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Managing multiple demands: Examining the behaviors of customer-contact workers in service industries

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The University of Arizona, 1991

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents the results of two field studies: a preliminary qualitative ethnographic study and an empirical field survey. The research investigated the strategies used by customer-contact workers in service industries when they experience role stress. Four strategies emerged: effort, negotiation, preempting, and avoiding. Negotiation was positively related to role conflict and role ambiguity. Job satisfaction was positively related to effort and negatively related to avoiding. Implications of the findings for service industry managers and researchers are discussed.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I couldn't stand for one minute longer being at the beck and call of every sonofabitch just because he had three cents in his pocket. — William Faulkner

The American novelist was explaining why he quit his job as postmaster of Oxford, Mississippi, in 1924 (Humes, 1975, p. 261). The feeling described by Faulkner is what organizational researchers refer to as role stress (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). Faulkner is not unique in his reaction to the stress which accompanies some service jobs. Role stress refers to uncertain or conflicting demands placed on an organizational member and their psychological and physiological consequences (French & Caplan, 1972; Kahn et al. 1964). Parkington and Schneider (1979) demonstrated that employees' feelings of role stress in front-line service jobs are negatively correlated with employee job satisfaction and customer perceptions of service quality and positively correlated with customer intentions to switch to other service providers. Meta-analyses of the role stress literature demonstrated that role stress is negatively
correlated with organizational commitment, job involvement, and satisfaction with pay, co-workers, and supervisors, and positively correlated with anxiety and propensity to leave the organization (Fisher & Gitelson, 1983; Jackson & Schuler, 1985). Service workers' responses to role stress have important consequences for workers, their organizations and their customers.

Service Industries and Service Jobs

Service industries are a major force in the United States economy with about 75 percent of the labor force working in service jobs (Roach, 1991; Shelp, 1984). The service sector includes retail and wholesale trade, finance and insurance, communications, utilities, transportation, government, health care, education, and business and personal services (Mills, 1986: 1). The United States dominates the world's service economy providing about half of all service transactions for the "Group of Seven" industrialized countries (which includes the United States, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, and Italy). This amounts to approximately $2.9 trillion spent on services annually in the U.S. (Roach, 1991).

The work performed by many workers in service organizations is different from work in manufacturing
organizations. One difference stems from the inseparability of the production and consumption of the service, that is, customers and production workers are both present and involved in service encounters (Czepiel, Solomon, Surprenant, & Gutman, 1985). This customer-worker interaction differentiates service organizations from Thompson's (1967) view of manufacturing firms. Thompson advocated separating the organization's production workers and the entire production system from the organization's environment. In other words, traditional organizational theory suggests that organizations should seek to buffer the production core from forces (like customers) in the organization's environment.

However, employees in front-line service jobs experience a high degree of contact with customers (Chase & Tansik, 1983). Thus, a second difference between manufacturing and services is that front-line service workers occupy boundary-spanning roles while production workers do not (Adams, 1976). Not only do front-line service workers create the organization's output, they also represent the organization to the customers. They process and filter information between the organization and its customers, and they play a key role in creating the customers' image of the organization (Aldrich & Herker, 1977). Rafaeli (1989a) indicated that front-line service
workers not only represent the company, but to customers, they are the company.

For example, a friend recently switched his accounts to a new bank because of "rude and inattentive" service he had received from tellers at his prior bank. In justifying his move, he stated that "the bank just doesn't care about its customers anymore." He generalized from his experiences with one or two tellers to a global corporate disposition.

On the other hand, it is possible that someone who receives excellent service from a customer-contact worker while dining in a restaurant might infer that the restaurant really goes all out to make sure its customers are happy. The criticality of the role of the customer-contact service worker in creating a favorable impression on consumers makes the role inherently demanding.

Role Conflict in Front-Line Service Jobs

The boundary spanning nature of customer-contact service jobs frequently leads to role conflict for service workers (Parkington & Schneider, 1979). Role conflict can be defined as "the simultaneous occurrence of two or more role expectations such that compliance with one would make compliance with the other more difficult" (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 204). Several researchers have indicated that role
conflict in boundary spanning service jobs can impact the behavior of employees and the attitudes and intentions of customers and employees (cf., Parkington & Schneider, 1979; Rafaeli, 1989a; Shamir, 1980; Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988). Role conflict and role stress may account for some of the poor service decried in Stephen Koepp's 1987 TIME article, "Why is Service So Bad? Pul-eeze! Will Somebody Help Me?"

