricht fast nur über Fakten, ist am einfachsten. Die Kunden würden niemals verhandeln, wenn eine Leistung nicht ersetzt wird, weil es steht im Kleingedruckten drin: es ist nicht ersetzt. Dann geben die sich halt damit ab. 202- 205*

[266] Quinn: *Klar wenn jetzt jemand anruft wie ‚Hören Sie mal, Fräulein' und ‚Nö nö nö, das ist hier aber alles schlecht und schlimm', dann macht man das natürlich nicht, da würde ich jetzt nicht sagen: ‚Ich such Ihnen jetzt nochmal was anderes raus', dann sagt man schon: ‚Das ist jetzt weg' und fertig. 275-278*

[267] Eric: *Also, auch wenn Leute wirklich unfreundlich rüberkommen, dann bearbeitet man das so, wie man das bearbeiten muss. Oder wie man das machen muss, halt. Das was nötig ist, ohne dass man einem was nachhalten kann. 239-242*

posed to use only objective measures, where whether someone is likeably shouldn't have any influence."[268]

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Interviewer: *"How would I have to be as a customer to make it more likely that you side with me in cases where there was room for decision, where you decide in favor of the company or the customer?"*

Phoebe: *"Well, I'd say you can't discount the likeability factor, which shouldn't have any impact, but no one can tell me that likeability isn't a decisive factor. If I have a grumpy face sitting across from me, that stinks of alcohol and cigarettes and is unfriendly, he can say whatever he wants, I will be harder on him than if I have a customer, a likeable woman of my age, maybe with a similar history or something, that I might say, I have been in her situation."*[269]

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Olivia: *"Some [customers] will stand in the service area and start shouting, you don't know who that is so you poke you head out of the door to lock and later you hear from the lady at the main office, that was Mr. So-and-so, then you associate that with him. And these are the kind of things that can sort of stir a little antipathy. Get you thinking, well, maybe not."*[270]

In some cases, frontline employee's reported going even further, not only deciding to not help the customer as much as they might otherwise have done, but to actively side against the cus-

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[268] Interviewerin: *Welche Möglichkeiten hast du denn da in Richtung Kunde zu gehen?*

Phoebe*: Ihm bestimmte Dinge eher finanzieren. (…) Dass ich da eher sage, okay das bewillige ich, denn das ist ja in meinem Ermessensspielraum. Ich muss das nicht bewilligen, ich kann das im Einzelfall. Ich sage auch: ‚Nö, dem jetzt auch noch Geld zu geben, wenn der so unfreundlich und muffig ist'. Obwohl ich ja eigentlich ganz neutral Maßstäbe ansetzen muss, wo ja der Sympathiefaktor eigentlich keine Rolle spielen dürfte. 303-312*

[269] Interviewerin*: Wie müsste ich denn als Kunde sein, um es wahrscheinlicher zu machen, dass in Situationen, in denen Entscheidungen auf der Kippe stehen, wenn du mehr für das Unternehmen oder mehr in Richtung Kunden entscheiden könntest, dich für mich entscheidest?*

Phoebe*: Also ich sage mal diesen Sympathiefaktor kann man natürlich nicht verhehlen, der sollte keine Rolle spielen, aber das kann mir keiner erzählen, dass nicht Sympathie ein entscheidender Faktor ist. Also wenn mir da schon so ein Griesgram gegenüber sitzt irgendwie, der wer weiß wie nach Alkohol und Zigaretten stinkt und noch motzig ist oder so, der kann mir noch so viel erzählen, da bin ich dann eher härter, als wenn ich vielleicht einen Kunden, sympathische Frau in meinem Alter, vielleicht noch ähnlichen Werdegang oder so, dass ich so sag: ‚Ach ja, ich war auch mal in einer so ähnlichen Situation'. 288-297*

[270] Olivia*: Manche stehen dann vorne am Empfang, brüllen rum, man weiß gar nicht, wer ist das überhaupt, klar steckt man dann den Kopf zur Tür raus, wenn man nachher von der Dame der Zentrale hört, das war der Herr Sowieso, dann hat der schon irgendwo so einen Stempel weg. Und das sind dann so Sachen, die dann so ein bisschen die Antipathie schüren. Und wo man sich dann so denkt, naja, vielleicht doch lieber nicht. 337-340*

tomer. This can involve withholding services that the customer would be entitled to or harming the customer in some other way. Eric and George offer some very good examples for this:

> Eric: *"This wasn't a customer, this was the injured party in a damage event, he insulted me personally during the first conversation, badly insulted me, indirectly my mother, with abusive terms. I decided to let it come to a court case. I didn't process the claim to the bitter end. I mean in the end we won, we didn't have to pay, but I stuck to my guns and I didn't bother about whether he was right or not. I chose the hard way."*[271]

Eric states that the caller was not a customer, which means that he was not insured with Eric's company. The other party in the damage event was the customer of Eric's company. However, part of Eric's job is also dealing with parties involved in damage or insurance events that involve customers. While the described case does not involve an explicit employee-customer relationship, it can still help shed light on the influences of customer behavior on frontline employee behavior.

Eric not only decides to not go out of his way to help the caller, but he reports actively shutting down on him. There is the feeling of this being personal for Eric - the description of the personal insults, involving his mother and his choice of phrases "stuck to my guns (*"ich bin von Anfang an stur geblieben"*) and "*to the bitter end*". There is also an impression of siding against the customer involving a cost or risk for Eric - "I choose the hard way" implying that the other way, simply dealing with the caller, would have been easier. Eric reports not having bothered about whether the caller was in the right or not and to "*let it come to a court case*". The German phrase Eric used ("*Dort habe ich es ganz klar auf ein Klageverfahren ankommen lassen")* is even stronger than the phrase used in the translation „*let it come to that*". He willingly took the risk that the case would end up in court. In summary, the impression that one can get from the quote is that the case has become personal for Eric and that he is willing to incur costs, risks and possible trouble before helping the caller. He also does not care whether the caller would be entitled to his help - whether or not the caller is in the right.

> George: *"I recall a customer who was a very unfriendly, overly loud person. Whenever he was in the agency he thought he could get what he wanted through his loud, screaming voice. And the company had already paid for 2 hearing devices, even though he was entitled to only one, and he still wanted assistance with*

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[271] Eric*: Das war jetzt kein Kunde, das war ein Geschädigter in einem Schadenfall, der hat mich direkt im ersten Gespräch mich persönlich beleidigt, massiv beleidigt, auch indirekt meine Mutter dann damit, mit Schimpfwörtern. Dort habe ich es ganz klar auf ein Klageverfahren ankommen lassen. Also, da habe ich bis zum bitteren Ende den Schadenfall nicht reguliert. (...) Ich meine, wir haben dann auch im Endeffekt dann gewonnen, mussten nicht zahlen, aber dort bin ich von Anfang an stur geblieben und habe mich dann auch nicht drum gekümmert ob der Recht hat oder nicht. Ich bin dann direkt den harten Weg gegangen. 263-269*

implants, where it was possible to have them partially covered. But the way he treated others, including his receptionist or his wife. He could shout all he wanted to and even though we could have given 1.000 Euro towards something that may have cost him 6.000 - 7.000 Euro, I had no problems with denying his claim. I could justify the decision. It was his using others or the lying and the being rude to others. That made it easier to say no. There needs to be a balance somewhere. He must be prepared to help others and if he treats his wife like that, then there is no need to treat him like a king."[272]

As was the case with Eric, there seems to be a personal element to George's decision to not help the customer. He decides to deny the customer's application for assistance with paying for a hearing implant even though he admits that it would have been possible to help the customer. He explains his decision with the customer's general behavior towards others. Unlike Eric's case the negative behavior is not presented as having been directed towards George. He speaks of general behavior - the customer shouting loudly and being unfriendly - as well of as of him treating his receptionist and wife badly. George disapproves of the customer's behavior and uses this as a reason for withholding his assistance.

Similar to the findings on positive feelings towards the customer in the previous chapter, the negative feelings described differ in strength. Whereas the positive feelings increased from simply taking a liking to someone to rapport to friendship, here we have frontline employees experiencing dislike ranging from mild dislike to stronger personal feelings. The negative feelings towards the customer mostly lead to withholding positive behaviors towards the customer. The employees report not investing extra time, not going out of their way to help the customer, and not granting a claim.

There is some support in the literature for the proposition that negative customer behaviors, such as rudeness, unfriendliness and aggressiveness, lead to frontline employees withholding positive and displaying negative behaviors. Wang and colleagues (2011) found that negative behaviors of customers in a call centre, including such behaviors as demanding special treatment, venting their bad mood on the employee, being unreasonable and aggressive, lead to higher levels of customer-directed sabotage. In this they included behaviors such as intention-

[272] George*: Ich denke an einen Kunden, der ein unfreundlicher, überlauter Mensch war. Wenn der in der Geschäftsstelle war, der meinte durch seine laute, verschreiende Stimme immer sein Recht zu kriegen. Und das Unternehmen hat dem zwei Ohrhörer schon angeschafft, obwohl ihm nur einer zusteht, und der wollte dann Implantate bezuschusst haben, wo es schon Möglichkeiten gab, einen Teil dabei zu bekommen. Aber in der Art, wie er mit andern Menschen umging, auch mal mit seiner Sprechstundenhilfe und auch mit seiner Frau (...). Also der konnte schreienn wie er wollte und wenn man, sag ich mal, was dem 6 - 7000 Euro gekostet hat, vielleicht mit 1000 Euro großzügig hätte bezuschussen können, daher habe ich nicht das Problem gehabt, eine Absage zu machen, weil ich mich auch rechtfertigen konnte. Es ist halt das Ausnutzen oder das Lügen und das unverschämt sein mit anderen, das hat es mir auch leichter gemacht, nein zu sagen. Aber das muss halt auch ein Ausgleich auch irgendwo sein. Er muss auch bereit sein das für andere zu geben und wenn er seine Frau so behandelt, dann muss er nicht wie ein König behandelt werden.* 765-778

ally putting the customer on hold for long periods of time, transferring the customer to a wrong department, or disconnecting a call as well as lying to the customer about having already dealt with the problem (Wang et al. 2011, p.319-320). They also showed that lower levels of self-efficacy for emotional regulation[273], shorter job tenure, and a lower commitment to service rules increased the effect of customer mistreatment on customer-directed sabotage by employees. The study by Wang and colleagues (2011) supports earlier findings by Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, and Walker (2008). They found that customer injustice, which relates to customer behaviors perceived by the employee as unjust (and as unfriendly or aggressive according to the items provided by the authors (p. 1347) increased the likelihood of customer-directed sabotage behaviors.

The two studies discussed above are two of very few studies directly looking at how negative customer behaviors towards employees affect employee behaviors towards customers. Most other studies looking negative customer behaviors focus on more general employee outcomes, such as emotional exhaustion (for example Grandey, Dickter, and Hock-Peng 2004; Grandey, Kern, and Frone 2007; Karatepe, Haktanir, and Yorganci 2010; Kim et al. 2012) turnover intention (Karatepe 2011); reduced cognitive abilities (such as ability to recall information and memory processes, Rafaeli et al. 2012), and reduced performance (Rafaeli et al. 2012; Wegge, Vogt, and Wecking 2007). At the same time, studies looking at dysfunctional or negative customer-directed behaviors by frontline employees tend to focus on environment- or company-related antecedents as well as personal ones, but not at customer behaviors as an antecedent. For example, Harris and Ogbonna (2002; 2006) propose various employee-related antecedents for service sabotage behavior, such as employees' perceptions of the extent of surveillance and employees' need for social approval. They also look at group, organizational and environmental factors, none of which refer directly to customer behaviors.

This study adds to the body of literature linking negative customer behaviors towards customers with customer-directed negative behaviors by frontline employees. The study indicates that customer misbehaviors, such as unfriendliness, rudeness and aggressiveness, lead to frontline employee withholding pro-customer behaviors and displaying dysfunctional (or sabotage) behaviors. In role conflict situations negative behaviors by customers (and resulting negative feelings of frontline employees towards customers) are likely to influence the frontline employee to side with the company and against the customer.

Unfair or illegitimate customer demands

The second category of influencing factors reducing the likelihood of frontline employees relates to the perceived legitimacy or justness of the customer interests or demands. When front-

[273] Self-efficacy for emotional regulation is defined as "an individual's belief regarding his/her ability to regulate emotions" and included items such as "I have good control of my own emotions" (Wang et al. 2011, p.319).

line employees felt that the customer was being unfair or making illegitimate demands, there were more likely to side with the company. Two quotes by David illustrate this well:

> David: *"If a customer is not prepared to be honest and open towards me then we won't have a very long contractual relationship with each other. By that I mean he may have a contract that I negotiated with our company but if he tries to get something here in some way that he is not entitled to, then I am more than happy to go separate ways from such a customer and contract."*[274]

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> David: *"Well, I think I am 60% customer-oriented and 40% company-oriented. (...) But we always come back to this, that this requires the customer to be honest to me about his needs and demands and we can set up everything correctly. If I find out a customer has been dishonest, cheated me, (...) then maybe one is more careful in future and not prepared to take that 60-40 position again. Then maybe you'll just read what it says, and so it is entirely possible that there is a clear refusal, even if maybe otherwise there would have been some room for goodwill."*[275]

Both quotes illustrate the importance of honesty to David, and of the customers' interests and demands being perceived as fair and just. If this is not the case, if David believes the customer's claims to be dishonest and illegitimate, he is less likely to decide or act in the customers' favor. George makes a similar point about siding against those customers he believes to have unjustified claims or desires.

> George: *"Maybe you do sort out the ones that just have a sense of entitlement, but aren't really sick, that just want a cheap holiday and then apply for treatment at a health facility."*[276]

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[274] David*: Wenn ein Kunde nicht bereit ist, mir gegenüber offen und ehrlich zu sein, dann werden wir kein langes Vertragsverhältnis miteinander haben. Das heißt, dann hat er zwar einen Vertrag möglicherweise, den ich vermittelt habe mit unseren Hause, aber wenn der dann sagen wir mal auf (...) irgendwelche Art und Weise hier Dinge zu erhaschen, die ihm nicht zustehen, dann bin ich also auch gerne bereit, mich von einem solchen Kunden und Vertrag wieder zu trennen. 184-190*

[275] *David: Also, ich denke mal, ich bin immer 60% kundenorientiert und 40 % unternehmensorientiert. (...) Das setzt voraus, wir kommen immer wieder auf das Gleiche zurück, dass er im Vorfeld auch mit seinen Ansprüchen oder vorher mit seinem Interesse an Versicherungen ehrlich auf mich zukommt und wir das Ganze in vernünftigen Bahnen abhandeln. Wenn also ich also gemerkt habe, dass mich ein Kunde mal gelinkt hat, (...), dann wird man natürlich beim zweiten Mal vorsichtiger sein und wird möglicherweise diese 60-40 Position nicht mehr einnehmen. Dann wird man also möglicherweise nur nachlesen, was steht dort, und dann kann es durchaus sein dass man also eine ganz klare Ablehnung erfolgt, wo sonst vielleicht so etwas Ähnliches wie eine Kulanz noch drin wäre. 539-542*

[276] George: *Man sortiert vielleicht schon so ein bisschen die aus, die nur ein Anspruchsdenken haben, aber nicht richtig krank sind, die günstig einen Urlaub machen wollen und dann eine Kur beantragen. 22-24*

Again, the legitimacy of the claim is an important factor in deciding whether or not to side with the customer (as discussed in the previous chapter 6.5.1). If the claims are not seen as legitimate, the lose importance, they are sorted out and separated from the more legitimate and thus important ones.

The question of legitimacy of demands is addressed somewhat by the study by Wang and colleagues (2011) which included aspects of legitimacy in the operationalization of customer mistreatment. Relevant items (p.334) include:

- Demanded special treatment.
- Complained without reason.
- Made exorbitant demands.
- Made demands that you could not deliver.
- Did not understand that you had to comply with certain rules.
- Insisted on demands that are irrelevant to your service.

Also, both Wang and colleagues (2011) and Skarlicki and colleagues (2008) argue that it is, at least in part, the perceived unfairness of the customer that leads to customer-directed sabotage behaviors. Customer mistreatment or injustice is seen as a violation of social and moral norms and thus encourages retaliation in form of sabotage behaviors (Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, and Walker 2008, p. 1337). O'Brian and colleagues (2009), who looked at the effects of perceived legitimacy of customer demands on role conflict (see chapters 3.4.4 and 6.5.1), found that normatively illegitimate claims reduced role conflict. They attributed this reduction to the fact that normatively illegitimate customer demands would make it easier for the frontline employee to side with the company or his or her own value system.

Further examples of unfair or unfriendly customers

During the interviews there were several more examples of unfair or unfriendly customers. However, these descriptions and situations were not linked to subsequent behaviors of frontline employees or decisions regarding role conflicts, which is why they will not be covered in detail in this study. In some of these instances the frontline employees reported feeling greater emotional distance towards such employees. Good examples of this are made by Brian and Sarah.

> Brian: *"If you don't get unfair, the customer demands, demands, I want, I want and we explain, it is not possible, this is something that cannot be insured in Germany and he still insists on it. He gets unfair and says, 'Insured here for twenty years and you won't pay' and because it cannot be insured we cannot pay. There are people who are like 'You're right, I understand' and people who are all 'I'll cancel everything' and then close the door. And those people, I would never*

see as emotionally close, as you just don't have a friendly or cooperative relationship ."[277]

***

Sarah: *"Emotionally I generally feel closer to the patients. (...) I do think that I usually feel closer to the patients. And that I can understand things from their point of view really well. I think it is in situations, I think that changes for me if I think the patients are just a little presumptuous. We have a cancellation fee, if patients don't cancel 48 hours in advance and sometimes if someone had a car accident or a sick child, I can understand that, I feel bad charging them.. But some, for example last year during the bad snows every therapist came, I was punctual and none of the patients came even though they might live only two kilometers away. I drove 80 kilometers and there like 'It's obvious I'm not coming, why should I call to cancel? Those moments tip the scale for me. "*[278]

In both cases, the unfair behavior of the customers and the perceived illegitimacy of their demands lead to emotional distancing of the frontline employee. Emotional closeness has been discussed in the chapter above (6.5.1) as a factor increasing the likeliness of frontline employees siding with the customer. It is therefore plausible to propose that emotional distance is likely to decrease that likelihood. This would give further support to the idea that negative feelings towards and perceptions of customers and customer behaviors negatively affect the likelihood of the frontline employee to side with the customer.

Chapter Summary

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[277] *Brian: Wenn man nicht ungerecht wird, der Kunde fordert, fordert, ich möchte, ich möchte, und wir erklären ihm, es geht aber nicht, es ist ein Punkt, der in ganz Deutschland nicht versicherbar ist und er besteht trotzdem drauf. Und wird dann unfair und sagt, ‚20 Jahre versichert hier und ihr zahlt nicht, und weil es einfach nicht versichert ist, können wir es nicht zahlen. So, da erlebe ich halt Menschen, die sagen ‚Sie haben ja Recht, ich sehe es ein' und ich erlebe Menschen ‚Da kündige ich halt alles' und machen die Tür zu. Und so, diese Leute, die würde ich halt niemals so als emotional nah, halt, weil man hat einfach kein freundschaftliches oder kein partnerschaftliches Verhältnis zunächst mal. 206-213*

[278] Sarah*: Also emotional fühle ich mich den Patienten eigentlich immer näher. (..) Ich glaub schon, dass ich mich den Patienten meistens näher fühle. So und dass ich das schon meistens aus deren Sicht auch total gut verstehen kann. Also ja ich glaub es ist in Situationen wo ich also, ich glaub das kippt bei mir dann wenn ich die Patienten dreist finde, manche sind halt einfach auch ein bisschen dreist. Die haben Ausfallhonorar hier ‚wenn die nicht 48 Stunden vorher absagen und manchmal wenn dann irgendwie jemand einen Autounfall hatte oder ein Kind krank wird, dann kann ich das halt voll verstehen, dann tut mir das eher so leid, das in Rechnung zu stellen. Aber manche sind auch, also zum Beispiel letztes Jahr vom Schneechaos sind alle Therapeuten gekommen, ich war auch pünktlich hier und alle Patienten sind einfach nicht gekommen, obwohl die irgendwie vielleicht zwei Kilometer entfernt wohnen. Ich bin 80 Kilometer gefahren und die sind so, ‚Was? Ist doch selbstverständlich, dass man nicht kommt, wieso soll ich ihnen absagen'. In dem Moment kippt es dann schon bei mir.551-575*

The focus of this chapter was on the factors related to customers and customer behaviors that decreased the likelihood of frontline employees siding with the customer and displaying pro-customer behaviors during role conflict situations. Two categories of factors were found during the analysis of the interviews:

- Negative feelings towards the customer - including finding the customer to be unfriendly, off-putting or unlikeable in some other way, and
- perceiving customer interests as unfair and illegitimate.

Negative feelings towards the customer, usually created by the customer being perceived as unfriendly, rude, or aggressive, were the most common reason given for deciding to side against the customer in role conflict situations. The negative feelings described ranged from describing dislike to stronger, more personal feelings. In two cases in particular, described by Eric and George, the dislike described was strong. Eric also described having felt personally insulted by a caller. Reactions to these customers and customer behaviors usually involved withholding positive behaviors towards the customers. These ranged from investing less effort and time in helping a customer to denying a customer help. Eric for example describes not processing an insurance claim and letting it go to court rather than handling the case beforehand (263-269). George describes not granting a customer an application for assistance from the company, even though he would have been able to. The reason he gives is that he wishes to punish the aggressive and rude behavior of the customer. In this case, the behavior is even not described as having been directed at George but at others. George has simply witnessed this behavior (765-778).

The findings of this research are supported by evidence in the literature. Studies by Wang and colleagues (2011) and Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, and Walker (2008) show that unfriendly, unfair or aggressive behaviors by customers lead to customer-directed sabotage behaviors by frontline employees. The sabotage behaviors included lying to the customer, disconnecting the call and thus ending the contact situation or withholding service in some other way.