Research Question

Consequently, the purpose of this research is to investigate the following question:

How do customer-contact service workers manage the multiple demands they experience as a result of the role stress in their front-line service jobs?

This thesis examines the specific behavioral tactics and strategies used by customer-contact workers and several factors which may predict these behaviors.

The purpose of this research is to add to the emerging body of literature on the service encounter (cf., Czepiel, Solomon, & Surprenant, 1985; Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990). The importance of this stream of research to service industries has been argued by Tansik (1990), who asserts
that service organizations are often dependent on customer-contact employees—usually the most recently hired, lowest paid members of the organization—for the service firm’s reputation and cash flow.

Overview

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter presents the context for the research, the research question, and an overview of the remaining chapters. In the second chapter, the literature relating to service encounters and to role stress is presented along with the conceptual framework for the present research. Chapter 3 reports the method used to investigate the research question. A presentation of the results follows in the fourth chapter, and conclusions and implications of the research are presented in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

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... —William Shakespeare
(As You Like It, Act I, Scene 7)

The English word "role" is derived from the Old French "rolle," referring to rolled scripts from which actors read their lines. (The American heritage desk dictionary, 1981: 815). The word eventually came to be associated with the parts played by actors rather than the scripts themselves. The parallel between a person's part in a drama and a person's part in an organization has proven to be a useful metaphor for many organizational researchers (cf., Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Biddle, 1986; Gross, Mason, & McEachern, 1958; Kahn et al., 1964; Van Sell, Brief & Schuler, 1981). In addition, the dyadic nature of interactions between consumers and customer-contact workers in service industries makes the role metaphor particularly appropriate for analyzing service encounters (cf., Czepiel et al., 1985, Parkington & Schneider, 1979; Rafaeli, 1989a; Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel, & Gutman, 1985).
Organizational Role Theory

As used by organizational researchers, a role is "the summation of the requirements with which the system confronts the individual member" (Katz & Kahn, 1978: 186). The role of a purchasing manager can be used to illustrate role theory concepts. A role-set refers to the people in an organization who are directly associated with the role (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Merton, 1957). The members of a role-set are interdependent on the task performance of the individual occupying the role (the focal person) in one way or another: "they are rewarded by it, judged in terms of it, or require it to perform their own tasks" (Katz & Kahn, 1978: 190). For example, the purchasing manager's role set might include the manager's supervisor and secretary, the organization's comptroller, the total quality manager, and the production manager.

As a result of their interdependence, individuals in the role-set develop beliefs and expectations about appropriate behavior for the focal person (e.g., how much can be spent for an item, when the item should be ordered, when paperwork should be completed, etc.). Combined, these beliefs and expectations define the role (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Role expectations are communicated to the focal person
through attempts to influence the focal person. These communications are referred to as the "sent-role" (Katz & Kahn, 1978: 195). Examples of the sent-role might include comments or memos from the role-set. The "received-role", on the other hand, refers to the focal person's perception and understanding of the expectations being communicated (Katz & Kahn, 1978: 195). For example, the purchasing manager might interpret a request from the total quality manager for "improvement in the purchasing system" as a request for higher quality parts when the total quality manager may have wanted more timely delivery of raw materials.

Finally, the focal person's responses to role expectations are referred to as "role behaviors" (Katz & Kahn, 1978: 195). In the case of the purchasing manager, role behaviors are simply what the purchasing manager does as a result of the received role. Together, role expectations, the sent-role, the received-role, and role behaviors make up what can be called a "role episode" (Katz & Kahn, 1978: 194).