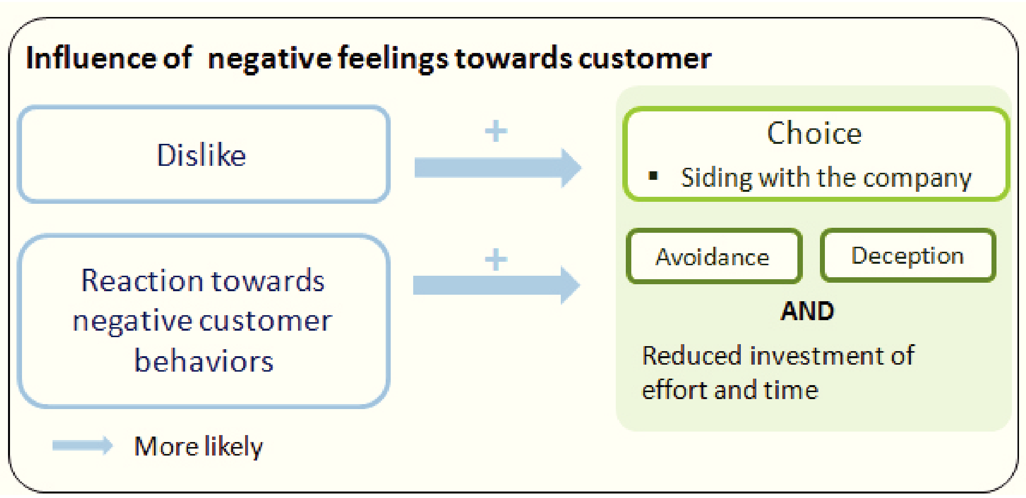
Other studies have shown that aggressive or unfriendly behaviors by customer can lead to emotional exhaustion of frontline staff (e.g. Grandey, Kern, and Frone 2007; Karatepe, Haktanir, and Yorganci 2010; Kim et al. 2012), reduced cognitive abilities (Rafaeli et al. 2012), and reduced performance (Rafaeli et al. 2012; Wegge, Vogt, and Wecking 2007). The results of the current study show that negative behaviors of frontline employees can lead to emotional distancing from the customer, which in turn could decrease the likelihood of frontline employees siding with the customer.

In summary, this study therefore leads to the following proposition:

- Negative behaviors by customers and negative feelings of frontline employees towards customers lead to a lower likelihood of frontline employees siding with the customer or protecting his or her interests in other ways. Pro-customer behaviors are more likely to be withheld and customer-directed negative behaviors more likely to be shown.

This is depicted in figure 34:

Figure 34: Influence of Negative Feelings towards Customers and Negative Behaviors by Customers



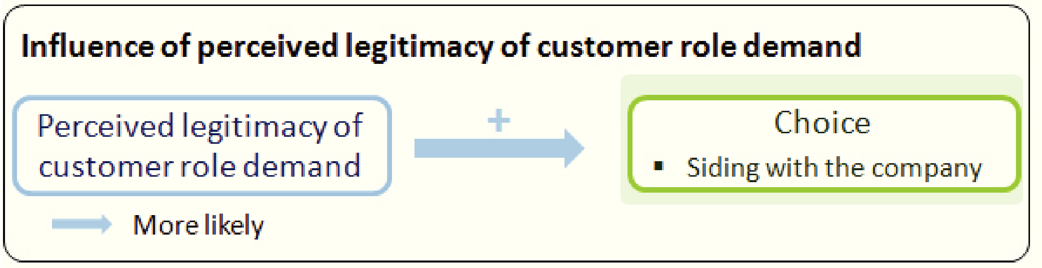
As was the case with customer-related factors increasing the likelihood of siding with the customer, the perceived legitimacy of customer interests also played a role in decreasing that likelihood. Customer demands or interests that were perceived as being unjust, unfair or not justified are much less likely to be supported by frontline employees. Interview partners reported that perceiving customer demands to be illegitimate made it easier for them to not fulfill them, to 'sort them out', as George puts it (22-24). It is likely that illegitimate demands reduce the importance and thus the strength of the role demand, making the selection of the opposing role demand more likely (see chapter 3.5.5; also Grayson 2007; Gutek, Searle, and Klepa 1991).

The studies by Wang and colleagues (2011) and Skarlicki and colleagues (2008) both support the proposition that customer demands that are perceived as unfair or unjustified are more likely to lead to customer-directed sabotage behaviors. Violations of social and moral norms, such as unjust or unfair demands, encourage retaliation in the form of customer-directed negative behaviors. O'Brian and colleagues (2009) found that normatively illegitimate customer demands reduced role conflict, implying that the choice between role demands was made easier. They argue that the choice for conflicting role demands posed by the company or personal value systems are then more likely to be chosen. Based on these findings as well as the results of the current study, the following proposition can be made:

- Perceiving customer role demands to be illegitimate, unjust or unfair decreases the likelihood that frontline employees will side with the customer or try and protect the customer interests in other ways. Role conflict levels are also likely to be lower.

This is depicted in figure 35:

Figure 35: Influence of Perceived Illegitimacy of Customer Role Demand



6.5.3. Summary

Chapter 6.5 focused on customer-related factors that influenced frontline employees' decisions in role conflict situations. Chapter 6.5.1 looked at factors increasing the likelihood that frontline employees side with the customer, chapter 6.5.2 at those that decrease it. Feelings towards the customer and the perceived legitimacy of the customer demands and interests were prominent in both chapters. Additional factors that increased frontline employees tendency to side with the customer included feelings of responsibility and obligations towards the customer. The factors are shown in table X:

Table 28 : Customer-related influence factors on frontline employees' decision during role conflict situations.

Factors increasing likelihood of frontline employees siding with customer	**Factors decreasing likelihood of frontline employees siding with customer**
▪ Positive feelings towards the customer - including liking the customer, sympathy, empathy, rapport and friendship. ▪ Perceiving customer interests as just and legitimate. ▪ Feelings of responsibility towards the customer, particularly when customers trusted the frontline employee and/or there a strong information asymmetry between the customer and the frontline	▪ Negative feelings towards the customer - including reactions to customers being unfriendly or aggressive. ▪ Perceiving customer interests as unfair and illegitimate.

employee.

- Feelings of obligation towards a customer due to benefits offered by that customer.

There is a small but growing area of research on the influence of customer behaviors on frontline employees. Positive behaviors of customers, such as customer citizenship behaviors[279], have been shown to increase well being of service frontline employees (Garma and Bove 2011) and positively impact employee performance, satisfaction and commitment (Yi, Nataraajan, and Gong 2011). How positive behaviors by customers affect employee behaviors towards customers is still little understood. Negative customer behaviors have also been looked at. Aggressive and unfriendly customers have been found to adversely affect employee performance (Rafaeli et al. 2012; Wegge, Vogt, and Wecking 2007), cognitive abilities (Rafaeli et al. 2012), and emotional exhaustion (Kim et al. 2012). There are also two studies showing that negative customer behaviors can lead to negative employee behaviors towards customers (Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, and Walker 2008; Wang et al. 2011).

This research adds to the developing understanding of how customer behaviors and frontline employees' feelings towards the customer impact employees' customer-directed behaviors. Positive feelings such as rapport and friendship lead to more pro-customer behaviors and negative customer behaviors lead to the withdrawal of pro-customer behaviors and an increase in negative behaviors directed at the customer. In role conflict situations, positive feelings towards customers and positive customer behaviors are likely to favor employees' siding with the customer. Conversely, negative feeling towards customers and negative behaviors by customers are likely to lead to siding against the customer.

6.6. Contextual Influencing Factors

As well as influencing factors related to the frontline employees themselves (see chapter 6.3), the employee-company relationship (see chapter 6.4) and the employee-customer relationship (see chapter 6.5) there was a fourth category of factors influencing frontline employee's decision in role conflict situations. This involved the consequences the frontline employee believed to be involved in siding against a role demand. The potential risk or harm to either the customer or the company that would follow from the employee siding against them in a role conflict situation was an important decision factor.

This is illustrated particularly well by a statement made by Lewis:

[279] Customer citizenship behaviors can be defined as voluntary behaviors by the customer that are outside of the required role for service delivery (Bove et al. 2009).

> Lewis: *"I have to honestly say that I definitely try to be an honest consultant and I believe I manage to do so. I do think you need to differentiate, well I, if I really find that a customer has no money, I'm the last person to take money from their pockets. If someone has half a million in their account and can do without the money, in a manner of speaking, then the situation looks different again."* [280]

In this quote Lewis makes it clear that his decision on whether to push for a sale even when he does not believe that to be in the best interests of the customer depend on the customer's financial situation. He says that he would never "empty the pockets" of someone who cannot afford it. The actual German phrase Lewis uses is "das Geld aus der Tasche ziehen", literally pulling the money out of someone's pocket. This refers to getting someone to spend either more than necessary or spending money on something this person does not need. This always involves manipulation in some way, although it can be perfectly legal. The connotation is always negative. Lewis states that he would not do this to someone he deems could not afford it, "has no money" as he puts it. But that changes when the customer has money. They can do without the money; they will not be substantially threatened by a potential loss. The difference then between the person whose pockets Lewis would empty and the person he would not do that to is the harm to the customer.

This stance is underlined in a statement Lewis makes later in the interview:

> Interviewer: *"How should I not be as a customer? Or are there customers where one is more prepared to act career-oriented or company oriented?"*
>
> Lewis: *"Yes, I'd say so. Whether you like someone or not is there definitely, and the financial background is important, that has to be said. As I said before, if someone has a huge amount of money, then some things don't hurt, in a manner of speaking, that has to be said."*
>
> Interviewer: *"So the consequences for the customer are such a criterion?"*
>
> Lewis: *"Yes. Sometimes you see people with really very, very, very, very much money and investing 20.000 Euros somewhere, wherever, is no bad thing after all, just maybe not exactly tailored to their needs."* [281]

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[280] Lewis*: Ich muss ehrlich sagen ich versuch da auf jeden Fall n' ehrlicher Berater zu sein und ich, ich denke, dass ich das auch schaffe. Ich glaub halt man muss auch abstufen, also ich, wenn ich jetzt richtig merke der Kunde hat kein Geld, dann bin ich der letzte, der dem das Geld aus der Tasche zieht. Hat einer ,'ne halbe Million auf dem Konto und kann auf Geld verzichten in Anführungsstrichen sieht man das schon wieder anders. 140-150*

[281] Interviewerin: *Wie sollte man als Kunde nicht sein? Oder gibt es so Kunden bei denen man eher bereit ist karriereorientiert, unternehmensorientiert zu handeln?*

Again, how a customer is affected by Lewis decision on whether to act more customer-oriented or more career- or company-oriented is presented as a deciding factor. He says that someone with a lot of money will not be hurt by an investment, even if that investment may not be the best solution for them. It is important to point out that Lewis does not see such an investment as something bad or detrimental to the customer, just that it may not have been the best choice for the customer.

Lewis is not the only one who bases his decision in role conflict situations on the outcome of his decision for the role partners. Charles makes similar statements:

> Interviewer: *"Are there products that are sort of on the border, where there is pressure to sell, the products aren't bad but there not perfect either?"*
>
> Charles: *"Yes, exactly. Yes."*
>
> Interviewer: *"So one sometimes has to decide …?"*
>
> Charles: *"You have to ask yourself, what happens to that customer's custody account if the customer has seven, eight or nine million and he gets 100.000 of that product. Which isn't so bad that I can't do that, how much is that percentage wise? What could happen? Of course, if I did that with a million, then I'd have to be prepared for questions, what is that. But it does have to fit, yes. Then you do of course get to the point eventually where you will do that."*[282]

The decision in a role conflict situation is again influenced by the impact it will have on the role partners, in this case the customer. How much of the customer's money is used for the transaction, what could happen? Charles also says that the decision to sell product for a cer-

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Lewis: *Ja würd ich sagen. Also Sympathie ist auf jeden Fall auch irgendwo finanzieller Rahmen muss man auch ganz klar sagen. Wie ich schon gesagt habe, wenn jemand extrem viel Geld hat, dann tun manche Sachen in Anführungsstrichen auch nicht weh, muss man auch mal ganz klar sagen.*

Interviewerin:*: Also das ist so ein Kriterium, was für Auswirkung es für den Kunden gibt?*

Lewis: *Ja. Man sieht ja manchmal Leute, die extrem sehr, sehr, sehr, sehr viel Geld haben und ich mein' 20.000 Euro irgendwo anlegen, naja welche Sachen auch immer, bedeuten ja jetzt keine Nachteile für die. Nur nicht vielleicht bedarfsgerecht oder so. 235-244*

[282] Interviewerin: *Gibt es vielleicht Produkte, die so ein bisschen auf der Kippe stehen, wo so ein bisschen Druck ist, aber die sind nicht schlecht, aber noch nicht perfekt...*

Charles*: Ja genauso. Ja gut.*

Interviewerin*: Muss man sich da manchmal entscheiden, was....*

Charles: *Da muss man sich die Frage mal stellen, was macht das in dem Kundendepot aus, wenn der Kunde sieben, acht oder neun Millionen hat und der bekommt 100.000 von diesem Produkt, was jetzt nicht so schlimm ist, dass ich es nicht machen kann, darein, wie viel ist das prozentual, was kann da passieren. Das muss man sich als Frage stellen. Wenn ich natürlich das jetzt mit ,'ner Mio mache, dann müsste ich mir die Frage gefallen lassen, was ist denn das. Aber das muss irgendwo darein passen, ja. Da kommt man natürlich schon irgendwann auch mal dazu, das eben auch zu machen. 664-685* tain sum is not "*so bad that I can't do that*", implying that it is bad for the customer, or at least not in his or her best interests. Investing a more sizeable sum however, would be bad.

Olivia describes that the consequences of a decision for the customer affects her objectivity in a role conflict situation.

> Olivia: *"There are cases, erm ... well, where you have to make sure that you don't lose your objectivity and don't let things close to you on a personal level, because you're deciding ... in effect other people's livelihoods. And that is difficult then. If you have a case, a company, that is close to bankruptcy. You know that there are so and so many employees. Then you have to decide do they get another restructuring credit or do you end it? Do you end the support? Those are cases where it's difficult because you are dealing with people's fates."*[283]

The importance of the decision and the possible consequences to the customer make it harder for Olivia to decide objectively. Siding against the customer could have serious repercussions - the ensuing bankruptcy of the customer would lead to the loss of livelihood for employees of that company. The weight of that decision is emphasized by the last sentences - the cases are difficult because of the affect they have on people's fates.

In all of the above examples the frontline employees consider the consequences for the customer in their decisions during role conflicts. There are also some examples in the interviews where the consequences for the company were considered. The following statements from Quinn, David and Sarah illustrate this well.

> Interviewer: *"Do you have any advice for someone in your job, in a call centre, how to best deal with such a conflict situation with customers wanting one thing and the company wanting another?"*

> Quinn: *"Well I think if it's within reason, I would say do it for the customer, but as I said, it isn't like we are talking about huge sums. We're talking about a few Euros, so I do think that as long as it is within reason and you're not badly violat-*

[283] Olivia: (…) *und das sind dann Fälle, ähm ..., ja, wo man gucken muss, dass man die Objektivität nicht verliert und sie nicht persönlich an sich ranlässt, weil da entscheidet man ... eigentlich über Existenzen. Und das ist dann schon schwierig. Wenn man dann einen Fall hat, eine Firma, die vor der Pleite steht. Man weiß, es sind so und so viele Angestellte da. Dann zu überlegen, gibt man da nochmal einen Sanierungskredit oder wickelt man ab? Kündigt man das Engagement? Das sind dann schon Fälle, wo ich sage das ist hart, weil man da über Schicksale entscheidet. 125-135*

ing something, which isn't really the case. It is difficult to do that really. Then I would say, go with the customer."[284]

Here, Quinn justifies her advice to usually go with the customer by pointing out that the damage to the company is only very little. She is only talking about "a few Euros" and what the company stands to lose by her decision to side with the customer in a role conflict situation is "within reason". She also points out that she isn't badly violating anything. In other words, she downplays the consequences of siding with the customer for the company. The decision to side with the customer is, at least in part, justified by the low extent of harm to the company in doing so. David and Sarah argue in similar ways.

David recounts a case in which a customer of his had underinsured expensive photo equipment and thus would not be fully compensated for his loss (438-463). He is protective of the customer, presenting the underinsurance as a minor mistake. He expresses disappointment with his company for not making an exception and covering the full damage. One of the reasons he gives for wishing that the company had decided differently was that the loss to the company for doing so would not have been very significant.

> David: *"I wish that they would have shown a certain generosity and said, OK, well insure it for the correct amount from now on. This unfortunately went wrong, well retroactively charge the extra premiums that would have been due and will simply pay for the damage now. After all, such a huge company does not go bust because of the 7.000 Euro they spend extra on that."*[285]

He goes on to say that the customer then left the company and insured his equipment somewhere else and thus that the company lost the future premiums the customer would have been paying (458-463). The important point here is that the decision he would have wanted to make in favor of one party in this role conflict situation is again in part justified by the harm that comes to the other party. 7.000 Euro would not have bankrupted the company. That the damage would not have been significant is used as an argument for siding with the customer.

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[284] Interviewerin*: Hättest du denn einen Rat an jemanden, der sich in deiner Art von Job, also in einem Call Center in so einer Konfliktsituation befindet, die Kunden wollen das von mir, das Unternehmen das, wie man damit umgeht?*

Quinn: *Also ich denke, wenn es echt noch im Rahmen ist, würde ich sagen: ‚Mach das für den Kunden', aber wie gesagt, es ist ja nicht so bei uns, dass es um was weiß ich wie viel geht, sag ich mal. Ein paar Euro Beträge sag ich mal, von daher denke ich schon, wenn das irgendwie im Rahmen ist und man nicht grob gegen irgendetwas verstößt, was aber eigentlich nicht der Fall ist. Also es ist eigentlich schwer, sag ich mal, dass Sie das machen können. Dann würde ich schon sagen, dem Kunden lieber. 327-334*

[285] David: *Da hätte ich mir gewünscht, dass die sagen wir mal auch eine gewisse Großzügigkeit an den Tag gelegt hätten zu sagen, komm, wir versichern das ab sofort jetzt in dem Maße wie es gewünscht ist, das ist nun mal fehl gelaufen, wir nehmen auch rückwirkend die Prämie dafür und müssen einfach den Schaden bezahlen. So ein Riesenunternehmen geht von 7.000 Euro nicht pleite, die sie jetzt zusätzlich rausgeben.453-457*

Sarah argues in a similar fashion. She recounts a case where she decided to not follow a company rule in favor of a customer who was uncomfortable with that rule. More precisely, the company rules state that all therapeutic sessions are to be recorded; something that many of Sarah's customers were not comfortable with. In one particular case she decided to side with the customer and not record the session. Again, one of the reasons she justifies the decision with is the fact that the company is not harmed much by her decision.

> Sarah: "*I think I did not record a session in a situation where I thought, or I realized, that doesn't really fit now, we'd better just take a walk around the block or something. I did do that sometimes even thought we are supposed to record all sessions, but it's not like it's the end of the world for anyone. It's not like someone comes and checks. So it's not like I'd get in trouble or have to justify myself or anything.*"[286]

Whereas the main argument here seems to be the fact that she does not think she would face any repercussions for not siding with the company, the fact that it is "not the end of the world" if she sides with the customer is also mentioned. The cost for the company of Sarah's siding with the customer is presented as not being so terrible as to influence her decision.

In summary it can be said that the perceived cost of siding with or against a role partner to that role partner was one of the factors frontline employees took into consideration when dealing with role conflict situations. If the costs were deemed high, the frontline employees were more likely to side with that role partner. Examples for this would be Lewis's statement: "*if I really find that a customer has no money, I'm the last person to take money from their pockets.*" Another example would be Olivia saying she finds it harder to be objective when siding against the customer comes with great harm to the customer, such as bankruptcy.

If on the other hand the costs are deemed to be low, this makes it easier for the frontline employees to side against that role partner. Examples would be Lewis and Charles saying that they are more likely to push for a sale that isn't exactly aligned with the customer's interests if that customer has a lot of money and thus would not be hurt by the transaction. Another example is Quinn's statement that the company is only out of a few Euros if she sides with the customer.

In some cases it is possible that these lines of reasoning are justifications made after the decision, to make the decision seem more just and reasonable. But in other cases this would ap-

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[286] Sarah: *Ich glaube ich habe schon einmal eine Videoaufzeichnung nicht gemacht, in einer Situation wo ich dachte, oder wo ich gemerkt habe, das passt jetzt nicht so gut, oder wir gehen jetzt lieber eine Runde um den Block, oder sowas. Das habe ich schon mal gemacht obwohl wir ja eigentlich Videos aufzeichnen sollen, aber wobei es auch für niemanden ein Weltuntergang ist. Also es kommt keiner an und sagt irgendwie, das kontrolliert eh keiner. Also insofern krieg ich da auch nicht wirklich Ärger, also dass ich mich da rechtfertigen müsste. 225-230*

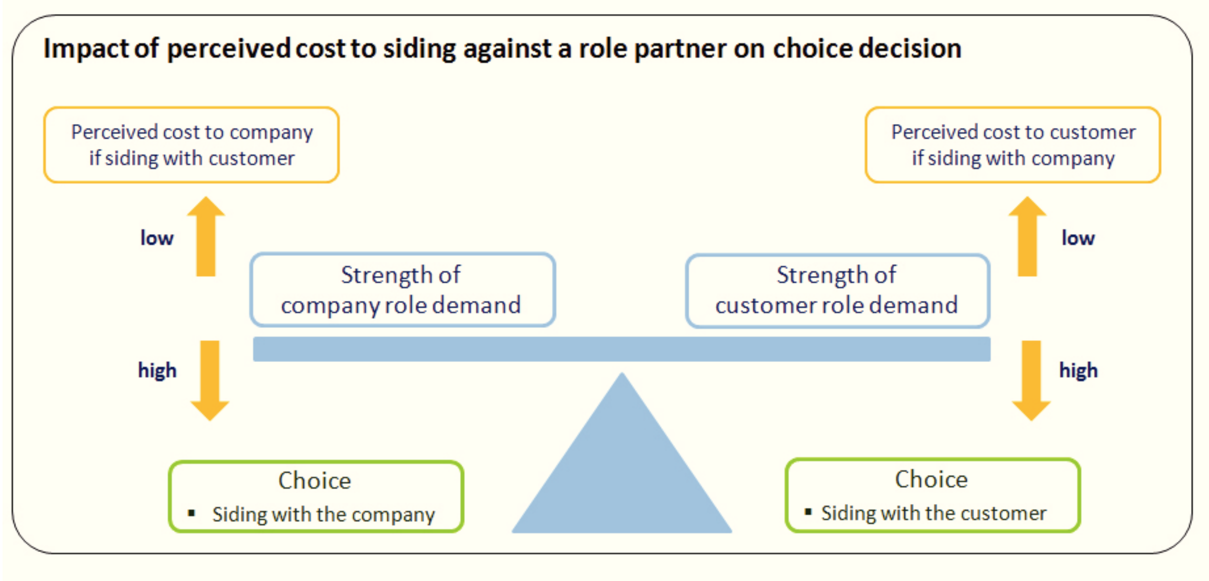
pear to be a factor factored into the decision itself, such as when Charles decides on which customers to sell a product to that he feels he has to sell, but that is not the best choice for the customer.

Looking at the literature on choice between role demands as a viable option for dealing with role conflict (see chapter 3.3.5; also Gross, Mason, and McEachern 1958; Grover 1993; Kahn et al. 1964), the relative strength of the role demand is usually given as the deciding factor (Grayson 2007; Grover 1993; Gutek, Searle, and Klepa 1991). As discussed in chapter 3.5.5, strength of a role demand is generally understood in terms of how much power and influence a role sender has over the role receiver, the cost of not complying with the demands and the importance and quality of the relative relationship (Grover 1993; O'Driscoll, Ilgen, and Hildreth 1992).

This is supported by other findings on role conflict, such as Varca’s (2009) study that showed that empathy with the customer increased role conflict. It is reasonable to assume that empathy with the customer increases the importance of that role demand with the frontline employee, making it harder to choose a side within a role conflict. Of course, this works only under the assumption that the company’s role demand is generally perceived as stronger by the frontline employee and empathy with the customer decreases the difference between the company’s and the customer’s role demand. Further support comes from the study by O’Brian and colleagues (2009) findings that normatively illegitimate customer demands reduce role conflict, presumably because they make it easier for the employee to side with the customer.

The consequence of the choice decision in a role conflict situation to the role partners involved may in- or decrease the strength of the relative role demands in a similar manner. The higher the potential cost to a role partner of siding against that partner, the stronger the relative gain in importance may be. This is illustrated in figure 36.

Figure 36: Impact of Perceived Cost to A Role Partner if Siding against that Role Partner in a Role Conflict Situation



Based on the findings discussed in this chapter, the following proposition can thus be made:

- A perceived **high cost** to a role partner for deciding to side against him or her in a role conflict situation **increases** the relative strength of that party's role demand. This makes it easier for the frontline employee to side with **that role partner**.
- A perceived **low cost** to a role partner for deciding to side against him or her in a role conflict situation **decreases** the relative strength of that party's role demand. This makes it easier for the frontline employee to side with **the other role partner**.
- Should the strength of the two opposing role demands be closer to each other due to the adjustment, the level of role conflict felt by the employee increases.

6.7. Summary of Results

This chapter summarizes the results of the empirical study carried out for this investigation.

6.7.1. Types of Role Conflict Situations

Chapter 6.1 looked at the different types of role conflict situations the frontline employees described during the interviews. While the situations themselves as well as the frontline employees' perception of and reaction to them varied widely, they can be grouped into roughly two categories:

- Situations in which the company expects the frontline employee to act in a way that he or she feels goes against the customer's interests.

  Frequently this involved offering and pushing products and services that frontline employees felt were not the best choice for the customer. In other cases it involved frontline employees feeling pressure to keep to company rules and guidelines that they felt went against customer interests. An example for this type of situation is Rebecca feeling pressured to include her customers in the scientific research projects of her company, even though she feels the involvement in the study could actually be detrimental to the customers (Rebecca 73-80; 253-274, see also chapter 6.1).

  The extent to which following the company's expectations negatively impacted the customer varied. In the case of product and service offerings, common concerns ranged from feeling that the offer went beyond a customer's needs, required higher spending that necessary, exposed the customer to unnecessary (and unwanted) risks to actually or potentially harming the customer.

  In these situations the customer was generally not aware of the role conflict situation and did not explicitly express an expectation towards the frontline employee.

- Situations in which the customer expects the frontline employee to act in a way that he or she feels goes against the company interests.

  In some of these cases the frontline employees were directly approached by customers asking him or her to go beyond what the frontline employee felt was acceptable to their company. In other cases the demand came not directly from the customer, but the frontline employee felt pressure to protect the customer interests for other reasons, such as for example a commitment to customer orientation (see chapter 6.3.1) or due to rapport between the employee and the customer (see chapter 6.5.1).

The types of role conflict situations described can thus be loosely categorized according to the side from which the frontline employee felt pressured to put that sides interests above those of the other. In some cases this pressure was felt to be exacted by the company, in other cases it was felt to come more from the customer's side. Pressure from the customer side sometimes arose due to customers explicitly voicing a role demand - such as Quinn's customers asking her to bend ordering rules to their advantage (Quinn 185-200, see also chapter 6.1). In other cases this pressure came more from the frontline employee him- or herself. The frontline employees acted as advocates for the customer interests without the customer asking for this or even being aware of it. Reasons for this are discussed in chapters 6.3 to 6.6 and further down in this summary.

6.7.2. Six Ways of Dealing with Role Conflict

During the analysis of the study, six different ways of dealing with role conflict were identified: choice (see chapters 6.2.1 and 6.2.2), compromise (see chapter 6.2.3), avoidance (see chapter 6.2.4), voice (see chapter 6.2.5), deceit (see chapter 6.2.6) and using personal resources (see chapter 6.2.7). These strategies mirror the ones discussed in the literature on role theory and role conflicts (see chapter 3.3.5). An exception is the last strategy: using personal resources. This strategy can be understood in terms of customer-directed citizenship behaviors or a result of customer orientation (see also chapters 4.1.1 and 4.1.2). An overview of the various ways of dealing with role conflict is presented in the following.

- **Choice- siding with the company**

  Choice in this case involves the frontline employees prioritizing the company's role demands over the customer's. This was the only strategy that every frontline employee interviewed reported to use at least some of the time. Some frontline employees described this as their standard strategy, rarely if ever choosing an alternative means for resolving a role conflict situation. Others described this strategy as something they felt they were forced to do at least part of the time.

  In the cases the frontline employees described, siding with the company usually involved one of the following behaviors:

  - Selling more than the frontline employee believes the customer needs or would benefit from in order to increase company profits,
  - Selling or pushing to sell offerings that the frontline employee believes are not in line with what the customer actually wants or needs, or
  - Adhering to company guidelines or rules that disadvantage the customer.

  The choice of siding with the company was sometimes more of a choice to side against the customer. In these cases, the choice decision was described in terms of going against the customer, not in supporting the company or in following company expectations. This was most commonly described as a reaction to negative customer behaviors (see also chapter 6.5.2). It usually involved adhering more strictly to the company guidelines than they would otherwise have done, interpreting company rules more strictly than necessary, and not using loopholes or available room for discretion. In other cases less effort was put into trying to help the customer in a role conflict situation.

Choosing the side of the company during a role conflict situation can thus be the result of actually siding with the company as well as siding against the customer. In both cases the interests of the company are put first, but the motivations behind that choice differ.

- **Choice- siding with the customer**

In these cases choice again meant that the frontline employees prioritized one role partner's demands over those of the other, except that in this case it was the customer's demands that received preference.

Siding with the customer involved the following approaches in role conflict behaviors:

- Not attempting to sell offerings their company wanted them to push if the frontline employees thought they did not offer sufficient benefit or even potentially harmed the customer. This can also involve selling other offerings better suited to the customer's needs rather than those the company wishes to focus on.

- Deviating from company rules or guidelines in order to help customers in situations of role conflict. In some cases this meant frontline employees ignoring company rules and guidelines, often without the customer being aware of this. Phoebe uses the phrase "to turn a blind eye" to describe this behavior (Phoebe 108). In other cases, frontline employees actively engage with customers to sidestep a company rule or guideline to profit the customer. Examples of this are Quinn assenting to a customer's request to sidestep ordering guidelines (Quinn 231-249) and George writing an objection to a company decision for a customer (George 458-474).

In contrast to the decision to side with the company, there were no cases in which the frontline employees described siding with the customer to spite or harm their company. Although in some cases frontline employees stated that negative feelings for their company influenced their decision (see chapter 6.4), the main reason for siding with the company was always described in terms of helping that customer.
In contrast to the decision to side with the company, there were no cases in which the frontline employees described siding with the customer to spite or harm their company. Although in some cases frontline employees stated that negative feelings for their company influenced their decision (see chapter 6.4), the main reason for siding with the company was always described in terms of helping that customer.

- **Finding a compromise**

  Finding a compromise is an approach to solving role conflict that was described by several frontline employees as a path they often choose. A compromise allowed the frontline employees to fulfill both of the conflicting role demands, although not to the extent to which each could have been fulfilled had it been granted full priority over the other.

  Finding a compromise took the following forms in the situations described by the interviewees:

  - Choosing an alternative to what the company and customer wanted (or would have fulfilled their needs best) respectively. This alternative still promoted each party's interest, though to a lesser extent. It frequently involved offering the customer an alternative product or service to the one the company wanted sold, and/or to the option that would have been best for the customer. In other cases this involved enforcing some of the company's rules, regulations and expectations while ignoring others relevant to a particular case.

    In general the aim here was to create a win-win situation, in which both the customer and the company profited from a transaction.

  - Finding a compromise, or balance, over time. In these situations, a compromise is not sought for a single instance of a role conflict, but rather over a series of similar situations. An example for this is Charles (Charles 786-788), who feels he sometimes has to bow to pressure for selling a certain product his company is pushing, even though he believes it to not be in the interests of most customers. So he will sometimes give in and try to sell it, and other times avoid it. A common reason for this behavior and especially for the choice of which customers to sell it to was the consequences for that customer (see chapter 6.6).

    Unlike the compromise within a single role conflict situation, seeking a win-win solution for both customer and company, this type of compromise means sometimes siding with the company, sometimes with the customer. An individual customer stands to either win or lose, unless he or she is involved in several such situations over time with the frontline employee sometimes siding with, sometimes against him or her. This type of compromise seems to be more for the benefit of the frontline employee him- or herself, as a way of dealing with personal feelings about the role conflict (see chapter 6.3.1 and 6.3.2).

- **Avoidance**

Avoidance of withdrawal from role conflict situations was a frequent theme in the interviews. Thirteen of the nineteen frontline employees interviewed described it as a way of handling role conflict that they used. Avoidance as a strategy for dealing with role conflict can be grouped into two categories:

- Psychological distancing, in particular emotional distancing from the role conflict situation and the role partners involved.

  For some employees, emotional distancing meant attempting to remain objective and not to feel too much empathy or sympathy with the customer. Eric (175-193), Olivia (125-135), and Lewis (322-329) in particular pointed out the importance of remaining objective and not letting customers affect their feelings too much. Holding on to this objectivity is described as important and necessary for doing one's job well. This governing of emotions during customer contact situations is a form of emotional labor (see chapter 2.2, Groth, Hennig-Thurau, and Walsh 2009; Hochschild 1983).

  One way in which frontline employees described distancing themselves emotionally from the customer was to take on an accepting, passive stance of 'that's just the way it is'. Both Lewis (322-337) and Sarah (303-305) in particular expressed this view and repeated such phrases several times. Lewis also states that he is *"a realist"* (330) and "*We are a private company, not the Caritas."* (330-331). Such a stance can make it easier to deal with role conflict, as it frames siding with the company as the normal and expected way of dealing with role conflict (and indeed both Sarah and Lewis report mostly siding with the company in role conflict situations; see chapter 6.2.8, table 22 in 6.3.1, and table 25 in 6.4). It can also reduce empathy with the customer and frame customers demand as being more unreasonable or unjust. There is empirical evidence for both factors having a reductive effect on role conflict. Varca (2009) found that empathy with customers increases role conflict; implying that lower levels of empathy should result in lower role conflict. O'Brian, Hill, and Autry (2009) have found that customer demands that are perceived to be in violation of social norms (unfair, unjust) also reduce role conflict.

  Emotional distancing was not only directed at the customer, but in some cases also against the company. Charles for example frequently speaks of his management as "they" and points to the differences in "their" point of view and approach to customer contact and his own (see also chapter 6.3.1). He distances himself from "their" position to justify and explain his own stance in role conflict situations, which he describes as being more pro-customer. Another example of this is Quinn (270-271; 316-322), who also distances herself from her company and her company's management. The effect of this distancing is similar to that of distancing oneself from the customer - it makes it easier to decide in favour of the other side in role conflict situations and/ or reduces the pressure resulting from role conflict.

- The second form of distancing reported by the frontline employee's as a form of dealing with role conflict was to distance themselves from the decision and the responsibility of making the decision.

  In some cases this involved actually passing the decision on to someone else in the company, usually someone with a higher level of authority. The responsibility for solving the role conflict situation thus is passed on, lowering the emotional investment and stress for the frontline employee. An example for this is David passing on some difficult situations within the company (204-209;312-330). If he suspected a claim to be dishonest or is uncomfortable with it for some other reason, he passes it onto his company. He believes that they will either find the problem or, if they believe the claim to be honest, pay. Either way, the decision was not made by him.

  In other cases the employees could not pass the decision on to someone else in the company. Avoidance in those cases often involved passing on as much responsibility as possible to the customer. This generally involved informing the customer and insisting that he or she make their own decision. The fact that the decision was made by the customer is also used as an explanation why the frontline employee does not feel responsible for the outcome. This is aptly illustrated by the following quote from Nicholas:

  Nicolas: *"Sometimes it is a little borderline, but in the end I think, that … the customer knows what he gets. He isn't forced into anything, he can see on a piece of paper exactly everything he gets, it is all there, what is for what and in the end they are adults that can say I want this and this. (...) If I write down all the products and their value and he says that is what I want, then in the end he is grown up enough to know whether he wants that or not. So the moral side of it doesn't really come into it much."*[287]

[287] Nicolas: *Manchmal ist es ein bisschen grenzwertig, aber letztendlich denke ich schon, dass man...der Kunde weiß ja, was er bekommt. Er kriegt es ja nicht reingedrückt, sondern er sieht es ja auf dem Zettel alle Positionen, die er hat, genau drauf geschrieben, was wofür ist und letztendlich sind sie erwachsene Menschen, die dann sagen, genau so möchte ich das haben. (...) Wenn ich die ganzen Produkte, oder den ganzen Nutzen der Produkte aufschreibe, und er sagt, genauso will ich das haben, dann ist er ja letztendlich erwachsen genug um zu wissen, ob er es haben will oder nicht. Deswegen hält sich diese moralische Schiene eher in Grenzen. 158-169*

Unlike choice or compromise, avoidance as a strategy does not necessarily solve a role conflict situation. Unless the frontline employee can distance him- or herself physically from the situation or pass the decision on to someone else, the role conflict situations remains and must be solved in some other way. Avoidance, in particular in the form of psychological withdrawal, can thus be seen as a supplementary or supportive approach to role conflict that makes it easier to find a way of solving the role conflict situation. It can for example make it easier to side with the company or the customer.

The literature on role conflicts also differentiates between actual physical avoidance and psychological avoidance. Role conflict has been linked to higher levels of absenteeism and job turnover (Anton 2009; Chung and Schneider 2002; Rugulies et al. 2007). In other words, employees with higher levels of role conflict are more likely to call in sick or to leave their job. Psychologically distancing oneself from the source (or sources) of stress is also an option (Goolsby 1992). Role conflict has been linked to lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Singh 1998) as well as to employees distancing themselves emotionally from customers (Cheng and McCarthy 2010; Varca 2009).

- **Voice**

Voice was a fourth way in which frontline employees addressed role conflict situations. It was introduced as a fourth way of dealing with role conflict by Hirschman (1970) as an addition to three options originally proposed by Kahn and colleagues (1964, see also Gross, Mason, and McEachern 1958). This often involves appealing to superiors within the organization, but encompasses "any attempt at all to change rather than to escape from an objectionable state of affairs" (Hirschman 1970, p. 30). Empirical evidence in the literature indicates that sales people facing high levels of role conflict are more likely to use a variety of tactics to influence their superiors in an effort to change the situation (Nonis, Sager and Kumar 1996).

Voice was used by just over a third of the frontline employees interviewed. Most frontline employees also reported that their attempts to use voice to change role demands were unsuccessful. In most cases it was directed at the company, usually at superiors within the organization, although in some cases voice was directed at customers. The frontline employees critically addressed problematic role demands they felt were leading to role conflict situations. When directed at customers, the frontline employees tried to change or lower their customer's expectation to help reduce or resolve role conflict.

In the literature on voice as a form of addressing conflict, voice is usually addressed to others within the organization (see for example van Dyne, Ang and Botero 2003; van Dyne and Le Pine 1998; Whiting, Podsakoff and Pierce 2008) . The results of this study indicate that voice can also be directed at customers in an attempt to address role conflict situations.

- **Deceit**

Deceit has been describes as the fifth option for resolving role conflict (Grover 1993). And indeed, several frontline employees reported using various forms of deceit to help them deal with role conflict situations.

The deceit described in the interviews took the form of outright lying as well as selectively presenting information and omitting relevant information when reporting to a role partner. The aim was usually to create the impression that a role demand was fulfilled more fully than was actually the case.

An example for this is given by Charles (767-786). In his reports on customer contact situations to the company, he includes the fact that he offered the customer the products the company wishes him to push. However, while it is true that he offered those products, Charles did in fact advise the customers against buying them. This fact is not included in the report. Through selective reporting and omitting relative information Charles creates the false impression that he did as his company would expect of him. Other frontline employees, such as Rebecca (281-303; 444-474) and Phoebe (116-124; 130-145), reported using similar tactics or intending to use them in the future.

Phoebe does not manipulate reports but keeps her deviation from company expectations from the management level in the company. She also reports that this is something many of her co-workers do and that even staff training employees know that this is done. There are strong parallels to service sabotage behaviors described by Harris and Ogbonna (2002), in particular to customary-public service sabotage (customary in that it is engaged in regularly, public as it is openly admitted in front of co-workers, see also chapter 4.4). Unlike in most service sabotage situations described by Harris and Ogbonna (2002) however, the customer here is the beneficiary of the sabotage behavior, not the victim.

In other cases the deceit was directed against the customer, not the company. An example is given by Phoebe (223-260). She describes a situation in which she deliberately lied to a customer in order to be able to fulfill a company expectation. She misrepresented the intention behind requiring one of her customers to go to a special training course. The customer believes the course will not benefit her and Phoebe agrees with her. She specifically states that she would not have chosen this customer for the course if she had not felt pressured to help make up the numbers required for the course. However, she also feels she cannot tell the customer the real reason for having been chosen and thus tells her that she is sure the course will benefit the customer very much. She thus attempts to create the impression that there is no conflict, or at least only little conflict, between the company's expectations and the customer's interests.

This was the most direct case of lying to the customer reported in the interviews. Other interviewees did not explicitly report lying to customers, although they did talk about giving information selectively. A quote by Lewis illustrates this particularly well:

> Lewis: *"Well, you can steer the conversation somehow to a place, where you can make a point, or at least have the chance to be able to end up where you want to end up. Because you're sitting in front of a non-expert, who you are explaining things too and you know the subject, so you can steer them."*[288]

Information is given selectively in order to manipulate the customer. If customers are unaware of relevant information in a particular situation, this would affect how well they can assess whether the frontline employee is fulfilling their expectations. Pressure from role conflict could thus be reduces, simply because the customer believes his or her role demands to be fulfilled more fully than is the case.

That frontline employees sometimes lie to their customers to make things easier and to avoid conflict has been documented in other studies as well. Scott (2003) found that airline service personnel sometimes lie to passengers for a range of different reasons, including protecting their company or to reduce stress. While the study by Scott (2003) does not directly link this lying to resolving role conflicts, it does enable employees to manage customer expectations and thus helps lower or prevent role conflict situations.

Like psychological avoidance, deceit by itself does not resolve role conflict. It can, however, make it easier for frontline employees to find another way of resolving the situation. One example would be using deceit to protect oneself from repercussions due to choosing one role partner over another. It is more of a supplementary or supportive strategy for dealing with role conflicts.

- **Using personal resources**

During the analysis of the interviews a sixth option for dealing with role conflict situations emerged. Two of the interview partners, Rebecca and Brian, reported using personal resources to solve a role conflict situation. Rebecca described using her personal time to offer a customer free therapy sessions (281-303; 396-411). Due to a mistake in company computer records Rebecca's company was not willing to allow further sessions. The cus-

[288] Lewis: *Ja also man kann natürlich man kann seine Gesprächsführung irgendwo dahin lenken, dass man da auch landet vielleicht, oder dass man die Chance zu mindestens erlangt, da zu landen wo man auch landen möchte. Weil man sitzt vor einem Laien, dem man etwas erklärt und man selber weiß worum es geht, also dementsprechend kann man den schon steuern. 186-193*

tomer on the other hand was at first not aware of this mistake and Rebecca felt her to be very much in need of further sessions. Rebecca's solution allowed her to fulfill the customer's expectations without directly going against her company's expectations. As the company had to bear no financial risk due to the extra therapy session, one of the main reasons for the company's demand that no further therapy be offered was observed. While it is debatable whether Rebecca entirely fulfilled her company's expectations, the use of her personal time allowed her a compromise much closer to a win-win situation for both customer and company than would have otherwise been possible.

Brian also invested personal resources to resolve a role conflict situation; although in his case it was money rather than time (172-182). He felt bound to a commitment he had made towards the customer. He had told the customer that a certain claim would be covered. However, the company reduced the compensation by one or two hundred Euros. Brian makes up the difference from his own personal reserves. Again, the use of personal resources allows for a win-win situation that would not have been possible otherwise. The customer gets his claim paid for at no extra cost to the company.

The use of personal resources thus allows frontline employees to reconcile differing role demands to an extent that would not otherwise have been possible. Only two of the interviewed frontline employees gave such clear examples for this behavior. Others also reported investing extra time or effort to solve role conflict situations, but these were usually within their working time or not used to solve the role conflict but to reassure the frontline employee.

Using personal resources can be seen as a pro-social or citizenship behavior directed at the customer or both the customer and the company. Citizenship behaviors (Moorman, Niehof, and Organ 1993; Organ 1988; see also chapters 4.1 and 4.2) can be defined as voluntary behaviors that promote organizational wellbeing and success (Podsakoff et al. 2009). The concept has also been applied to behaviors directed at customers (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Bettencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie 2005). Using personal resources can be seen as a citizenship behavior directed at the customer. It can, however, also be argued that in promoting customer satisfaction it is also promoting organizational wellbeing.