When the expectations in a role episode are "such that compliance with one would make compliance with the other more difficult," role conflict occurs (Katz & Kahn, 1978: 204). Again, using the example of a purchasing manager, an example of role conflict might result from the comptroller's
insistence on cutting costs while the total quality manager insists on improving the quality of raw materials. Role ambiguity results from a lack of clear information about appropriate role behaviors and about resources available to do one's job properly (Kahn, et al., 1964: 21-22). The purchasing manager would experience role ambiguity when he or she was not sure what was expected or when he or she was not fully aware of the resources available to do the job correctly. Kahn and his colleagues (1964) described role conflict and role ambiguity as different facets of role stress. Role stress can also refer to the psychological and physiological consequences of role conflict and role ambiguity (French & Caplan, 1972). (For the purposes of this thesis, "role stress" refers to the demands placed on an individual by his or her environment, and "strain" refers to the psychological and physiological consequences.)

Role stress has been a topic of investigation for organizational researchers since the early work of Gross et al. (1958) and Kahn et al. (1964). Since then, literally hundreds of articles have been published on issues related to role stress. Jackson and Schuler (1985) noted in a recent literature review, that between 1970 and 1983, approximately 200 studies were published which used a common measure of role conflict and role ambiguity (developed by Rizzo, House & Lirtzman, 1970).
Consequences of Role Stress

Much of the research on role stress has been correlational, a look at antecedents and consequences of role stress (cf., Fisher & Gitelson, 1983; Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Van Sell et al., 1981). Role stress has been correlated with such physiological consequences as tension, smoking, high blood pressure, cholesterol, and coronary heart disease (French & Caplan, 1972). Role stress has also been positively correlated with employees' propensity to leave the organization and negatively correlated with job satisfaction, performance, organizational commitment, and job involvement (Fisher & Gitelson, 1983; Jackson & Schuler, 1985). In 1979, Parkington and Schneider reported similar results in their study of customer-contact workers in the banking industry.

Literally hundreds of published articles have demonstrated a strong positive correlation between role conflict and turnover intentions and a strong negative correlation between role conflict and job satisfaction (Fisher & Gitelson, 1983; Jackson & Schuler, 1985). However, research on role ambiguity is itself ambiguous. While some researchers have found the same relationship between role ambiguity, job satisfaction and turnover intentions as they found for role conflict (French & Caplan,
1972), others have found directly opposite relationships (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Hollander (1964) has suggested that some degree of role ambiguity might be necessary to facilitate the management of role conflict. In other words, some degree of role ambiguity may be functional under conditions of high role conflict.

**Role Stress, Boundary Spanning, and Customer-Contact Workers**

The Customer Contact Model (Chase & Tansik, 1983) defines organizational contact with customers in service industries as the presence of the customer in the production system of the organization. In other words, customers are present during—and often participate in—the production of the service. This interface between the customer and the organization is facilitated by a blend of technology and human resources. In a low-contact service encounter (when a customer uses a bank's automatic teller machine, for example), the interface is mediated by technology. In a high-contact service encounter (when a customer's transaction is processed by a bank teller, for example) the interface is mediated by organizational human resources. The organizational members who interface with customers can be described as customer-contact workers.
Because customer-contact workers interact with both the organization and the organization’s environment, customer-contact workers occupy what organizational researchers have identified as boundary spanning roles (Bowen & Schneider, 1985). These are roles which "involve resource acquisition and disposal, political legitimacy and hegemony, and... social legitimacy and organizational image" (Aldrich & Herker, 1977: 220).

A recent review (Van Sell et al., 1981) and two recent meta-analyses (Fisher & Gitelson, 1983; Jackson & Schuler, 1985) of the role stress literature indicated that boundary spanning is highly correlated with both role conflict and role ambiguity. Thus, it seems reasonable that customer-contact workers experience high levels of role stress.

The nature of role conflict and role ambiguity in customer-contact jobs in service organizations is illustrated by the following example. During the early stages of this research, I had the opportunity to work in a retail store which sells low-cost footwear. The business is designed to be mostly self service which means that the store rarely has enough personnel on the sales floor to provide high levels of personalized service to customers. Generally, the employees show the customers where to look to find the shoes they want. Occasionally, customers request more specialized service from the store’s personnel, for
example, measuring a child’s foot, offering suggestions on styles, lacing an athletic shoe, assisting the customer in putting the shoes on their feet, and checking for how well the shoe fits. Meanwhile, the store’s manager has assigned store personnel the task of rearranging the merchandise on the shelf to make it easier for customers to find the shoes they want. The company’s training program emphasizes both types of tasks as important elements of "good" customer service. On a busy day, an employee must choose between completing the merchandising tasks assigned by management and fulfilling customer requests for specialized attention. Both tasks are legitimate aspects of customer service. The conflict inherent in this type of situation led one store employee to remark during a personal interview,

"I’m damned if I do; damned if I don’t. You just can’t win. Either Tom [a pseudonym for the boss] is mad at me, or the customer is. If I don’t get my work done, Tom’s going to yell at me. But if I don’t help the customers, they get pissed at me."