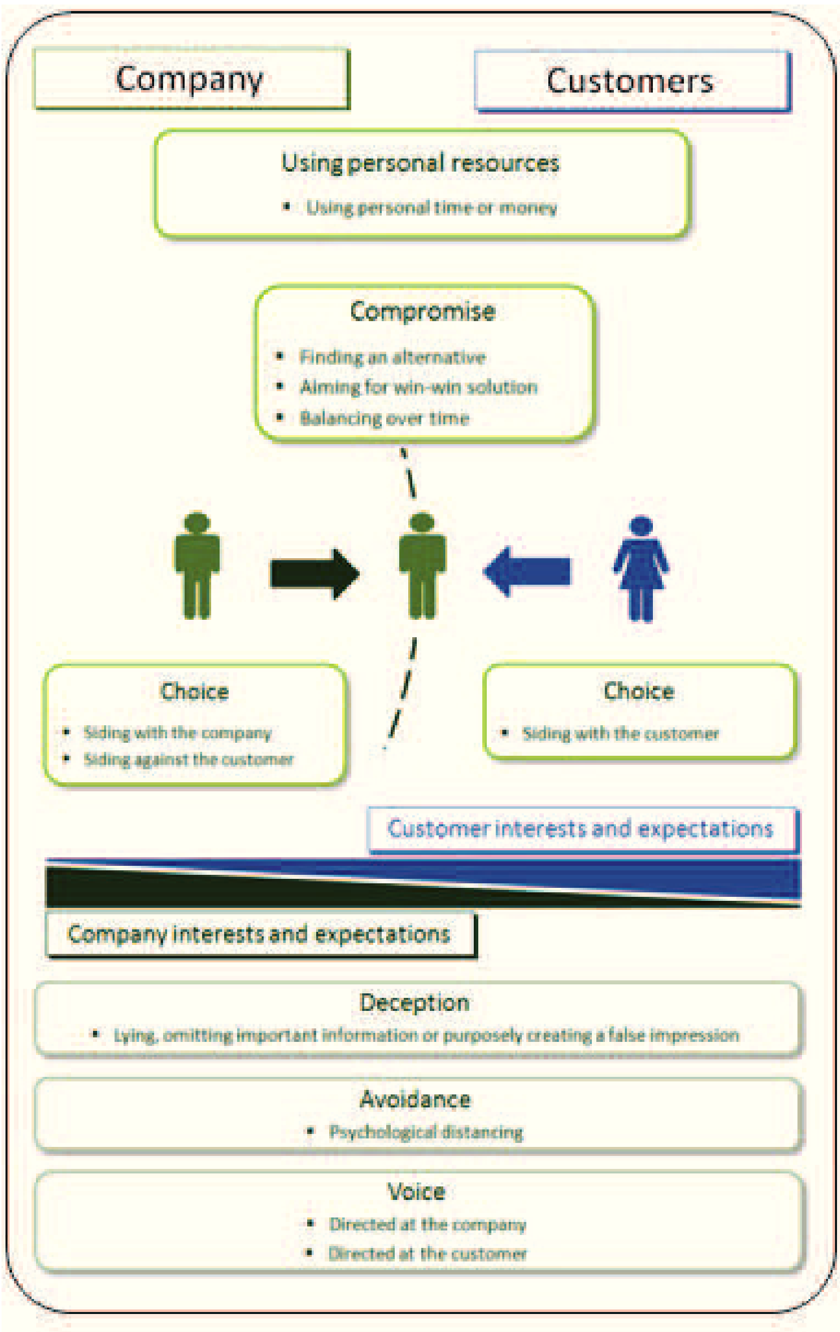
As has been said in the beginning of this chapter, analysis of the interviews revealed six strategies for dealing with role conflict. The first five have been discussed in the literature on role conflict. Choice, compromise and avoidance have been introduced as options by Kahn and colleagues (1964, see also Gross, Mason, and McEachern 1958) with psychological avoidance been added later as a further form of avoidance (Cheng and McCarthy 2010; Goolsby 1992; Varca 2009).Voice (1970) has been discussed as a fourth option (Goolsby 1992; Grover 1993) and deceit as a fifth (Grover 1993). These options were also discussed shortly in chapter 3.5.5.

Using personal resources was found to be a sixth strategy employed by frontline employees in a role conflict situation. This can also be understood as a form of citizenship behavior.

As well as identifying the different ways of resolving role conflict, a difference in the effect of the strategies was found. Some approaches, namely choice, compromise, physical avoidance and using personal resources can be seen as stand-alone strategies. They effectively represent a decision during role conflict situations on how to deal with the differing role demands.

Psychological avoidance and deceit on the other hand on their own do not do this. They facilitate one of the other choices, potentially making it easier to choose which option to take. Psychological distancing can reduce empathy with one of the role partners, reducing the strength of that party's role demand, and thus making for example choice easier (see chapter 6.2.4). Deceit can help protect they employee from the repercussions of selecting one of the stand-alone strategies. If the frontline employee sides with the customer and manages through deceit to hide this from the company or make the company believe he or she sided with them, then there will be less risk of any sanctions. The same is true for siding with the company and deceiving the customer (see also 6.2.5).

Figure 37: Dealing with Role Conflict: Summary



Voice can solve role conflict on its own only if it is successful in changing one or more role partners' demands. In most cases described by the interviewees this was not the case, leaving voice as a supplementary option in most instances. Figure 37 provides a overview over these options and is repeated here for convenience sake (figure X).

With the exception of siding with the company, no one strategy was employed by every frontline employee and no frontline employee used every strategy. An overview of who employed which strategies is given at the end of chapter 6.2.

The findings of this study lead to the following proposition:

Proposition 1:

Frontline employees faced with role conflict due to incompatible role demands by their company and customers use one of the following strategies:

- Choice
- Compromise
- Avoidance (actual or psychological)
- Voice
- Deceit
- Using personal resources

Choice, compromise, actual avoidance and using personal resources can be seen as stand-alone strategies. Psychological avoidance and deceit are supplemental strategies that must be combined with others to resolve the role conflict situation. Voice was mostly described as being unsuccessful, so that additional strategies also need to be used.

6.7.3. Factors Influencing the Decision on how to Deal with Role Conflict

Chapters 6.3 to 6.6 look at factors influencing the decision of how to react to role conflict situations and the different role demands. Chapter 6.3 looks at those factors pertaining to the frontline employee, chapter 6.4 at those related to the employee-company relationship and then the employee customer relationship is discussed in 6.5. Finally, chapter 6.6 looks at contextual factors. In this chapter, an overview of the various factors will be given; the various propositions will be summarized and brought into perspective.

Factors related to the frontline employee

Three influencing factors related to the frontline employees were identified during the analyses of the interviews:

- Differences in role perception between the frontline employees' personal understanding of what their roles consist of and what they believed their company's understanding was.
- Moral and ethical values of the frontline employees and the challenges to these in role conflict situations.
- Instrumental and self-servicing motives in role conflict situations.

These three aspects will be addressed in the following.

Differences in role perceptions - What I think my job is and what I think my company thinks my job is

The frontline employees interviewed for this study can be placed in one of three groups depending on the degree of similarity between what they described as being their personal perception of what their role should be and what they believed to be their company's view. The three groups also differed in the types of strategies they choose in role conflict situations.

The groups can be described as follows:

- <u>High level of similarity between personal expectations and perception of company role expectations</u>

  This group saw only few if any differences in their own role expectations and those of the company. They responded to role conflict situations by siding with the company, to the near-exclusion of any other strategy.

- <u>Fairly high level of similarity between personal expectations and perception of company role expectations with some minor differences</u>

  While there was a large agreement in this group between personal role expectations and the perceived role expectations of the company, there were also some differences. This group showed a broader range of behaviors in role conflict situations than the first, although siding with the company was still very much dominant. Siding with the customer was described as an exception rather than a common occurrence. Compromises were also made, though considerably less so than in the next group.

- <u>Low level of similarity between personal expectations and perception of company role expectations with major differences</u>

  This group described strong differences between their own role perceptions and those they believed their company to have. All reported having sided with the customer in role conflict situations. This behavior was generally not presented as an exception but as a comparatively common strategy. Compromise and other strategies, such as avoidance and deceit, were also common.

The finding that frontline employees' role perception can and does differ from the role expectations of their company is supported in the literature. The focus there lies on the definition of in- and extra-role behaviors, particularly on whether a particular behavior is a form of organizational citizenship (Chiaburu and Marinova 2012; Lam, Hui, and Law 1999; Morrison 1994). This study indicates that the difference in the perceived role expectations also affects the level of role conflict felt by the frontline employee and his or her reaction to it. Hsuing and Tsai (2009) found that a positive relationship between employees and their superior can reduce the difference in role perceptions. This would then also likely lead to a reduction in role conflict and a lower likelihood of the employee not conforming to company role expectations (i.e. not siding with the company).

The findings of this study lead to the following propositions (see also chapter 6.3.1):

Proposition 2:

The higher the similarity between frontline employees' own role expectations and those they believe their company to have, the higher the likelihood that they will side with the company in situations of role conflict

And conversely:

Proposition 3:

The lower the similarity between frontline employees' own role expectations and those they believe their company to have, the higher the likelihood that they will choose alternatives to siding with the company in situations of role conflict. In particular, the likelihood of compromises and siding with the customer is increased.

A further finding of this study is that when employees' role expectations differed from those they believed their company to have, that difference was particularly evident in the level of customer-orientation involved. Frontline employees in the group with low similarity between personal and perceived company role expectations frequently reported that they felt themselves to be more customer-oriented than their company. Siding with the customer was also frequently explained in terms of helping the customer and looking out for the customer's interests. Both reasons are in line with customer-oriented behavior (see also chapter 4.2.1 and Knight, Kim, and Crutsinger 2007; Saxe and Weitz 1982).

The findings of this study thus support the idea discussed in 4.2.1 that customer orientation can be a reason why frontline employees side with the customer. However, this applies only in situations in which the frontline employees perceive themselves to be considerably more customer oriented than their own company. In these cases, company role expectations are more likely to violate frontline employee's idea of customer-oriented behavior. This leads to a further proposition:

Proposition 4:

Frontline employees are more likely to choose alternatives to siding with the company in situations of role conflict if the perceived level of customer orientation of the company is lower than their own.

Influence of personal values - Doing the right thing

Personal values, especially in the form of moral and ethical values, were often cited by the frontline employees as an influential factor on their decision in role conflict situations. Half of the frontline employees interviewed reported situations in which their moral and ethical beliefs influenced their behavior. These beliefs were often used to set up a boundary between what the frontline employee felt comfortable doing and what he felt to be wrong and would not do. The frontline employees also discussed expectations by both their company and their customers in terms of being honest or ethical. This evaluation then influenced how comfortable and how willing the employees were in complying with these expectations.

Moral terms and metaphors were also frequently used throughout the interviews. Some employees used very strong terms when talking about company or customer expectations. Charles for example called some of his company's expectations an outrage (766) and criminal (413). Several interview partners mentioned the need to be able to look the customer in the eyes (e.g. Andrew 265-269 and Fred 421-427) or being able to look in the mirror (Lewis 314-317). It was important to them to be able to feel hones and deserving of the trust placed in them by their customers. Some interview partners frequently talked of certain values important to them that influenced their behavior. Examples of this were Brian using the concept of being an honest businessman (172-182), George's high regard for solidarity (e.g. 5-8, 228-231) and Phoebe's need to remain human (or empathic) in her work (105-109).

The incongruence between personal values and role expectations is referred to as person-role conflict in the literature (see for example Kahn et al 1964 and Pandey and Kumar 1997; see also chapter 3.3.1). However, this construct includes a number of different sources for conflict, including between personal ambitions and role expectations or how well the employee believes he can use his personal skills in his role. Moral and ethical beliefs are just a subset of aspects looked at under this construct.

A second area in the literature that may give additional insight is research on person-organization fit (PO-fit), which is generally defined as the level of congruence between employees' personal values and those of the organization (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson 2005; O'Reilly III, Chatman, and Caldwell 1991). PO-fit has been shown to be positively related to organizational identification, perceived organizational support, citizenship behaviors and decisions to stay at an organization (Cable and DeRue 2002; Saks and Ashforth 1997) as well as job satisfaction and job performance (Lauver and Kristof-Brown 2001).

The results of this study indicate that there is also a link between PO-fit and employees' reaction in role conflict situation.

This leads to the following proposition:

Proposition 5:

The higher the conflict between the personal values of the employee and the role expectations of the company, the higher the likelihood that they will choose alternatives to siding with the company in situations of role conflict.

A similar conclusion can be made about the fit between the personal values of the employee and the customer. A low fit between customer expectations and employee values is likely to result in the employee siding with the company. This is summed up in the following proposition:

Proposition 6:

The higher the conflict between the personal values of the employee and the role expectations of the customer, the higher the likelihood that they will side with the company in situations of role conflict.

Influence of instrumental motives - doing it for me

As discussed in chapter 4.1.3 instrumental motives could influence frontline employees' decision in role conflict situations. The findings of this study support this. The motives and subsequent decisions described can generally be grouped into two categories:

- Instrumental motives increasing the likelihood of siding with the company - such as career orientation, impression management and financial motives.

  Several frontline employees reported that siding with the company in role conflict situations served their own interests. Lewis says he generally protects his own interests rather than those of the company, but as he wants to earn money and further his career in the company, these often align (195-205; 218-228). Not siding with the company, not pushing for sales may not lose him money on a short-term basis, as he is not paid on commission, but he feels this would still hurt his career prospects. Nicolas (229-236), Thomas (157-169) and Sarah (319-332) also state that they feel their own interests are generally best served by taking the company's side.

  Self-oriented and instrumental motives can thus increase the likelihood of frontline employees to side with the company, so that they are perceived as being more successful, improve their career chances and gain other monetary and non-monetary benefits offered by the company.

- Instrumental motives increasing the likelihood of siding with the customer - protecting long-term success chances by looking after customer interests.

  Instrumental motives do not necessarily lead to the frontline employee siding with the company. There were several instances in which frontline employees reported siding with the customer to protect their own long-term interests. This was generally the case when a healthy employee-customer relationship brought important benefits to the frontline employee. In these cases, short-term gains attained by siding with the company were seen as being offset by long-term costs caused by damage to the customer relationship.

  Two main benefits of a good employee-customer relationship were addressed. The first was related to the acquisition of new customers, an important aim for many frontline employees. Positive word-of mouth was often described as the best and most effective way of finding new customers. Brian (227-232), David (7-13) and Fred (62-76) in particular stated depending heavily on this method. Negative word-of-mouth due to dissatisfied customers was presented as having a strong negative impact on future success (e.g. Brian 186-193). The second benefit of a good employee-customer relationship described in the interviews was that dealing with existing customers are easier, more profitable and more pleasant.

  Frontline employees thus stand to gain a lot from good relationships with their customers and lose much from poor ones. This is particularly problematic when company interests offering frontline employees short-term success are pitted against customers' interests and thus employees' long-term interests. This would be for example the case when the company pushes for the sale of a certain product that the frontline employee believes to be against the customer interests. The short-term effect would be profits, and perhaps making a good impression in front of superiors, with a long-term risk of hurting the customer relationship. Such conflicts of interests were frequently described by the interview partners.

To summarize - instrumental motives can lead to frontline employees' siding with the company or the customer, depending on which move bests serves their own interests. This leads to the following proposition:

Proposition 7:

If frontline employees' long-term job success depends on good customer relationships or the acquisition of new customers depends heavily on positive word of mouth, instrumental motives are likely to the employee favoring the customer's side in situations of role conflict.

If these conditions do not apply, or the benefit to be gained by siding with the company is greater than those of siding with the customer, instrumental motives are likely to tip the balance in favor of siding with the company.

Factors related to the employee-company relationship

The frontline employees' relationship with their company was a prominent topic during the interviews. Social exchange theory (Blau 1964; see also chapter 4.1.1) and research on perceived organizational support ( ) predict that a positive relationship with the company, especially the perception that "that their contributions are valued by their organization and that the firm cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger et al. 1986, p. 501), should lead to pro-organizational behavior (see for example Aselage and Eisenberger 2003; De Coninck and Johnson 2009; Fu, Bolander, and Jones 2009; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). This would imply that high levels of perceived organizational support and other elements of a positive employee-company relationship such as job satisfaction should increase the likelihood of frontline employees siding with the company. There is some tentative support for this in the results of this study, although there are contradictory and ambiguous findings as well.

Looking at individual cases, there are several frontline employees who explicitly cite their relationship with their company as a reason for their decision in role conflict situations. Ian, Olivia and Thomas report that feelings of responsibility and loyalty towards their company were one of the reasons why they often sided with the company. Rebecca and Quinn named negative experiences in the employee-company relationship as influencing their decision to side with the customer. Quinn was especially vocal about this, stating that she rather side with customers than with the company (300-311). These individual cases indicate that a positive relationship with the company is more likely to lead to frontline employees favoring the company side in role conflict. Conversely, a negative relationship with the company is more likely to push the frontline employee towards siding with the customer.

When looking at employee-company relationship of all interview partners according to statements they made about the perceived organizational support and their company in general, the picture is not as clear. About half of the frontline employees reported high levels of perceived organizational support, with the other half describing low levels. Mostly a high level of perceived organizational support coincided with high levels of job satisfaction, and low levels of perceived organizational support with low job satisfaction. But there were several exceptions and also several cases where job satisfaction was ambiguous or not sufficiently clear from the interviews.

Seven of the ten frontline employees reporting high levels of perceived organizational support described siding with the company as their main strategy for dealing with role conflict, with few exceptions. However, the other three frequently choose to side with the customer. So, while there is some support for the idea that there is be a positive relationship between perceived organizational support and siding with the customer, one does not necessarily lead to the other.

Looking at the frontline employees with low levels of perceived organizational support, there are mixed results. Of the nine employees reporting low levels of perceived organizational support, five can be described as being less likely to side with the company and instead focus on other ways of dealing with role conflicts. The other four however, report generally siding with the company. Two of these, Ian and John, also report high job satisfaction so that their positive evaluation of the company relationship may be an explanation for this. The other two, Eric and Mathew, however, also generally (or always in Matthew's case) side with the company even though they report both low perceived organizational support and low job satisfaction.

Social exchange theory predicts that employees dissatisfied with their exchange relationship tend to seek restoring a balance by changing their input to the relationship. This could lead to siding against the company as a way of reducing pro-organizational behaviors. However, it could also just lead to a general reduction of work effort and emotional involvement (Gibney, Zagenczyk, and Masters 2009) . If siding with the company is the easiest way of resolving a role conflict situation, then this may be the chosen strategy despite the negative relationship with the company.

So while frontline employees' evaluation of their relationship with the company can be an important influence factor when deciding how to deal with role conflict, it is by itself insufficient to predict behaviors. In some case, however, it is clearly a very decisive factor. The study allows the following propositions to be made:

Proposition 8:

Positive perceptions of the employee-company relationship increase the likelihood of frontline employees siding with the company in situations of role conflict.

And conversely:

Proposition 9:

Negative perceptions of the employee-company relationship decrease the likelihood of frontline employees siding with the company in situations of role conflict.

Factors related to the employee-customer relationship

Frontline employees' perception of and relationship to customers played an influential role in their decisions regarding role conflict situations. The analysis of the interviews led to four factors that were likely to promote frontline employees siding with the customer (see chapter 6.5.1), and two that were likely to influence them more in the direction of the company and away from the customer (see chapter 6.5.2).

How customers influence the role conflict situations in their favor

Customer-related factors that incline the frontline employee more in the direction of the customer were:

- positive feelings towards the customer - including liking the customer, sympathy, empathy, rapport and friendship,
- perceiving customer interests as just and legitimate,
- feelings of responsibility towards the customer, particularly when customers trusted the frontline employee and/or there a strong information asymmetry between the customer and the frontline employee, and
- feelings of obligation towards a customer due to benefits offered by that customer.

A short outline of the four factors is given below.

- Positive feelings towards the customer:

  Pro-customer feelings were the most common customer-related reason frontline employees cited for siding with the customer. These feelings ranged from simply finding someone likeable to rapport to friendship. The stronger the connection, the less commonly they were mentioned in the interviews. Eight interview partners address finding someone likeable, three address rapport and two friendship.

  These feelings were often described as influencing frontline employees more towards siding with the customer. This was particularly the case for rapport and friendship. Phoebe (288-302) and Brian (251-259) explicitly state that rapport towards a customer was decisive in their decision to side with that customer. George describes treating friends and good acquaintances different from other customers in role conflict situations (331-344). The interview partners reported investing more time and effort into situations with customers they found likeable, had established rapport with or were friends with. Being friendly and likeable was also the most common answer to what customers should be like to make it more likely that the frontline employees would side with them. The influence of pro-customer feelings on decisions and a resulting loss of objectivity were also names as a reason why several frontline employees reported avoiding developing too close a relationship with customers. This echoes other studies which found that some frontline employees dislike and actively avoid forming close relationships, such as commercial friendships with customers (Geiger and Turley 2003; Goulter and Ligas 2004; Price and Arnould 1999).

  This research thus allows for the following proposition to be made:

Proposition 10:
Pro-customer feelings by the frontline employee (e.g. finding the customer likeable, feelings of rapport, and friendship) increase the likelihood that they will side with the customer or try and protect the customer interests in other ways.

It is also likely that the stronger the positive feeling for the customer, the more pronounced the increased likelihood for siding with the customer will become. This leads to the next proposition:

Proposition 11:
Customer-employee friendship will increase the likelihood of the frontline employee siding with the customer more than feeling of rapport. In turn, feelings of rapport are likely to cause a stronger increase than the employee simply liking the customer.

The influence of pro-customer feelings on frontline employees' behavior towards the customer is as of yet little studied. The influence of positive feelings in the employee-company side by contrast has received much more attention. The findings of this research generally support the notion that pro-company feelings in employees lead to pro-company behaviors (for example Aselage and Eisenberger 2003; Bettencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie 2005; De Coninck and Johnson 2009; Fu, Bolander, and Jones 2009; Lambooij et al. 2007, see also chapters 4.1.1 and 6.4). Looking at the employee-customer relationship it is feasible to assume similar mechanisms may be at work. This would support the findings of this study: that pro-customer feelings in employees lead to pro-customer behavior.

There is some literature available that directly looks at the customer-employee relationship that supports this. Interesting in this regard is the literature on sweethearting, a form of service sabotage behavior in which frontline employees offer friends and family free goods or services (Brady, Voorhees, and Brusco 2012; Harris and Ogbonna 2002; 2009). Brady and colleagues' scale for measuring sweethearting behavior two of the five items directly address giving free services and products to friends a third refers to helping people that the employee likes. Further research on sweethearting and on the influence of pro-customer feelings of employees in general are necessary to provide a better understanding of this and similar behaviors. This study offers a step in that direction.

- Legitimacy of claims:

The perceived legitimacy and justness of customer claims was also found to have an influential impact on frontline employees' decisions in role conflict situations. When frontline employees felt the customer to be in the right and his or her interests and demands to be legitimate, they were more likely to side with the customer. George 822-26, 313-315, 475-479) and Rebecca (281-303, 518-526) in particular describe the perceived legitimacy and justness of a customer's claim as a powerful influencing factor.

There are few findings available in the literature directly addressing the impact of perceived claim legitimacy on frontline employee behavior. One such study is by O'Brien, Hill and Autry (2009), who differentiate between normative, cognitive and rules-based legitimacy (see chapters 3.4.4 and 6.5.1 where the study is discussed in more detail). O Brien and colleagues (2009) found that cognitively illegitimate claims could increase role conflict as frontline employees tried to understand why the customers were making this claim.

This study is qualitative and therefore does not measure the level of role conflict felt by frontline employees directly. This can make it difficult to compare findings. Yet the results of this study contradict O Brien and colleagues (2009) findings in some points. Thomas for example reported that he felt more conflicted when he could understand and empathize with a customer's demands, in other words with a cognitively legitimate claim. So at least in some cases, cognitively legitimate customer demands may increase role conflict. The effect on role conflict would likely depend on the relative strengths of the role demands. If the perceived legitimacy of the customer's role demand reduced the difference to the company role demand strength, higher levels of role conflict are likely.

O'Brien and colleagues (2009) study was made in a specific context - frontline employees dealing with customers wishing to return goods. The difference in context between that study and the present one may account for much of the difference. Further research on the impact of the perceived legitimacy of customer role demands on the frontline employees' behavior is necessary for a better understanding of this issue.

The findings of the present study lead to the following proposition:

Proposition 12:

Perceiving customer role demands to be (cognitively) legitimate increases the likelihood that frontline employees will side with the customer or try and protect the customer interests in other ways (such as looking for compromise).

- Responsibility towards customers

A feeling of responsibility towards customers was cited as a further reason for siding with the customer. This is in part discussed in chapter 6.3.1 1 on employee role perceptions, as it was sometimes described as something employees saw as inherent to their job role. As it sometimes was presented as part of moral or ethical principles it was also looked at in chapter 6.3.2.

However, it is also closely linked to the employee-customer relationship and thus covered here as well. Three aspects were particularly salient in relation to responsibility towards customers. Many frontline employees pointed out that their customers trusted them, that they knew much more about the services and products offered than the customers and that these two aspects offered opportunities for frontline employees to influence, and perhaps even manipulate, customers.

The feeling of responsibility towards customers was often cited as pushing frontline employees to do the right thing. Some, such as Andrew (181-183) and Charles (712-

715), even explicitly condemn abusing the trust the customer places in them and state that they would not do so. In short, the findings of this study offer the following proposition:

Proposition 13:

A feeling of responsibility towards the customer increases the likelihood of frontline employees siding with the customer or trying to protect the customer interests in other ways (such as looking for compromise).

- Obligation towards customers

The final category of customer-related factors leading to pro-customer decisions that was identified in the interviews was an obligation towards the customer. This involved reciprocity, a tit for tat mentality, in which siding with the customer was seen as payment for a benefit offered by the customer.

Only George explicitly connects this to his behavior in a role conflict situation, although others also talk about the importance of reciprocity. George helps a customer more than he would otherwise have done because he felt he and his company owed this customer something. The customer had been bringing five new customers for every year and so George helped him get a claim for a stay in a health facility accepted (420-439). He does this even though he sees the claim as illegitimate and the customer only angling for a cheap holiday. He has also repeatedly stated that he does not normally side with customers if he feels their claims to be unjust. The stay in the health facility is a means of balancing the obligation created by the customer's assistance in acquiring new customers.

David also speaks of reciprocity, stating that honesty by the customer is rewarded with honesty by the agency. He also expects honesty from the customer in return for his own honesty. This leads to the following proposition:

Proposition 14:

A feeling of obligation towards the customer due to benefits offered by that customer increases the likelihood that frontline employees will side with the customer or try and protect the customer interests in other ways (such as looking for compromise).

How customers and their behavior influence frontline employees to side against them

Customer-related factors that incline the frontline employee more in the direction of the company and against the customer were:

- negative feelings towards the customer - including finding the customer to be unfriendly, off-putting or unlikeable in some other way, and
- perceiving customer interests as unfair and illegitimate

A short outline of the four factors is given below.

- Negative feelings towards the customer:

  Negative feelings towards the customer were the most common reason given for deciding to side against the customer in role conflict situations. They ranged from describing a mild dislike to stronger, more personal feelings involving anger and a desire for revenge. These feelings were generally described as being created by the customer being unfriendly, rude, or aggressive. The reaction to these customer behaviors often involved withholding positive behaviors and ranged from investing less time and effort in helping the customer to actively denying a customer help. For example, Eric refuses to settle a customer claim and instead lets the claim go to court (263-269). He describes this as a reaction to the customer's strong verbal aggression.

  There is some support in the literature for the findings of this study that negative customer-behaviors lead to negative behaviors by frontline employees directed at these customers. Studies by Wang and colleagues (2011) and Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, and Walker (2008) show that unfriendly, unfair or aggressive behaviors by customers lead to customer-directed sabotage behaviors by frontline employees. These studies and the findings of the current study broaden our understanding of why frontline employees engage in service sabotage behavior. Previous studies by Harris and Ogbonna (2002, 2006, 2009) did not consider the customer as antecedent to sabotage.

  The findings of this study suggest the following proposition:

Proposition 15:

Negative behaviors by customers and negative feelings of frontline employees towards customers decrease the likelihood of frontline employees siding with the customer. Pro-customer behaviors are more likely to be withheld and customer-directed negative behaviors more likely to be shown.

- Legitimacy of claims:

Claims that were perceived to be illegitimate, unfair or unreasonable were much less likely to be supported by frontline employees than legitimate ones. Interview partners reported that perceiving customer demands to be illegitimate made it easier for them to not fulfill them, to 'sort them out', as George puts it (22-24). A possible explanation for this is that the perceived illegitimacy reduces the strength of the role demand, making it easier to side against it.

Wang and colleagues (2011) and Skarlicki and colleagues (2008) both found support for the proposition that claims perceived as being illegitimate are more likely to lead to customer-directed sabotage behaviors. This research project finds at least a reduction of pro-customer behaviors, if not of behaviors directed against the customer. The following proposition is thus made:

Proposition 16:

Perceiving customer role demands to be illegitimate, unjust or unfair decreases the likelihood that frontline employees will side with the customer or try and protect the customer interests in other ways. Role conflict levels are also likely to be lower.

Contextual influencing factors - perceived consequences as influencing factor

A final important factor influencing frontline employees' decision of what to do in role conflict situations are the perceived consequences to each role partner should the frontline employee decide in their favor or against them. If the costs were deemed high, the frontline employee was more likely to side with that partner. For example both Lewis (140-150, 235-244) and Charles (664-685) described acting differently towards customers depending on how much money they had and how much a potential investment could 'hurt' them. If on the other hand the costs for siding against them were perceived to be low, this makes it easier for the frontline employees to do so. For example, Quinn justifies siding with the customer by pointing out that the decision costs the company very little (327-344).

In the literature on choice as a means of dealing with role conflict (see chapter 3.3.5), the relative strength of the role demand is usually given as the deciding factor (Grayson 2007; Grover 1993; Gutek, Searle, and Klepa 1991). As discussed in chapter 3.5.5, strength of a role demand is generally understood in terms of how much power and influence a role sender has over the role receiver, the cost of not complying with the demands and the importance and quality of the relative relationship (Grover 1993; O'Driscoll, Ilgen, and Hildreth 1992).

The perceived consequences of not fulfilling a role demand are likely to influence the strength of this role demand and may thus tip the balance in favor of a party with high costs or against a party with low ones.

Based on the findings discussed in this chapter, the following proposition can thus be made:

Proposition 17:

- A perceived high cost to a role partner for deciding to side against him or her in a role conflict situation increases the relative strength of that party's role demand. This makes it easier for the frontline employee to side with that role partner.
- A perceived low cost to a role partner for deciding to side against him or her in a role conflict situation decreases the relative strength of that party's role demand. This makes it easier for the frontline employee to side with the other role partner.
- Should the strength of the two opposing role demands be closer to each other due to the adjustment, the level of role conflict felt by the employee increases.

Overall overview of influencing factors

Figure 38: Overview of Factors Influencing FLE Decision in Role Conflict Situation

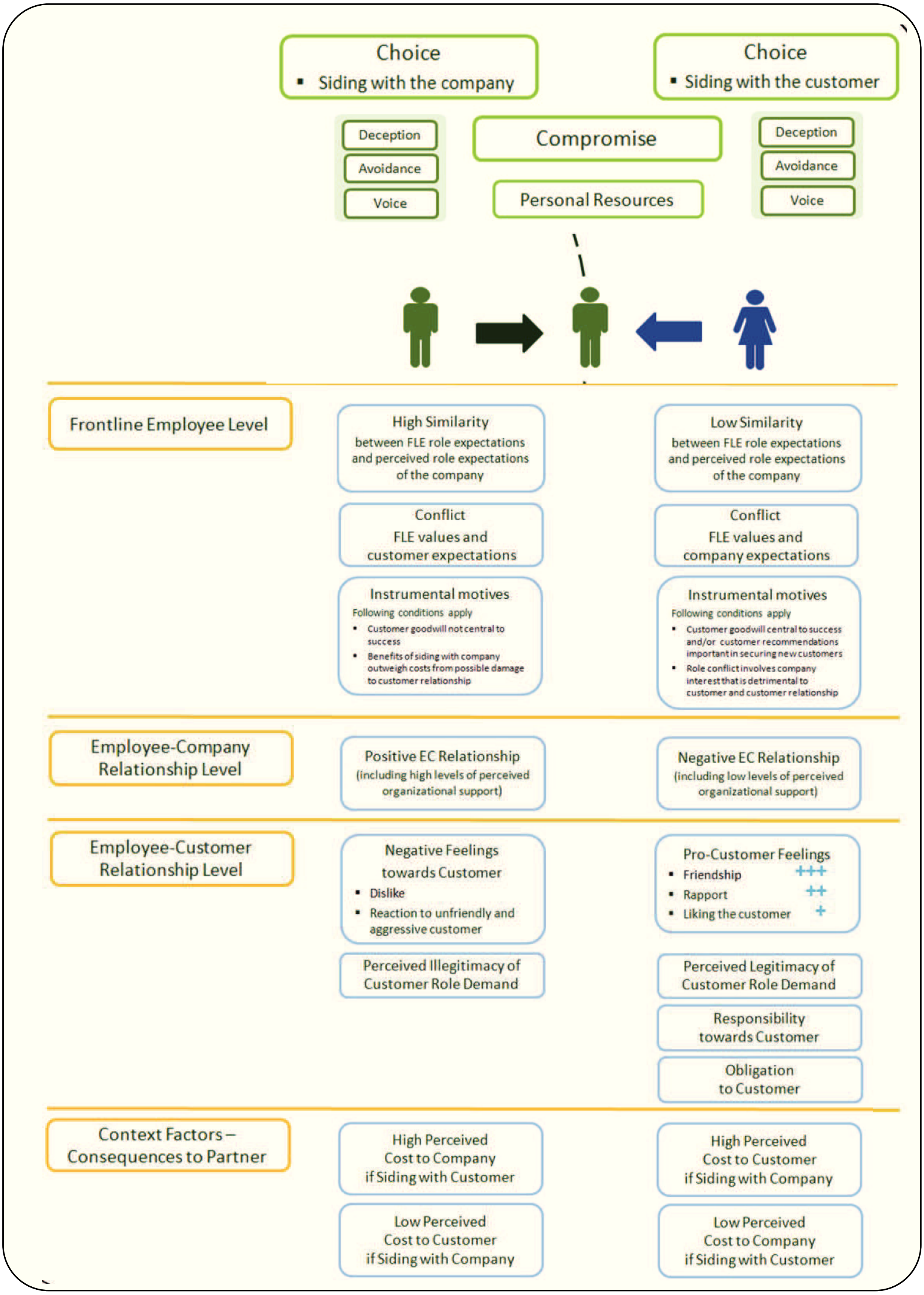


Figure 38 gives an overview of the influencing factors identified in this study. The various influencing factors have been categorized as to whether they increase the likelihood of the frontline employee siding with the company or the customer. Compromise and using personal resources lie in the middle, as they address both the needs of the customer and the company. However, in general it can be said that the factors influencing the frontline employee towards siding with the customer also increase the likelihood of compromise and using personal resources. Deception, avoidance and voice are supportive strategies that are used in conjunction with one of the stand-alone strategies. They generally do not solve role conflict situations by themselves. In principle, voice could do so if the role demands are then successfully changed to the point of no role conflict remaining. This however was mostly not the case in the situations described by the interview partners. Avoidance too could solve the role conflict, but only if a physical avoidance is possible or the role conflict situation can be handed over completely to someone else.

This chapter ends the presentation of the empirical results of this study. The implications resulting from this study and a look at its limitations will be the focus of the next chapter.

7. Discussion

In this chapter I will discuss the findings from this research project. I will begin by discussing the implications resulting from this study, both for research (chapter 7.1) and business (chapter 7.2). Chapter 7.2 looks at the limitation of this research and also takes a critical look at the quality of the empirical research. The chapter concludes by given an outlook (chapter 7.3).

7.1. Implications

This chapter discusses the implications and insights for research and businesses that emerged during this research project.

7.1.1. Implications for Research

This research project has built on prior research on role conflicts and influencing factors on frontline employee behaviors in customer contact situations. In this section I will discuss how this research can further the extant literature and outline possible directions for further research. I will begin by discussing the role conflict construct as it is used in the marketing literature. This will be followed by a closer look at the ways of dealing with role conflict. Finally, insights regarding frontline employee role definitions, the employee-company and employee-customer relationship and the decision process in role conflict situations will be discussed.

Role Conflict - what type of role conflict are we actually looking at?

This section is built mainly on the insights from the literature review on the conceptualization and measurement of role conflict. As has been discussed in chapter 3.3.1 the most commonly used measure for role conflict in quantitative research project is the one developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970). This scale has been already strongly criticized (see for example Kelloway and Barling 1990; King and King 1990; Tracy and Johnson 1981). The main deficiencies discussed include a questionable match between the stated content domain and the actual item content for many of the items, insufficient attention to convergent and discriminate validity and confusion regarding the definition of the construct itself. However, the scale is still commonly used (see chapter 3.3.1 for a more detailed discussion). Furthermore, many researchers adapt this scale, using only some of the eight items and changing the wording of individual items (see for example O'Brien, Hill and Autry 2009). Because of this, various aspects and sources of role conflict are looked at under the blanket term 'role conflict' which can make comparisons or research findings difficult. Some researchers have developed other scales for measuring role conflict in an attempt to address these shortcomings (see for example Pandey and Kumar 1997; Singh 2000, also see chapter 3.1.1).

However, despite the improvements and advancements made to the scale, role conflict arising from different role demands made by the company and by customers is arguably not captured well by the existing scales. The items in several role conflict measurement scales do not specify customers at all but talk simply of incompatible role demands made by different people. Examples include:

From the Rizzo (1970) scale:

- I receive incompatible requests from two or more people.
- I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others.

From the scales used by Singh (2000; adapted from House (1980)):

- Trying to meet conflicting demands of various departments.
- Having to deal with or satisfy too many different people.

The scale developed by Pandey and Kumar (1997) speaks of conflict created by different demands from superiors, subordinates, peers and colleagues.

These scales do not specifically address incompatible demands from the company and customers, even though they are used in studies looking at frontline employees (the study by Singh (2000) mentioned above for example is carried out with frontline employees). Considering that many articles using such scales argue that role conflict is especially high for frontline employees due to differing demands from their company (superiors, management rules, etc) and customers (see for example Singh 2000; Varca 2009), there may be a need for a role conflict measurement scale that more precisely captures this type of role conflict.

As mentioned above, role conflict scales are adapted by some researchers, such as O'Brien, Hill and Autry (2009) to a specific context, including frontline work. O'Brien and colleagues (2009) use the following four items to measure role conflict:

- When I handle returns, I have to "cheat" certain rules or policies to get it done effectively.
- Often, our company returns policy makes it difficult to provide for my best customers' best interests.
- Sometimes when handling returns, I have to work around company rules to keep the customers happy.
- I often do not have the resources or knowledge to execute the return.

While these items more directly address the conflict between customer and company demands, they are mostly tied narrowly to the study context - frontline employees dealing with customer returns. Also, the type of conflict focuses on company rules making it hard to comply with customer wishes. Item 1 and 3 imply that the frontline employee is prepared to side with the customer in such role conflict situations, which may not always be the case despite role conflict being present. The items also focus on role conflict arising from company rules restricting the ability of frontline employees ability to serve the customer, but not customer demands going against company rules (for example a customer wanting to involve the front-line employee in cheating the company).

So while these items are an improvement in that they focus on the company-customer role conflict, they are specific to one type of frontline context and make some assumptions about the direction of the role conflict.

The situations recounted and described by the interview partners during this research project show that role conflict situations arising from incompatible role demands by the company and the customer are common and varied (see introduction to chapter 6 and chapter 6.1). The findings also show that the pressure from role conflict situations that frontline employees feel can arise from both the company and the customer side. The pressure from the customer side was sometimes directly and explicitly voiced by the customer - such as in situation in which a customer wanted to defraud the company with the employee's help or at least knowledge. In other cases employees became advocates for customer interests without customers directly asking for this (see chapter 6.1).

When looking at role conflict experienced by frontline employees in their work with customers, there is therefore an argument to be made for using measurement scales that capture this type of role conflict. These would capture the situation more accurately than the generic scales that capture various forms of role conflict without differentiating between facets of role conflict (such as the Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman 1970 scale) or, if intersender conflict is captured as a separate dimension, looking only at different sources, not specifically customers and company demands.

Dealing with role conflict - using personal resources as an additional method and looking at the difference between stand-alone and supplementary methods

All of the options for resolving a role conflict situation discussed in the literature were found in the interview material. The three potential options described by Kahn and colleagues (1964) in their seminal work on organizational role theory were found. This includes choosing between the conflicting role demands (the findings of this project include both choosing the company's side and the customer's side; see chapter 6.2.1 and 6.2.2), finding a compromise (see chapter 6.2.3) and avoidance (see chapter 6.2.4).

Kahn and colleagues (1964) viewed avoidance as physical withdrawal in the form of absenteeism or leaving the job (turnover). Later studies have shown that avoidance can also take the form of psychological withdrawal. Various studies have linked role conflict with distancing from the company in the form of lower organizational commitment and job satisfaction (see for example Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Goolsby 1992). Avoidance can also take the form of emotional distancing from the customers, which reduces the importance of fulfilling these customers' demands in role conflict situations (Cheng and McCarthy 2010; Varca 2009). This study found evidence of both actual or physical avoidance and psychological withdrawal, with the latter being by far the more common approach (see chapter 6.2.4).

Voice and deceit are two further options discussed in the literature and also found in this research project. Voice, introduced by Hirschman (1970) involves addressing or changing the role demands and actively seeking to control, alter and manage the role conflict situation (Goolsby 1992; Grover 1993). Several frontline employees reported doings so towards both company members and customers, though most reported cases were not successful. Deceit was discussed by Grover (1993) as a fifth possibility for resolving role conflict. It involves lying, covering up relevant information and misrepresenting information in such a way that one or more role partners believe their demands to have been met to a greater extent than is actually the case.

The findings of this study raise two important points regarding these five options for resolving role conflict:

- As discussed in chapter 3.3.5, research on role conflict generally views choice primarily in the context of the relative strength of role demands (Grayson 2007; Gutek, Searle, and Klepa 1991). Role strength can be described in terms of much power and influence a role sender has over the role receiver, the cost of not complying with the demands and the importance and quality of the relative relationship (Grover 1993; O'Driscoll, Ilgen, and Hildreth 1992).

  This research suggests that the consequences for each role partner if the frontline employee chooses the other side's role demands also impact the role demand strength and therefore the choice decision (see chapter 6.6). If the cost of not siding with a role partner was low, this increased the likelihood of siding with the other partner. Examples for this reasoning include Quinn stating that the loss for her company was only a few Euros if she sided with the customer (327-344) and Lewis stating that he would sell a product that was not ideal for the customer if that customer was wealthy enough to not be hurt by it (140-150). Conversely, if the cost was considered high, this made it more likely that the frontline employees would side with that role partner.

  In other words, when considering role strength, the consequences not only for the focal person, in this case the frontline employee, but also the role partners should be considered.

- Grover (1993) presents deceit as a fifth option for dealing with role conflict. However, by itself deceit cannot resolve role conflicts. It is a supplementary approach that makes other choices easier. If for example a frontline employee sides with a customer, deceit can be used to hide that fact from the company. In fact, the instances of deceit described in the interviews were all used to cover up some other choice, usually siding with one role partner or compromising (see chapter 6.2.6).

Similar points can be made about emotional withdrawal as a form of avoidance. This by itself may reduce role stress and make it easier to choose one of the other options, but it does not resolve role conflict (see also the discussion on stand-alone and supplementary approaches in chapter 6.2.8). As most frontline employees described voice to have been ineffective in resolving their role conflict situation (see chapter 6.2.5), usually it was combined with another approach. It has therefore been grouped as a supplementary strategy as well.

When looking at ways of resolving role conflict, research projects should consider the option of approaches being combined (for example choice and deceit).

As well as the five approaches to resolving role conflict discussed in the literature, the analysis of the interview material uncovered a sixth approach - using personal resources. This involves the use of personal resources, such as time, effort or money, to enable the frontline employee to fulfill two role demands that would not have been both addressed otherwise. There were two clear examples of this in the study (see chapter 6.2.7). Rebecca used her personal time to offer a customer free therapy sessions without incurring cost for her company (281-303; 396-411). Brian used his personal finances to make up the difference between what his company offered and a customer expected in an insurance case (172-182). As well as these two examples there were others in which frontline employees had invested extra effort or time. However, this either took place within working hours or was not done to directly resolve a role conflict situations, so that these examples are not as clear.

Using personal resources is an example of a customer-directed pro-social or citizenship behavior. Citizenship behaviors (Moorman, Niehof, and Organ 1993; Organ 1988; see also chapters 4.1 and 4.2) can be defined as voluntary behaviors that promote organizational well-being and success (Podsakoff et al. 2009). They are usually not directly recognized by an organizations formal reward system (Organ 1988), but can profit the frontline employee by leading to a better evaluation of his or her performance (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Fetter 1993; Podsakoff et al. 2000) and thus increase the likelihood of receiving organizational rewards such as a salary increase, promotion, or a high-profile project (Yun, Liu, and Takeuchi 2007). In other words, while pro-social or citizenship behaviors are voluntary and thus extra-role and not directly rewarded, frontline employees who engage in them are often perceived as better employees and thus indirectly rewarded for their efforts.

Citizenship behaviors in the literature have been mostly looked at as behaviors benefitting the employee's organization. In fact, that the behavior should benefit the company is part of most definitions of pro-social or citizenship behaviors of employees (see Podsakoff et al. 2000). The citizenship behaviors can involve customers. This is for example the case with the behaviors described by Bettencourt and Brown (2003), which involve excellence in service delivery. They can however also negatively impact the customer. An example for this are unethical pro-organizational behaviors such as described by Umphress and colleagues (2010, p. 771). These include exaggerating the truth about products or services, withholding negative information about the company and even withholding refunds if this benefited the organization.

There is little in the empirical literature on pro-social or citizenship behaviors directed at the customer. Brian and Rebecca go far beyond their in-role behavior to help their customers. The behavior can be described as promoting the well-being of their company, as it avoids customer dissatisfaction. However, the aim of both was to help the customer, not the company. In fact, both report being disappointed that their company's behavior had made this step necessary. It is also possible to see such pro-social or extra-role behavior as potentially harmful to the company. Rebecca had told her customer why she had to give her a free therapy session; this could also injure the company's image in the eyes of the customer.

In summary the focus in the research on pro-social, extra-role or citizenship behaviors of frontline employees lies on behaviors benefiting the company. The findings of this research project find evidence for pro-social, extra-role behaviors directed at customers that go beyond simply delivering a good service. There is room for further research looking at these customer-directed citizenship behaviors, their antecedents and consequences.

Differences in role perceptions and expectations in employees and their company - employees' ideas of what they think their job is and what they believe their company sees as their job

The results of this study support and add to the findings in the literature that employees can have very different perceptions of their job responsibilities from their employers (Chiaburu and Marinova 2012; Hsiung and Tsai 2009; Lam, Hui, and Law 1999). Much of this research focuses on the boundary between in-role and extra-role behavior (see also chapter 3.2). A study by Morrison (1994) found that this boundary is influenced by employee organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job tenure. Other factors such as the relationship between superiors and subordinates (Leader-Membership Exchange relationship; Hofmann, Morgeson, and Gerras 2003; Lam, Hui, and Law 1999) and procedural and interactional justice perceptions (Coyle-Shapiro, Kessler, and Purcell 2004) have also been identified as important influencing factors. These studies also provide insight into how employee role perceptions are formed.

This study found that there are can be differences in what an employee see as their job and what they believe their superiors or other organizational members to see as their job (see chapter 3.1) This difference relates not only to a disparity of opinion on whether a particular behavior constitutes in-role or extra-role behavior, but on the in-role content itself. Charles for instance sees himself as advocate for both customers and his company, and believes it to be his role to look after the interests of both parties. He does not believe his immediate superiors and his company in general to have the same view. In fact, he often feels that he has to defend his job roles against his employers. In most cases where there were differences in job perceptions not so much to content of the job role itself than to priorities (see chapter 3.1., particularly table 21). The relative importance of customer orientation and profit orientation in particular was a point where several frontline employees saw significant differences between their own job role expectations and those of their company. The frontline employees described seeing customer orientation as far more important than their company, and often prioritized it over profit orientation.

According to the extant research, discrepancies between employees' role definitions and those of their superiors can lead to several negative consequences. An employee may for instance not carry out a task he or she believes to be extra-role but his or her superiors see as important in-role behaviors. This would lead to the employee making a negative impression on his or her superiors and possibly to sanctions (Hsiung and Tsai 2009). On the other hand, employees may feel that extra-role tasks outside their own role definition are forced on them by superiors who view these tasks as in-role. This could lead to resentment or the feeling that a breach of psychological contract occurred (Hsiung and Tsai 2009; Lam, Hui, and Law 1999).

This study indicates that higher levels of role conflict are a further possible consequence of disparate role perceptions. Also, some of the behaviors that the frontline employees see as in-role behaviors, such as protecting customer interests, could lead to behaviors the company would see as deviant. This is for instance the case when Charles manipulates reports to be able to protect a customer's interests by not pushing a product while letting the company believe he did his best to sell the product (see chapter 6.2.5). Disparate role perceptions therefore not only risk employees underperforming by not carrying out tasks the company deems as in-role, or revenge by employees caused by a perceived breach of psychological contract, but also to high levels of role conflict with its associated detrimental effects (see chapter 3.3.3) and deviant behaviors (see chapter 4.3).

An important point to note here is that this study looked only at employees' perception of their company's role expectations rather than the actual expectations of the company. However, many of the consequences discussed in the paragraph above depend on the employees' perception rather than the actual role expectations.

Role conflict due to personal values and beliefs - an important issue that should receive more research attention

As discussed in chapter 6.3.2, an inconsistency between role expectations of the company or of customers and the personal values and moral beliefs of a frontline employee can be a significant source of role conflict. Personal values were cited by about half of the interviewed frontline employees as influencing their decisions in role conflict situations. These beliefs were often used to establish a boundary between what the employee felt comfortable with doing and what he or she felt to be wrong or immoral and did not wish to do. Role expectations by both the company and customers were discussed in terms of being honest and ethical. Moral terms and metaphors were also used to explain or justify decisions in role conflict. A term that was used often was the ability to look someone in the eyes or to be able to look in the mirror (see chapter 6.3.2). Both expressions refer to having a clear conscience. Some frontline employees referred to values that were important to them, such as a business man's honesty (Brian 172-182), solidarity (George 5-8, 228-231) and empathy (Phoebe 105-109).

This type of role conflict is captured by the concept of person-role conflict discussed by Kahn and colleagues (1964). As outlined in chapter 3.3.1, person-role conflict refers to incompatibility between the requirements of a role and the values of the person carrying out the role. However, this conflict is not reflected well in their own operationalization of role conflict (Kahn et al. 1964, Katz and Kahn 1966, Pandey and Kumar 1997, King and King 1990). It is also not reflected well in other measurement scales, such as the commonly used role conflict measure by Rizzo, House and Lirtzman (1970).

Pandey and Kumar (1997) developed a new measure of role conflict to address the shortcomings of the various extant measurement scales (see chapters 3.3.1 and 6.3.2). They define person-role conflict as "*experienced by the role incumbent when the expectations associated with the work role is incompatible with his or her needs, aspirations, values, or ethics. This definition clearly identifies the conflict to be between the person and the work role only. A marketing manager who believes that making untested claims about a product is unethical but whose work role requires him to do it is likely to experience person-role conflict."* (1997, p. 198).

As discussed in chapter 6.3.2, the example Pandey and Kumar (1997) for person-role conflict clearly refers to a conflict between role expectations and personal ethical beliefs. Their nine-item measurement scale, however, focuses more on other facets of role conflict, such as conflict between role expectations and personal goals and the feeling that one's knowledge and skills are not being used in the job. Only two items actually address personal values:

- *"The values at my workplace are in accordance with my personal values".*
- *"My idea of what my job should be is very different from what it really is".*

The concept of person-role conflict therefore only in part captures the conflict between personal beliefs, especially in the sense of moral and ethical beliefs, and role expectations. During this research project it was found that conflict between such personal beliefs and role expectations was common and influenced the decision on how to deal with role conflicts. Yet there are very few studies that look at person-role conflict. A search of databases EBSCO Business Source Premier, PsycArticles and PsycInfor[289]; EconBiz[290], and Emerald[291] turns up only four studies, carried out in the late 1970's and early 1980's. One reason for this may be that elements of person-role conflict are looked at in other research areas, such as research on work-life balance (Kossek and Ozeki 1998; O'Driscoll, Ilgen, and Hildreth 1992), emotional labor (Morris and Feldman 1996; Totterdell and Holman 2003), and particularly ethics in sales (Babin, Boles, and Robin 2000; Chonko and Burnett 1983; De Coninck 2010) and person-organization fit.

Research on person-organization fit (PO-fit; Chatman 1989; O'Reilly III, Chatman, and Caldwell 1991see also chapter 6.3.2) is defined differently in the literature, but the most commonly used definition describes PO-fit as the level of congruence between employees personal values and those of the organization (Cable and DeRue 2002; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson 2005). This is sometimes described as supplementary PO-fit (Kristof 1996). Other definitions include a complementary PO-fit which refers to the degree to which employees and their organizations fulfill each other's needs (Carless 2005; Kristof 1996).

PO-fit based on value congruence focuses on values held by both employees and the organization and not on the fit between employee values and role expectations by role partners such as the organization or the customer (as person-role conflict does). However, most research on PO-fit actually looks at perceived PO-fit (Cable and DeRue 2002; van Vuuren et al. 2007). It is very likely that there will be a high correlation between the fit employees perceives between their own values and those of the organization and between their values and the role expectations they believe their company to have.

PO-fit correlates with job satisfaction, organizational identification and citizenship behaviors (Cable and DeRue 2002; Saks and Ashforth 1997) and job performance (Lauver and Kristof-Brown 2001). Low PO-fit should thus indicate lower levels of these constructs. Thus, a low level of fit between personal values and role expectations from the company (as part of the perceived organizational values of the company) should result in lower job satisfaction, organizational identification, citizenship behaviors and performance.

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[289] http://web.ebscohost.com

[290] http://www.econbiz.de/

[291] http://www.emeraldinsight.com/

This is supported by the results of this study, which further indicate that a low level of fit between personal values and company role expectations lead to role conflict and work deviance (such as deceiving the company, siding against the company, etc.). The impact of low PO-fit on negative behaviors is far less well researched than the influence of PO-fit on desired outcomes. This research adds to the insights on low PO-fit.

This research also shows that a low fit between customer role expectations and personal values of frontline employees may lead to role conflict and is likely to lead to pro-organizational behaviors rather than pro-customer ones. It is likely that the results of a low fit between personal values and customer values as expressed in the role expectations leads to similar results as low PO-fit.

This research shows that there may be value in developing the person-role conflict construct further and developing a measure that focuses more on the ethical dimension of the construct. As this construct looks at role expectations from different role partners, it would include both the organization and customers. For frontline employees faced with role expectations from both parties, this would be a valuable measure to further understanding of the consequences of personal role conflict.

Insights from research on PO-fit is also likely to be valuable in understanding the consequences of conflict between personal values and role expectations. This research in turn can offer some insights on the negative consequences of low PO-fit, including deviant behaviors.

Influence of the employee-customer relationship and customer behaviors on the frontline employee - impact of rapport, positive customer behaviors and negative customer behaviors.

The results of this research project includes information on how the employee-customer relationship, particularly frontline employees' feelings towards customers and customers' behavior towards frontline employees, influences frontline employee behavior (see chapter 6.5). Put simply, the research shows that pro-customer feelings lead to pro-customer behaviors and that negative feelings towards customers as well as negative behaviors by customers lead to frontline employees withholding pro-customer behaviors and expressing deviant or sabotaging behavior instead.

These results add to a small but growing area of research on the influence of customer behaviors and employee feelings towards customers on frontline employees. Positive behaviors of customers, such as customer citizenship behaviors[292], have been shown to increase well being of service frontline employees (Garma and Bove 2011) and positively impact employee performance, satisfaction and commitment (Yi, Nataraajan, and Gong 2011). However, how em-

[292] Customer citizenship behaviors can be defined as voluntary behaviors by the customer that are outside of the required role for service delivery (Bove et al. 2009).

ployee behavior towards customers is impacted is still little understood. Varca (2009) has shown that lower empathy towards customers leads to lower role conflict, but the influence of customer behavior on empathy towards customers was not explored.

This study adds to the understanding of the consequences of rapport between frontline employees and customers. The extant literature explores the consequences of rapport with regard to the customer. Higher customer satisfaction and a higher propensity to engage in positive word of mouth (Gremler and Gwinner 2000; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2006; Macintosh 2009) as well as a higher brand equity (Biedenbach, Bengtsson, and Wincent 2011) have been empirically linked to rapport between frontline employees and customers. This research broadens this understanding by focusing on the frontline employees' consequent behaviors. This understanding should be expanded by further research.

The impact of negative customer behaviors has also received some attention in the research literature. As discussed in chapter 6.5.2, aggressive and unfriendly customers have been found to adversely affect employee performance (Rafaeli et al. 2012; Wegge, Vogt, and Wecking 2007), cognitive abilities (Rafaeli et al. 2012), and emotional exhaustion (Kim et al. 2012). Two studies have also found evidence that negative customer behaviors lead to deviant and sabotaging behaviors by the frontline employees towards the customers (Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, and Walker 2008; Wang et al. 2011).

This research offers additional insights on how customer behaviors and frontline employees' feelings towards the customer impact employees' customer-directed behaviors.

Legitimacy of customer demands

This study has found that the perceived legitimacy of customer expectations and demands impacts how frontline employees' deal with role conflict (see chapter 6.5). These results add to the understanding of the effect of perceived legitimacy on role conflict. On this topic there is as of yet little research available. O'Brien, Hill and Autry (2009) offer some insights on the effect of legitimacy on role conflict (see also chapter 3.4.4). Both Wang and colleagues (2011) and Skarlicki and colleagues (2008) argue that negative customer behaviors are seen as violating social norms (are normatively illegitimate) and thus encourage retaliating behaviors.

This study supports these findings. Customer demands and expectations that were perceived as illegitimate increased the likelihood of frontline employees siding against the customer and withholding pro-customer behaviors. The study also furthers the understanding of the effect of perceived legitimacy by showing that demands and expectations that were perceived as legitimate generally led employees to show pro-customer behaviors and increased the likelihood of siding with the customer. It did, however, in some cases lead to higher role conflict.

Sweethearting - when frontline employees take from the company to give to friends and family

Sweethearting is a type of service sabotage behavior (Harris and Ogbonna 2009). It involves employees offering friends and family free or discounted services and gifts without knowledge or authorization from the company (Brady, Voorhees, and Brusco 2012; Harris and Ogbonna 2009). This behavior has received fairly little attention so far in the research literature, although there are several articles in management and retail magazines on sweethearting (see for example Amato-McCoy 2009; Lewis 2009; Tarnowski 2008).

Harris and Ogbonna (2009) and Brady, Voorhees, and Brusco (2012) look at various influencing factors for sweethearting in their research, such as personal traits, deterrence factors and job related factors. This research project can offer additional insights on influencing factors of sweethearting. While the focus did not lie directly on sweethearting behaviors, siding with the customer against the company expectations can be a form of sweethearting. Sweethearting itself is definitely a form of siding against the company. This research thus broadens the understanding of both sweethearting behaviors and their influence factors by looking at the role the customer-employee relationship and the legitimacy of the perceived customer claims play (see chapter 6.5).

7.1.2. Implications for Businesses and Customers

The findings of this research project offer not only insights for research but also for business practice. The focus of this project was placed on situations of role conflict arising from incompatible role demands made by companies and customers. Particular attention was paid to how frontline employees approached these situations and on the factors influencing their decision in role conflict situations. In the following chapter I will outline first why the results can offer important insights for companies, then how companies can use these results to improve the likelihood that frontline employees take their side in a role conflict situation, and finally discuss some of the results pertaining to some of the causes of role conflict discussed by the frontline employees. Implications for customers wishing to influence frontline employees in their favor are also discussed.

As has been outlined at the beginning of this research report, frontline employees play a central role for the economic success of service companies (Hartline and Ferrell 1996; Singh 2000). They are a crucial element in building and developing customer relationships and have significant impact on important business outcomes such as perceived service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault 1990; Grönroos 2007; Hartline, Maxham, and McKee 2000). This means that they also are important to a company's overall financial performance (Capon, Farley, and Hoenig 1990; Hays and Hill 1997).

The fundamental importance of frontline employees to their company's success is reflected by the service profit chain (Heskett, Sasser, and Schlesinger 1997; 2003), which has been discussed at the beginning of chapter 2. This model links internal service quality to employee satisfaction, retention and productivity and these in turn with customer satisfaction and loyalty which are linked to revenue growth and profitability (Heskett et al. 1994). The way a company manages their frontline employees and influences their attitudes and behaviors in customer contact situations can thus become an important and sustainable source of competitive advantage (Lovelock and Wirtz 2007).

This illustrates the importance of companies being able to influence how their frontline employees react in role conflict situations. The desired outcome for a firm should be that the frontline employee routinely decides to side with the company and puts the company's role demands over those of the company. If a frontline employee does not act in the way the company expects him to, this leaves the company with less influence over what happens in customer contact situations.

Employees acting in ways that contravene important organizational norms and expectations is often referred to as workplace deviance (Ferris, Brown, and Heller 2009; Robinson and Bennett 1995, see also chapter 4.3 for a more in-depth description). If such deviant behaviors are directed at the customer or carried out at the frontline, these behaviors are also called service sabotage (Harris and Ogbonna 2002; 2006, see also chapter 4.4 for more information). Siding with the customer, using deceit or employing other strategies for dealing with role conflict with the exception of siding with the company, are examples of such behaviors. Sweethearting is a particular type of deviant behavior in which frontline employees offer discounted or free services and products to customers they like or have a personal connection to (Brady, Voorhees, and Brusco 2012; Harris and Ogbonna 2009). Sweethearting can also be seen as a form of siding with the customer in role conflict situations, such as when George helps a customer get a claims grant (see chapter 6.2.2), Quinn helps customers avoid service charges (see chapter 6.2 and 6.4), or David helps friends and acquaintances get questionable claims settled (see chapter 6.5.1). This sort of behavior can result in substantial losses for a company. In their study, Brady, Voorhees and Brusco (2012, p. 81) speak of a cost of $400 billion annually to US firms due to sweethearting.

Although not all ways of dealing with role conflict other than siding with the company can be referred to as sweethearting, it is likely that many of them translate to real costs for the company. There is therefore a strong motivation for companies to ensure that their frontline employees act according to company role expectations, both to prevent deviance and the associated costs and to ensure efficient management of the strategically important customer interface.

Advice to companies on getting frontline employees to take their side

The results of this research project allow for a number of recommendations to be made to companies regarding options for influencing frontline employees to take the company's side in situations of role conflict. These are recounted in the following.

Being on the same page - the influence of frontline employees having the same role expectations as their company

The analysis of the interview material collected for this study showed that the higher the similarities between the expectations a company poses to its frontline employees and the frontline employees' personal role expectations the more likely it is that frontline employees side with the company. These results are discussed in chapter 6.3.1, but table 23 illustrates this particularly well. The three frontline employees who had highly similar role expectations to those they believed their company to have almost always sided with the company. On the other hand, frontline employees with low similarity between their own role expectations and the perceived role expectations were much more likely to choose alternative ways of resolving role conflict to siding with the company. Siding with the customer and compromise were presented as options chosen regularly, not as an exception.

How can companies try to promote a high similarity between their employees' role expectations and the role expectations the company actually has? One possibility is emphasizing role expectations during recruiting and in employee appraisals and reviews. However, this assumes that the employees are not clear on the company role expectations. This was not the case for the employees describing significant differences in role expectations.

Turning to the extant literature on differences in the role expectations of employees and their superiors, there is some empirical evidence as to what factors influence the level of similarity of these expectations (Hsiung and Tsai 2009; Morrison 1994).

Hsiung and Tsai (2009, p. 90) divide differences in job role definitions into two types: discrepancy on job breadth and on job content. Discrepancy on job breath would mean that subordinates and superiors have a different understanding on the scope of in-role tasks (what tasks the job actually involves). Difference on job content is described as referring to uncertainty on whether certain behaviors are in-role or extra-role. This differentiation is important. If discrepancy arises from uncertainty about role behaviors, then this can be best remedied by clearly communicating role behaviors. If, however, the discrepancy arises from employees being unwilling to see certain tasks as in-role behaviors, the aim must be to get them to accept a broader role definition (Lam, Hui, and Law 1999).

As mentioned above, the discrepancies between job role expectations described by the frontline employees in this research project related mostly to job breath. There was a difference in the kind of behaviors frontline employees saw as their job, as well as the priorities they should set in cases of conflict (see chapter 3.3.1).

Research on discrepancies in role definitions between subordinates and superiors offers several insights on possible influencing factors and therefore on ways in which companies can address this factor. This research offers advice on what factors may induce employees to broaden their job role definitions. This sometimes involves taking on citizenship behaviors as in-role behaviors, or broadening job role definitions to include new tasks. Although most of this research does not look explicitly at frontline employees, it is likely that the implications also apply to them.

An important factor that has been found to influence the level of incongruence between employee and superior job role definitions was the quality of leader-membership exchange (LMX, Hsiung and Tsai 2009). LMX focuses on the quality of the exchange relationship between superiors (leaders) and subordinates (members) in organizations. LMX theory sees the leader-member relationship as a social exchange relationship. In line with social exchange theory (Blau 1964, see also chapter 4.1.1), it proposes that employees in high quality LMX relationships will feel an obligation to reciprocate by investing in the relationship. One way in which employees can pay back their superiors is to extend their roles beyond the normal role requirements (Hofmann, Morgeson, and Gerras 2003; Settoon, Bennett, and Liden 1996). As well as being more likely to engage in extra-role behaviors, employees in high-quality LMX relationships are likely to communicate more and engage in collaborative problem-solving, which should lead to both a broader set of role behaviors and a higher level of congruence in the role definition between leader and member (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995). There is empirical support in the literature for the link between high quality LMX relationships and a high level of congruence between employee and superior role expectations (Hofmann, Morgeson, and Gerras 2003; Hsiung and Tsai 2009).

Morrison (1994) has also found that employee job satisfaction, affective and normative commitment lead to broader definitions of job responsibilities and the definition of behaviors usually seen as citizenship behaviors as in-role behaviors. Affective commitment refers to emotional attachment to and involvement in an organization, normative commitment to feelings of duty and obligation towards the organization (Meyer and Allen 1991). Chiaburu and Marinova (2012) also found that tenure is positively related to both broader job role definitions of employees and the inclusion of citizenship behaviors into their definition of in-role behaviors.

In summary, the results allow for the following recommendation to be made:

Recommendation for companies:

Companies wishing to ensure that frontline employees are more likely to take their side in role conflicts should promote a high level of congruence between their job role definition and that of their frontline employees. They can do this by:

- Encouraging high quality LMX relationships between superiors and frontline employees
- Enhancing frontline employee job satisfaction as well as their affective and normative commitment
- Reducing turnover to ensure that more frontline employees have longer terms of tenure.

That a high quality of employee-company relationship, including good relationships between employees and superiors (LMX relationships), high levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction, is likely to lead to frontline employees siding with the company is also supported by the findings discussed in chapter 6.4 on the employee-company relationship.

Influence of instrumental motives - aligning frontline employee interests with siding with the company in role conflict situations

Several of the interviewed frontline employees pointed out that they generally sided with the company because doing so was in their own interests. They felt that this made sense for them financially, with regard to their future career plans or for their personal work organization (see chapter 6.3.3).

Siding with the company may not always be in-role behavior, as it is unlikely that all possible situations in which role conflict will occur will be covered by explicitly defined in-role behavior. The boundary between in-role and extra-role can be seen especially fuzzy in the case of service frontline employees due to the difficulty in exactly specifying their job responsibilities and behaviors (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Hartline, Maxham, and McKee 2000; Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1988). Instrumental motives, such as career orientation, can also be a powerful motive for frontline employees to engage in extra-role behaviors benefiting the company (Bolino 1999; Grant and Mayer 2009).

Ensuring that frontline employees are aware of the potential benefits siding with the company offers them is likely to increase their readiness to side with the company - both as an in-role behavior and as an extra-role behavior. This can be done by providing financial motives, as Nicolas describes his company does (see chapter 6.3.3, Nicolas 229-236), or by including it in employee appraisals. A further option may be pointing out how company rules may protect the employee or offer benefits to the employee's workflow, which is a motive Sarah speaks of (see chapter 6.3.3, Sarah 319-332).

Instrumental motives can also lead to employees not prioritizing company interests or expectations. This is the case when customer goodwill is an important key to the employee's long-term success and siding with the company would likely damage that relationship. For example, if a frontline employee pushes a certain service that damages his customer relationships and leads to less success later in time, then he is less likely to do so. This may particularly be the case when employee productivity is continuously assessed on short-term measures only, such as sales volume. Bowing to pressure to sell more of a product or service the employee believes to be against the interests of the company would compromise his or her ability to do so again a little later. At this later point in time it could then be very difficult for the employee to meet the short-term assessment criteria again.

Here companies can either ensure that their expectations do not endanger the employee-customer relationship, the consequences of such a damaged relationship are outweighed by benefits the company offers or the relationships with customers do not last long enough for the employee to suffer from a potential damage to the relationship. This can for example be done by often reassigning employees to different customers. However, many benefits of a good employee-customer relationship to the company would also suffer (such as customer satisfaction and loyalty, Grönroos 2007; Hartline, Maxham, and McKee 2000).

In summary, the following recommendations can be made:

Recommendation for companies:

Companies wishing to ensure that frontline employees are more likely to take their side in role conflicts should offer and communicate incentives to frontline employees. The aim is to tie frontline employee instrumental motives to siding with the company. This can be done by:

- Providing financial motives, such as commissions and premiums
- Providing career-oriented incentives, such as including the desired behaviors in appraisals, rewarding it with access to interesting projects, etc.
- Pointing out how company rules protect employees or offer other benefits to the employee, such as an easier workflow.

If frontline employees are dependent on customer goodwill for future success and the company wants them to do something that they believe may damage their relationship with the customer:

- Emphasize potential benefits for customers to the frontline employee
- Offer benefits that outweigh potential risk to future business with customers
- Rotate frontline employees frequently so that customer relationships do not last long enough for the employee to suffer from potential damage to the employee-customer relationship.

It should be pointed out that these last points are ethically difficult, particularly if the company is aware that their role demands may actually be detrimental to the customer and thus the frontline employee-customer relationship. There may also be negative consequences for the firm resulting from damaging or restricting employee-customer relationships.

Emphasize potential negative consequences of not siding with the company

As discussed in chapter 6.6, frontline employees often considered the potential consequences of their decision in a role conflict situation before making the decision. Frontline employees were more likely to side with the company, if the perceived the cost of siding against the company as high for the company and/ or low for the customer. They were more likely to side with the customer if they perceived the cost of deciding otherwise to be high for the customer and low for the company.

Thus, the company should clearly communicate potential costs of siding against the company to their employees. For example, consider the following argument made by Quinn:

> Quinn: *"Well I think if it's within reason, I would say do it for the customer, but as I said, it isn't like we are talking about huge sums. We're talking about a few Euros, so I do think that as long as it is within reason and you're not badly violating something, which isn't really the case. It is difficult to do that really. Then I would say, go with the customer."*[293]

She is downplaying the potential costs to the company of siding with the customer. The company could address such situations by communicating the actual or cumulated costs of such

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[293] Interviewerin*: Hättest du denn einen Rat an jemanden, der sich in deiner Art von Job, also in einem Call Center in so einer Konfliktsituation befindet, die Kunden wollen das von mir, das Unternehmen das, wie man damit umgeht?*

Quinn: *Also ich denke, wenn es echt noch im Rahmen ist, würde ich sagen: ‚Mach das für den Kunden', aber wie gesagt, es ist ja nicht so bei uns dass es um was weiß ich wie viel geht, sag ich mal. Ein paar Euro Beträge sag ich mal, von daher denke ich schon, wenn das irgendwie im Rahmen ist und man nicht grob gegen irgendetwas verstößt, was aber eigentlich nicht der Fall ist. Also es ist eigentlich schwer, sag ich mal, dass Sie das machen können. Dann würde ich schon sagen, dem Kunden lieber.327-334* decisions to their frontline employeesFor example, an employee engaging in sweethearting by saving a customer he or she likes may see only the few Euros this costs the company. A company could emphasize the estimated accumulated damage to the company from such behaviors, to set the potentially low cost of the individual service or product into context This would not be applicable in all role conflict situations, only in those in which such a weighting of consequences may be applied. Furthermore, this recommendation only works if the company is aware of these situations and they occur fairly regularly. Of course, the company can also try to emphasize that the cost to the customer for certain situations is low.

To summarize, the following recommendation can be made.

Recommendation for companies:

Companies wishing to ensure that frontline employees are more likely to take their side in role conflicts should emphasize the cost to the company if frontline employees decide to side against them, for example by pointing out the accumulated cost of certain types of behavior, such as sweethearting or bending rules for customers. They could also try to lower the possible negative consequences to customers in the eyes of their employees.

This advice especially concerns role conflict situations in which a weighing of consequences may be applied, and which are likely to occur fairly often.

As well as these general recommendations on how companies can influence their frontline employees and so increase the likelihood of them siding with them and prioritizing their demands and interests in role conflict situations, there is another important point that should be made.

Importance of reducing role conflict for frontline employees - particular role conflict caused by role demands frontline employees perceive as detrimental to the customer or immoral

Several of the interviewed employees reported that they felt that they were generally more customer oriented than their company (see chapter 3.1.1, especially table 3.1). Some employees reported intrasender role conflict, with management asking them to fulfill role expectations that were mutually or at least partially incompatible. Examples include Quinn describing that her management expects her to build a relationship with her customers, be empathic, make customers feel welcomed and valued Examples would be Quinn describing that her management expects her to build a relationship with her customers, be empathic, make customers feel welcomed and valued (e.g. Quinn 15-25). At the same time she is to stick to an average talk time of 90 seconds per customer (Quinn 123-128) and employees who take longer are sanctioned. Some frontline employees described feeling pressured by their company to lie to customers (for example Phoebe 223-260) or to act in ways that they perceived as immoral (see chapter 6.3.1 and 6.3.2). The frontline employees recounting these experiences generally also described feeling pressure and stress from role conflict. This is problematic for companies for several reasons.

Firstly, the results of this research shows that the situations described above often lead the frontline employees to not side with the company, but to choose alternatives such as siding with the customer and compromise, sometimes combined with deceit or avoidance.

Secondly, there is ample evidence in the literature on the negative effects of role conflict for employees and companies (see also chapter 3.3.3). Role conflict has been linked to lower work performance and quality (Churchill et al. 1985; Singh 2000). It has been shown to increase burnout, tension and turnover intentions and to reduce job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Brown and Peterson 1993; Churchill, Ford, and Walker Jr 1976; Hartline and Ferrell 1996; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne 1998; Nygaard and Dahlstrom 2002; Singh 2000; Singh, Goolsby, and Rhoads 1994). Empirical studies have also found that role stress reduces the effort frontline employees put into their work (Brown and Peterson 1994) and their commitment to service quality (Schwepker Jr and Hartline 2005). [294]

Thirdly, research on the service profit chain (see chapter 2.1) has shown that employee job satisfaction has a significant impact on important outcome variables such as profitability and revenue growth. A 2007 study by Deloitte Consulting found that the companies on Fortune magazine's list of the "100 Best Companies to work for in America" significantly outperformed the companies that make up the Standard & Poor's 500 stock index (Dickler 2007). Other studies report that companies with high levels of employee satisfaction outperform other companies by as much as 30 to 40 percent (Pfeffer 1998; Webber 1998). Role conflict, as stated above, negatively impacts job satisfaction.

Reducing role conflict for frontline employees can therefore be an important measure in securing competitive advantages and long-term economic success. Companies should evaluate the role demands they place on their frontline employees for possible sources of conflict with the role expectations and demands placed on frontline employees by customers. The aim should be to ensure that demands and expectations leave room for both parties to profit. As discussed in chapter 6.3 most frontline employees saw themselves as both customer and out-

[294] There is also some discussion in the literature that the relationship between role stress and performance is curvilinear, in other words that certain stress levels enhance performance. Role stress can lead to employees working harder and thus increase productivity (Weatherly and Tansik 1993), at least in the short term. However, the general consensus in the literature is that role conflict has a negative impact on frontline employees. See also chapter 3.3.3 for a more in depth discussion.

come or profit oriented (chapter 6.3.1) and saw those company role demands as particularly difficult that they felt left the customer too little to gain or even harmed them.

Some role conflict in demands made by the company to frontline employees will be inevitable. Some role conflict in demands made by the company to frontline employees will be inevitable. The expectation that frontline employees fulfill both quality and productivity goals is often discussed in the literature (Lovelock and Wirtz 2007; Mahesh and Kasturi 2006; Singh 2000; Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler 2009). Research on call centre frontline employees points to the twin aims of high quality service and high levels of efficiency (Raz and Blank 2007). While these aims are not mutually exclusive, they cannot both be maximized. At some point compromises will have to be made, prioritizing one over the other. Both aims cannot be fully realized as at some point one can only be advanced at cost to the other.

However, by being aware of these conflicts, clarifying which aims should be prioritized to what extent (reducing role ambiguity) and by ensuring that role expectations that impact the customer still protect customer interests, the role conflict felt by employees and the incentives for siding against the company can be reduced.

It is important to note that several frontline employees described some of their company's role expectations as immoral, felt pressured into behavior they considered ethically wrong and believed that following some of the role expectations could potentially harm their customers. Companies should rethink reevaluate such problematic role expectations. Pushing for the sale of products and services that unfairly disadvantage customers or holding on to rules that have a severe negative impact on customers may offer some advantages to companies, but may also come with considerable cost to their employees, their relationships with customers and thus their long-term organizational success.

This leaves the following recommendation for companies:

Recommendation for companies:

To ensure that frontline employees are more likely to side with the company, are less likely to suffer from role stress and can be a source of competitive advantage for the company, companies should consider:

- Being aware of and communicating possible conflicts in the expectations they put on frontline employees. A classic conflict lies in expectations of quality and productivity.
- Companies should clarify where they see priorities and how far one aim should be compromised in favor for the other.

- Ensure that role expectations that impact the customer still leave room for the frontline employee to feel that he or she is serving both the company and the customer. This was an important concern for several frontline employees and an often cited reason for siding against the company.
- Reevaluate role expectations that are detrimental to customers, leave them at an unfair disadvantage or could otherwise be considered immoral.

Advice to customers

After discussing the implications from this research project for companies I want to give a short overview of what customers can take from this advice. The one factor that really stood out in relation to customers was that frontline employees were much more likely to protect the interests of customers they found likeable, could establish a rapport with or were friends with (see chapter 6.5.1). In cases in which customers were aggressive or unfriendly frontline employees were much more likely to side with the company and withhold pro-customer behaviors (see chapter 6.5.2).

A second factor that impacted whether or not frontline employees sided with customers was the perceived legitimacy of the customer request or demand. If the demands were seen as legitimate and fair, frontline employees were more likely to side with the customers (see chapter 6.5.1). If the demands were seen as unreasonable or unfair, then the frontline employees were more likely to side with the company (see chapter 6.5.2).

Finally, frontline employees were more likely to side with the customer if they felt that the cost of not doing so to the customer was high (see chapter 6.6) Customers should thus highlight the importance of their demands and emphasize possible risks.

The advice to customers can thus be summed up as follows:

Recommendation for customers:

To increase the likelihood of frontline employees siding with the customer, customers should aim for the following:

- Be friendly and courteous towards the frontline employee and try to establish rapport.
- Frame your demands and expectations as fair and legitimate requests as much as possible. Refrain from letting demands appear illegitimate.

- Emphasize the importance of transaction to you and highlight possible risks.

7.2. Research Limitations - Addressing the Question of Quality

As with any empirical study it is important to consider the limitations of this research. In this chapter I will address these limitations. In a next step I will also discuss evaluation criteria for qualitative research in general and grounded theory in particular and apply these to this research project.

Research limitations

The limitations of this research primarily concern the qualitative approach, the selected sample for the research, and sampling issues. Concerns regarding interview partners' openness on delicate and sensitive issues, such as cheating their own company, are also addressed.

- *Limitations due to qualitative approach*

A qualitative approach for this study was chosen due to the reasons discussed in chapter 5.1. As the reasons are presented in detail there, I will only give a short summary here. This research was exploratory in nature. Its aim was to gain a deep, holistic and rich understanding of how frontline employees decide to resolve role conflict situations. The qualitative methods allowed ideas, hypotheses and theory to emerge from the collected data rather than the data being used to confirm or disprove prior hypothesis (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005; Miles and Huberman 1994). Interview partners could introduce new ideas and emphasize concepts and topics that they felt were important (Rubin and Rubin 2005).

The openness and flexibility of qualitative methods come with a price tag attached. Sample sizes are necessarily much smaller, which means that one has to consider issues of generalizability (Silverman 2004; the generalizability of this study will be discussed towards the end of the chapter). A qualitative approach can discover relevant concepts, establish links between them and often also determine causation (Mason 2002; Richards 2005). However, measuring how much one concept affects another, identifying and measuring moderating effects and similar issues remain elusive aims. These lie the domain of quantitative research (Hair et al. 2009). In this research project, such quantitative methods could have helped measure levels of role conflict and helped compare the impact various influencing factors had on the level of role conflict described by the frontline employees. This poses an interesting avenue for future research to explore.

Finally, qualitative research methods always have an element of subjectivity. Interview situations are always social situations and as such have contextual, situational and interactional elements (Mason 2002). These elements influence the interview, the topics that are discussed, and possibly the experiences and opinions the interview partner is comfortable expressing (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005; Mason 2002). This subjectivity is also present in data analysis. The data is looked at, filtered, evaluated and combined through the understanding of the researcher (Miles and Huberman 1994; Richards 2005). This subjectivity is an inherent part of qualitative research (Ezzy 2002; Patton 2002). Eliminating it takes away from the strengths of qualitative research and essentially leaves us with quantitative research (Mason 2002). This subjectivity is of course also present in this research. It is addressed by describing both the data collection and analysis in detail (see chapter 5.2 and 5.3). Also, the results section details how the results are arrived and present arguments for them, so that others can follow the analysis process.

- *Limitations regarding the sample*

Twenty people were interviewed for this study. However, only 19 interviews were included in the detailed analysis as one interview partner asked that his interview record be deleted and no direct quotes used in the study. The interview partners all are or have involved in frontline work, with three now being self-employed but working for only one company (Brian, David and Fred), one now also heading a small company (Harry), one person now responsible for training frontline employees (Nicolas) and one now doing mostly back office work (Olivia). The interview partners stem from a variety of industries, such as finance, insurance, consulting, mental health and a government agency. While the heterogeneity of this sample allowed for a broad variety of role conflict situations and also illustrates that the results regarding role conflict situations apply in various settings, this also represents a limitation of this study.

Had the sample been structured more according to industry or position it may have been easier to identify elements specific to certain industries or positions. For example, the study could have compared finance (including banking and insurance), health (including medical and wellness services) and government agencies. Retailing represents a very large service sector that is also not included in this study and that could provide additional insights. In the same way, including larger groups of managers or back-office support workers may have offered the opportunity to compare between these groups.

The sample is structured the way it is because at the beginning of the project the aim was to get a broad and varied feel for the topic. Differences in industries or positions became a concern later in the project, when the ongoing analysis of data led to more and more emerging themes. Additional data was not collected due to project time restraints. This is something that could be considered in future research.

Finally, the research is mostly set in a business-to-consumer setting. It is therefore not clear whether the results can be carried over into a business-to-business setting. Further cases of frontline employees with business customers would have broadened the applicability of the study results. Again, this is something that should be considered by future research.

- *Limitations regarding theoretical sampling*

In grounded theory research, sampling begins with purposive sampling and then continues with an interplay between data analysis and theoretical sampling (Birks and Mills 2011; see also chapter 5.2.2). In this research project this course was followed during the early and middle stages of analysis. An example for this sampling strategy from this research is that early on during analysis it became clear that the fact that some frontline employees relied heavily on the goodwill of their customers for future success (see chapter 6.3.3) influenced their decision in role conflict situations. This led to a search for frontline employees who were less dependent on their customers' goodwill towards them.

However due to time concerns this strategy was not more followed during the later stages of this research project. There are some results of this study that could have been developed more fully with further sampling. This particularly concerns the following two results:

- Use of personal resources as a strategy for resolving role conflict (chapter 6.2.7)

  Two clear instances of using personal resources to resolve role conflict situations were found in the interviews: Rebecca using her free time to give a therapy session to one of her clients (281-303; 396-400) and Brian using his own funds to make up the difference between what a customer wanted for an insurance claim and what the company was prepared to pay (172-182). Although there were other cases in which frontline employees invested more time or other resources due to a role conflict situation, they were either not really personal (such as investing more work time) or not used directly to resolve role conflict. This approach to dealing with role conflict had been unexpected and not something described in the prior literature. Finding more frontline employees who had behaved in such a way would have furthered our understanding of this approach to role conflict.

- Impact of commercial friendships on role conflict decision

  The results clearly show the importance of the frontline employee-customer relationship for decisions made in role conflict situations (see chapter 6.5). While there was plenty of data on frontline employees liking their customers or developing a rapport with them, there were only two examples of frontline employees having customers as friends or friends of customers (David and Fred). Further sampling of cases in which friendship existed between frontline employees and customers could have developed the understanding of friendship as an influencing factor further.

Despite these shortcomings, the results offer some very interesting insights into both topics and in both cases the available data clearly suggests that these are relevant concepts. The inferences drawn from both cases has been clearly documented in the results chapters and further our understanding of how frontline employees deal with role conflict. Finally, both topics represent interesting points for future research to explore more fully.

- *Limitations regarding the sensitive nature of some of the research topics*

As discussed in chapter 5.1 some elements of this research project are delicate. Dealing with role conflict situations can involve behaviors that interview partners may not wish to acknowledge openly towards others. Examples for this are deceiving their company or customers, selling offerings to customers that they believe to be harmful and would not buy themselves or helping a customer take advantage of the company. In all of these cases there may also be very real concern on the side of the frontline employees that their company or their customers do not find out about this sort of behavior.

As outlined in chapter 5.1 the sensitive nature of the research topic was a powerful reason behind the decision to choose qualitative research methods. These allow for forming trusting relationships between interviewer and interviewee and can help promote openness and honesty (Rubin and Rubin 2005). Participants were also recruited over personal contacts to help promote a trustful interview atmosphere. The interviewer had not personal connection with any of the interview partners, but they were usually found over mutual acquaintances.

On the whole the interviews can be judged to having been honest and open. That instances of deceiving customers or companies (see chapter 6.2.5), instances of helping customers get around company rules (see chapter 6.2.2) or deciding not to help some customers (see chapter 6.5.2) were discussed openly and candidly. However, it is possible that the interview partners knew of more such instances but did not want to report doing so.

Addressing the question of quality - criteria for assessing the quality of qualitative research

As well as looking at the general limitations of this study I will also outline criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research and apply them to this research project.

I will use the evaluation criteria for grounded theory research projects used by Charmaz (Charmaz 2006), as her guidelines for coding and data analyses were used for this research project (see chapter 5.2). Further criteria by other grounded theory authors exist (see Birks and Mills 2011 p.149 for an overview). However, these authors also offer different approaches to grounded theory. In some cases there are significant differences, for example when following grounded theory according to Glaser (1992). As well as the criteria by Charmaz (2006) I will also look at the more general evaluation criteria discussed by Spiggle (1994) in her seminal paper on the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data.

Charmaz (2006, p. 182) discusses four criteria for evaluating grounded theory studies: credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness. Although there are slight differences in the description and scope of the criteria, Charmaz' (2006) criteria largely correspond to those described by Spiggle (1994, pp. 500-501), even though Spiggle uses different words for two of the criteria, namely credibility (referred to as adequacy by Spiggle) and originality (referred to as innovation by Spiggle). Spiggle (1994) also names an additional criterion: integration. These criteria will be briefly outlined and then applied to this research project.

- **Credibility (Charmaz 2006) or Adequacy (Spiggle 1994)**

  This concerns the logic and conceptual grounding of the study (see also Birks and Mills 2011, p. 152). The fulfillment of this criterion requires the researcher to demonstrate a strong logical link between data and results. This includes systematic comparisons between observations and results and categories covering a wide range of observations. The presented data should demonstrate familiarity with the topic and be sufficient to support the arguments made. The results and corresponding evidence and arguments should allow readers to be able to form an independent assessment.

  To fulfill this criterion the results in chapter 6 are described in detail. The thought processes and arguments leading to the results are presented in a clear and precise manner. All arguments are supported by at least one quotation and generally several. Where appropriate, tables are used when comparing different frontline employees with each other. Possible alternative interpretations of quotations are discussed. Where results are not clear or strong, this is pointed out in the text. For example the results on the impact of friendship on role conflict decisions is based on only two cases. This is discussed openly in chapter 5.1.1. The presented categories of results cover a wide range of the observations. This has been made possible by several iterations of analysis, including coding using MaxQDA, pen-and paper coding, developing tables and memo writing. Visualizations have been used where appropriate and as a means of summary. These have also helped develop the results and are available to the reader.

  To further the credibility of the study, examples for memos and the analysis process are given in chapter 5.3. To address problems with translating interview quotes into English, all quotations are also presented in German. When translation threatened to change the meaning or important nuances of quotations were lost through the translation, this was openly discussed in the text. Examples include issues regarding the German word "Sympathie" (see chapter 5.1) or the use of metaphors such as the use of "passing on the Peter", a reference to a German card game that means that one passes on an undesirable responsibility or task (see chapter 6.2.4).

- **Originality (Charmaz 2006) or Innovation (Spiggle 1994)**

This criterion relates to the value and significance of the study. It assesses whether the study comes up with new insights and "*new and creative ways of looking at experience*" (Spiggle 1994, p. 501). It also looks at how the research "*challenges, extends or refines current ideas, concepts, and practices*" (Charmaz 2006, p. 182).

Despite the wealth of research available on role conflict (see chapter 3) and additional insights from other literature (see chapter 4), understanding how frontline employees decide in a role conflict situation is still a research field with many open questions. This research has addressed some of them and helped developed a better understanding of this topic.

In particular, this research identified a new way of dealing with role conflict that was not addressed in the role conflict literature before - using personal resources to solve role conflict. A particular contribution has also been made in furthering the understanding of how customers' actions and behaviors and frontline employees' feelings towards customers impact their customer-directed behaviors (chapter 6.5). This research has also broadened the understanding of work deviant behavior, looking at those that benefit the customer (for example chapters 6.2.2 and 6.2.3). The behaviors covered a broader range of behaviors than sweethearting, which typically looks at free or discounted services. George helping a customer write an objection against a decision made by his company is an example for such behavior. This research project has thus been able to extend the understanding on role conflict, behaviors in role conflict and employee-customer relationships.

- **Resonance (Charmaz 2006; Spiggle 1994)**

Charmaz (2006) and Spiggle (1994) refer to slightly different aspects of resonance. To fulfill this criterion, Spiggle (1994, p.501) proposes that research must be "enlightening, resonating, evocative, and sensitizing to us". Charmaz (2006, p. 182) focuses on the need for the results to be meaningful to participants and people in similar circumstances and draw connections to larger collectives and institutions.

It is difficult for me as the author of this study to judge how "enlightening, resonating, evocative, and sensitizing" this research is, as this is something that must necessarily be deferred to an audience. Excerpts of this research project were shown to research colleagues and frontline employees (who had not participated in the study). The feedback was positive and the results often led to lively and interesting debates. The frontline employees often supplemented the results with their own experiences. In several instances readers responded by recounting experiences that they had as customers. Initial results of this study were also presented at academic conferences, where several interesting and helpful comments were made by the audience. However, these observations, pleasing though they are, are anecdotal and as such do not constitute proof for having fulfilled this criterion.

During the presentation of the results an effort was made to apply the results to various groups, including management, frontline employees in general, and customers. This research report includes implications for research, businesses, and customer and as such aims to have an impact on and sensitize these groups.

- **Usefulness (Charmaz 2006; Spiggle 1994)**

  This criterion relates to knowledge development and practical use (see also Birks and Mills 2011, p. 152). It is concerned with whether the research project furthers knowledge, leads to further research and is of practical values to people.

  I believe this research project fulfills this criterion. As mentioned above and in chapter 7.1 the results of this project offers several insights and implications for research and business practice alike. A better understanding of the difficult position frontline employees often find themselves in, sandwiched between the expectations of their employer and their customer, and the ways in which they decide what to do in these situations opens opportunities for improving their situations. By better understanding the causes, nature and effects of role conflict, companies may better be able to reduce it. By understanding the influencing factors, companies have more opportunities in reducing deviant behaviors by frontline employees. Finally, any frontline employees reading this work may see that the ways in which they resolve role conflict situations are also employed by others. Several frontline employees sometimes expressed anger or moral outrage at some of the situations and felt pressurized into behaviors such as deceit or avoidance. Seeing that others have similar experiences may be helpful.

- **Integration (Spiggle 1994)**

  This refers to how well the results are integrated with each other and a holistic framework is established. This research project has aimed to go beyond the mere "identification of common themes in the data" (Spiggle 1994, p.501). Connections between related concepts were developed and causalities established. This can for example be seen in the summary of the results, see chapter 6.7. The results were also integrated into the extant literature. Connections between hypothesis and findings from other empirical research projects were drawn.

A few comments on the generalizability of this research

As described above, the sample drawn for this study was heterogeneous. Frontline employees from various industries working at companies of varying sizes were included. As can be seen in chapter 5.3.1 and specifically in table 19, interview partners worked for companies of varying sizes at different hierarchical levels. Some interview partners were self-employed but worked only for one firm as is common in the insurance industry. Some now had management functions, others now worked in the back office. This broad range of interview participants furthers the generalizability of this research. Whenever results were believed to be particular to a certain context, this was made clear in the description of the results.

7.3. Outlook

Frontline employees have long been the focus of much research attention. Singh (2000) speaks of frontline employees as interesting paradoxes. He describes them as paradoxical because, although their importance for organizational effectiveness and success is acknowledged by both research and business practice, they are often "underpaid, undertrained, overworked and highly stressed" (Hartline and Ferrell 1993, p.62; see also Singh 2000, p.15). In other words, although they occupy a central position at the boundary of the organization, they are often not treated with the attention and care that this would imply.

Singh (2000, p.15) addresses a further reason why frontline employees are attractive research objects: their boundary-spanning work puts them in the middle of conflicting demands from customers and the organization. This conflict inherent to frontline work is generally described as role conflict (see chapters 1, 2, and 3). While there is a wealth of research available on role conflict, its antecedents and consequences (see chapter 3), much of this research is quantitative and concerned with the effects of or on role conflict. This research project aimed to take a closer look at the role conflict situation itself and at some of the unanswered questions lurking inside the well research construct. It in particular aimed to understand the different ways in which frontline employees may resolve role conflict situations. Influencing factors on the decision which side to favor were also of considerable interest.

This research helped broaden the understanding of how frontline employees decide to address conflicting role demands at the front line. It looks at influences from the individual level, from the employee-company and employee-customer relationship level, as well as circumstantial factors. It has found evidence of a sixth option for dealing with role conflicts as well as of the five already discussed in the literature. It has extended the emerging literature regarding differences in job role expectations between employees and superiors and the effects of customer behaviors on employee behaviors. There are also several research implications (discussed in chapter 7.1). This research project leads to several suggestions for related and follow-up research projects that would help complete our understanding of what happens when frontline employees are faced with conflicting role demands. The following three research ideas particularly recommend themselves for this:

- An important area requiring further research is the customer's reaction to the frontline employees' behavior in role conflict. How do customers react when they perceive that frontline employees take their side against the company's, doing more for them than is likely to be acceptable to the company? What motivations do they believe the employee may have for doing so? And how does such behavior influence their perception of the company? These questions have not yet been sufficiently addressed in research and require more empirical work.

- Quantitative survey research could help better understand the impact of the influencing factors identified in this research. In particular the impact of positive feelings towards the customer, such as rapport, on pro-customer behaviors, and negative customer behaviors on frontline employee behavior offer an interesting research opportunity.

- Finally, the interactions between the company and frontline employees could be looked at in more depth than was possible in this study. This could include interviews with supervisors as well as quantitative research approaches. Looking at the impact of high quality LMX relationships on frontline employees approach to role conflict situations would be one possible first step in this direction.

The results of this research project lead to advice for business practice and to customers as to how to influence frontline employee behavior in their favor (see chapter 7.2).

One of the more striking insights during this research, especially in the work with the interviews and conversations with frontline employees, was to see how much some of the interview partners felt torn between their responsibilities to their company and to their customers. For many, striking the balance between these different role demands, in a way that left them feeling satisfied with their work and their view of themselves as a moral person and good employee, was a very difficult task. It is the hope of this author that this research project will contribute to the understanding of their situation and, ultimately, promote their ability to find a balance that they feel is fair to both their company and their customer.

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Appendix A - Original Interview Guide

Leitfaden – Boundary Switching

I. Eisbrecherfragen/Intervieweinstieg

1. Können Sie mir als erstes ein bisschen was über Ihre Aufgaben und Ihre Tätigkeit erzählen?
   - *Was gehört denn noch zu Ihren Aufgaben?*

II. Fragen über Kundenkontakt

2. Wie sieht denn der Kundenkontakt bei Ihnen normalerweise aus? Können Sie mir das beschreiben?
   - *Wie viel Freiheit haben Sie den bei der Gestaltung des Kundenkontakts?*
   - *Gibt es Verhaltensrichtlinien oder ähnliches?*
   - *Können Sie mir dies näher beschreiben?*

3. Was macht für Sie einen guten FLE (hier anpassen) aus? Was ist da wichtig?
   - *Gibt es weitere Dinge, die da wichtig sind?*
   - *Was macht noch einen guten FLE aus?*

4. Was bedeutet Kundenorientierung für Sie? Wie würden Sie das mit eigenen Worten beschreiben?
   - *Was macht das noch aus?*
   - *Glauben Sie, dass Ihr Unternehmen das genauso beschreiben würde? Oder gäbe es da Unterschiede?*
   - *Wie sieht das bei den Kunden aus? Glauben Sie, dass die Beschreibung von Kundenorientierung da ähnlich wäre?*

5. 5. Was sind Herausforderungen, die im Zusammenhang mit Kundenorientierung (unterschiedlichen Auffassungen von Kundenorientierung) auftreten können?
   - *Was macht sieht diese Situationen so schwierig? Können Sie mir das näher beschreiben?*
   - *Ist das auch schon mal im Zusammenhang mit unterschiedlichen Vorstellungen von Kundenorientierung aufgetreten?*
   - *Haben Sie so etwas schon einmal erlebt?*

III. CIT – Boundary Switching Situationen

6. Können Sie sich an eine Situation erinnern, in der Sie das Gefühl hatten, zwischen den Wünschen des Kunden und denen ihres Unternehmens entscheiden zu müssen? Also das Gefühl, zwischen den Stühlen zu sitzen?
   - *Können Sie mir das genauer beschreiben?*
   - *Wie haben Sie die Situation erlebt?*
   - *Können Sie sich daran erinnern, was Sie dabei gedacht haben?*
   - *Wie sind Sie damit umgegangen?*
   - *Wie haben Sie sich verhalten?*
   - *Warum haben Sie sich so entschieden?*
   - *Etwas Besonderes am Kunden?*

- *Etwas Besonderes an der Situation?*
- *Wie war die Reaktion des Kunden darauf?*

7. Können Sie sich an ähnliche „zwischen-den-Stühlen“ Situation erinnern, in der Sie anders entschieden haben? In der Sie sich an den Wünschen Ihres Unternehmens/Ihres Kunden orientiert haben?
    - *Können Sie mir das genauer beschreiben?*
    - *Was war hier das Besondere?*
    - *Am Kunden?*
    - *An der Situation?*
    - *Wie haben Sie diese Situation erlebt?*
    - *Können Sie sich daran erinnern, was Sie dabei gedacht haben?*
    - *Wie sind Sie damit umgegangen?*
    - *Wie hat der Kunde reagiert?*

IV. Nachfragen

8. Kommen solche Situationen häufiger vor? Oder ist es eher selten?
    - *Wie entscheiden Sie sich denn im Normalfall? Können Sie das so pauschal sagen?*
9. Kommt es denn vor, dass Sie sich Ihrem Kunden näher fühlen als Ihrem Unternehmen?

Wenn ja:

- *Woran liegt das? Was sind da wichtige Aspekte?*
- *Was fördernd denn diese Nähe zum Kunden?*
- *Was müsste ich als Kunde tun, wenn ich möchte, dass Sie sich mir einen Gefallen tun, der vielleicht über das hinausgeht, was Ihr Unternehmen für richtig hält?*

Wenn nein:

- *Woran liegt das? Was sind da wichtige Aspekte?*

10. Gibt es noch weitere Dinge, die wir jetzt nicht angesprochen, haben, die Sie aber noch wichtig finden? Im Zusammenhang mit möglichen Unterschieden zwischen den Vorstellungen des Kunden und des Unternehmens?

Vielen Dank für das aufschlussreiche und interessante Gespräch.

Noch mal zusammenfassen, was jetzt mit den Interviewdaten passiert.

Visitenkarte, falls die AP noch Fragen hat oder noch einmal Kontakt aufnehmen möchte.

Appendix B - Interview Guide - English Translation

Interview-guide used during interviews with frontline employees (translated from German)

First Questions, Identification of Interviewees

1. Please tell me a little about your job and what you do.

Description of Customer Contact Situations

2. Please describe the sort of situations in which you have contact to customers. What are typical customer contact situations like?
    - How free are you in your behavior when interacting with customers?
    - Does your company offer you any guidelines or similar as to how you should behave towards customers?
3. In your opinion, what makes a good frontline employee (sales representative/ bank assistant/ insurance representative…adjust to respondent's job)? What is important?
4. What do you think your company expects from you during customer contact situations?
    - How is this communicated?
    - What aspects would be important for you company when naming the employee of the month?
5. What do you believe your customers expect from you?

Situations with role conflict

6. Have you experienced situations, in which it was difficult for you to fulfill both the expectations of your customers and your company?
    - Can you describe an example of such a situation?
    - How did you feel during that situation?
    - What made fulfilling both expectations difficult?
    - How did you deal with the differing expectations?
7. Can you think of such a situation, where you felt yourself to stand in between the expectations of your customers and those of you company, and you decided to do more for the customer?
    - Can you describe that situation to me?
    - Can you remember what you felt during the situation?
    - Can you explain your decision? Why did you decide to do more for the customer?

8. Can you remember a situation in which you decided to favor the company's expectations?
   - Can you describe that situation to me?
   - Can you remember what you felt during the situation?
   - Can you explain your decision? Why did you decide to go with the expectations from the company?

Further questions

9. Are such standing in-between situations common or more of a rare exception?
   - Do you have a rule of thumb whether you go more with the customers' expectations or the company's?
   - How do you usually decide to handle such situations?
10. Have you experienced situations in which you felt emotionally closer to the customer than your company?

    If yes
   - What are such situations like? What might be important aspects?
   - When do you feel closer to the customer?

    If no
   - Why do you believe that that is the case?
11. What should customers do, or be like, to make it more likely that you would favor their wishes and expectations over those of your company?
12. What might companies do to ensure that you favor their expectations over those of the customers in situations where they conflict?
13. Is there anything that we did not yet talk about that you feel is important for this topic? Do you have any other ideas, suggestions or comments on how frontline employees may handle situations in which they stand in between the expectations of their customers and their company?

Appendix C - Screenshot MAXQDA © Categories

Liste der Codes

- Codesystem — 1741
  - Widerspruch — 1
  - Emotionale Arbeit — 6
  - Und sowas wird (...) mit den — 0
  - Notizen — 0
  - Beziehung zum UNT — 9
    - Einteilung des UNTS? — 1
    - sieht UNT positiv — 10
    - Job Zufriedenheit — 8
      - Job anstrengend — 13
      - Job macht Spaß — 7
    - Absichern gegen UNT — 8
    - Unterstützung, POS — 25
      - wenig Unterstützung, geringe POS — 15
    - nur Zahlen nicht Menschen — 2
    - UNT hat sich verändert — 8
    - sieht UNT als eher gegen Kunden — 14
    - sieht UNT als generell pro-Kunde — 17
    - nimmt Unternehmen in Schutz — 5
      - Verständnis für Vorgesetzte und Interessen des Unts — 1
    - Misstrauen — 3
    - Verbundenheit zu UNT — 9
    - Enttäuscht, desillusioniert, fühlt sich schlecht behandelt — 26
  - Wettbewerb zwischen Mitarbeitern — 3
  - Kundenzufriedenheit (beziehung) wichtig für FLE — 23

- Kundenaspekte — 0
  - Kunden managen — 2
  - Kunden - negativ — 21
    - faule — 1
    - negative Einstellung zu Kunden — 2
    - unrealistische Erwawrtungen — 3
    - anstrengend — 4
    - Kunden loswerden — 2
    - Kunden bedrohlich,betrügerisch — 4
    - Absichern gegenüber Kunden — 12
    - unfaire Kunden — 25
  - Kunde als Ressource — 9
    - wer die Kunden hat, ist der — 1
    - Wettbewerb um Kunden — 1
  - Emotionale Nähe zum Kunden — 32
  - Freiheiten im Kundenkontakt — 69
  - Entstehen von Kundenkontakt — 39
  - Beziehung zum Kunden — 14
    - Macht über Kunde — 1
    - distanziert — 1
    - Bedeutung von Vertrauen — 1
    - wütend auf Kunden — 1
    - Fairness — 12
      - Social Exchange — 5
      - Man muss einfach fair — 3
    - Erwartungen an Kunden — 25
      - sich selbst einbringen — 3
      - Ehrlichkeit — 6
  - Kunden den man eher nicht hilft — 27
  - Kunden den man eher hilft — 26

- Aufwendige Regelung um Kunden zu schützen - Reglementierung: 1
- Moralische Sprache: 36
- Verantwortung gegenüber Kunde: 33
  - Nachweisbarkeit Zurechenbarkeit: 5
  - Informationsasymmetrie: 27
  - Beeinflussung des Kunden: 10
  - Kunden vertrauen FLE, verlassen sich auf FLE: 6
- FLE Bilder: 2
  - über sich: 18
  - schlechtes Image FLEs: 9
  - Konflikt guter FLE aus FLE Sicht und aus UNT sicht: 8
  - Guter FLE aus FLE-Sicht: 93
    - wichtig für MA: 1
  - Guter FLE aus UNT-Sicht: 61
  - Guter FLE aus Kundensicht: 30
    - Unsicherheit: 3
- Vorgabe UNT - Interesse UNT: 5

- Interessenkonflikt: 99
  - absichern: 1
  - ungewollte Kunden: 1
  - mit Freunden: 8
  - Grauzonen - FLE entscheidet: 9
  - FLE als Vermittler: 8
  - Vorgaben von UNT vs Kunden: 8
  - Schnelle Erträge vs langfristige Kundenbeziehung: 17
    - Konflikt Ertrag Kundenbeziehung: 3
  - Häufigkeit von Konfliktsituationen: 21
  - Entscheidung - worauf kommt es an?: 13
    - Verhalten anderer Mitarbeiter: 2
    - Beziehung zum UNT: 5
      - negative Bez: 4
    - schützen von anderen: 3
    - Bauchgefühl: 3
    - Eigenes Interesse - Spaß an der Arbeit: 1
    - Konsequenzen: 13
    - social exchange: 3
    - wer Recht hat: 1
    - Entscheidung situationsabhängig: 3
    - Beziehung zum Kunden: 11
      - Empathie: 9
      - Mitleid: 5
      - Sympathie: 9
      - Vertrauen zu Kunden: 3

    - wirtschaftliche Überlegungen: 17
      - eigenes Interesse: 6
      - Eigenes Interesse - Spaß an der Arbeit: 3
    - Persönliche Werte: 35
      - schlechtes Gewissen: 2
      - kundenorientiert: 1
      - das Richtige tun: 7
      - Moralischer Raum: 11
      - Gerechtigkeit: 2
      - gerechtfertigter Anspruch: 16
        - Wenn ich fühle, dass es: 2
      - Selber vertreten - überzeugt sein: 3
      - Mitgefühl: 1
      - macht für sie Sinn: 10

- kann man eben noch vertreten 2
- Verhalten von Kunde 14
  - Engagement des Kunden 4
- Beeinflussung durch UNT 2
- ist halt so 3

- Konsequenzen aus Interessenkonflikt 13
  - krank 1
  - Druck 9
    - Druck von UNT 20
    - Druck durch Kunden 7
      - Schiebt Verantwortung auf FLE 1
  - Absicherung schwerer 1
- Umgang mit Konflikt 9
  - Verständnis zeigen 1
  - besonders freundlich sein 6
  - für UNT entscheiden 23
    - erzwungen 3
    - wichtige Ziel (Gemeinschaft) 1
    - Vor UNT stellen auch wenn man es anders sieht 2
    - Kunde ausnutzen 2
    - Kunde abwerten 1
  - Gegen UNT entscheiden 12
    - gegen UNT gearbeitet 1
    - von UNT Zielen distanzieren 2
    - Vor Kunde UNT Schuld geben 4
    - Bsp handeln gegen UNT 1
  - Gegen Kunden entscheiden 3
  - für Kunden entscheiden 16
    - auf Kundenseite stellen 1
  - aktiv einsetzen 8
    - für den einsetzen, der im Recht ist 2

- Entscheidung abgeben 3
  - UNT soll entscheiden 8
    - Ja, ich sag, dann meld das, ich 1
    - Dann gebe ich den Peter weiter. 1
  - Kunde soll entscheiden 6
- whistle blowing 2
  - gescheitert 2
- withdrawal 11
  - passiv verhalten, hat nichts mit mir zu tun 1
  - Emotional distanzieren vom Kunden 11
  - Verweigerung 1
- Ignorieren 1
- heimlich/ lügen 14
  - lügt Kundin an 1
- Selber mehr machen 6
  - Absichern 4
  - besondere Sorgfalt 2
- Informieren 30
  - offen und ehrlich sein 4
  - Kundenerwartungen managen 4
  - besondere Sorgfalt 4
- Kompromiß finden 18
  - Kämpfe aussuchen 6
  - Alternativen anbieten 7
  - nach Konsequenzen 8
  - Kompromiß - bei bestimmten Kunden dann doch 2
  - sich durch Erfolg Freiräume schaffen 2
  - Validierung für Entscheidung 3


Interesse der Bank 2
Personen/ Aufgabenbeschreibung 85
Gerechtigkeit 5
Fairness 4
Motto 6
Ehrgeiz 4
Stolz auf seinen Erfolg 4
Sets 0