Conflict of this nature is especially troublesome to customer-contact workers who are caught between the demands of legitimate authority (their boss, organizational policy, etc.) and the demands of customers with whom they usually identify psychologically (Rafaeli, 1989a). In service jobs which allow tipping of the customer-contact worker, the
identification of the worker with the customer is typically even stronger (Shamir, 1983, 1984).

As a result of this conflict, Bateson (1985) has suggested that a service encounter be viewed as "a three-cornered fight" with the customer, the server and the service firm all vying for control (p. 72). Bateson (1985) argued that customer-contact workers seek to control the service encounter as a means of guarding their own mental and physical health. Yet, customers also seek to control the encounter since they not only consume the service, but also help to produce the service (Chase & Tansik, 1983; Mills, 1986; Tansik & Chase, 1988). Meanwhile, the organization itself seeks to control the encounter through its system of policies, procedures and supervision (Schneider, Parkington, & Buxton, 1980). By working together, all three actors benefit: the consumer seeks to exchange money for satisfaction; the customer-contact worker exchanges job performance for job satisfaction and pay; the organization provides the resources necessary for the encounter to transpire in hopes of earning a profitable return on capital. Nevertheless, conflict over control of the service encounter can prevent the actors from working together (Bateson, 1985).

Similarly, in a study of service workers in Israel, Shamir (1980) refers to the conflict experienced by customer
contact workers as "the organization vs. the client: the two bosses dilemma" (p. 748). For example, the loyalty of employees who receive tips is often divided between customers and the organization. Shamir (1980) and Rafaeli (1989a) have observed several different strategies customer-contact workers use to gain control of their interactions with customers. What follows is an integrated summary of their findings.

**Customer-Contact Workers' Strategies for Controlling Interactions with Consumers**

**Ignoring/Avoidance of Contact.** One way to reduce the amount of conflict received by the customer-contact worker is for the worker to avoid contact with the customer, thereby preventing the customer from communicating any expectations. Shamir (1980) noticed waiters who would avoid eye-contact with restaurant patrons in order to prevent them from asking for anything. Rafaeli (1989a) observed supermarket cashiers who focussed their attention on processing merchandise in order to avoid interaction with customers.

**Rejecting.** Rafaeli (1989a) also noted cashiers who would receive the expectations communicated by customers but
would not act on them because the cashier perceived them not to be legitimate requests. For example, she quotes one cashier, "He is paying for the merchandise. He is not paying my salary. Why does he think he can tell me what to do?" (Rafaeli, 1989a: 263).

**Reacting.** Reacting is more active than rejecting (Rafaeli, 1989a). Reacting refers to a customer-contact worker's rejecting the legitimacy of customer demands and communicating their rejection to the customer. The following incident illustrates reacting as a tactic for influencing customers: After a customer scolded a cashier for making a mistake, the cashier reacted,

> Why do you have to yell? Why do you have to talk like that? You think I do it on purpose? You think it will help that you yell? It only slows things down and makes them worse! (Rafaeli, 1989a: 264).

**Educating the Client.** Shamir (1980) observed that customer-contact workers sometimes seek to influence their customers by teaching them the policies of the organization. This is similar to reacting, but much less confrontational. For example, a customer-contact worker might reduce the expectations of the customer by explaining that refunds can only be given within 30 days of purchase. Although the
customer may not be satisfied, he or she might acquiesce, thereby reducing the employee’s level of role conflict.

**Mindlessness.** What Shamir (1980) refers to as "psychological withdrawal and automatic behavior" is similar to Langer’s (1989) concept of mindlessness. Although not often available to service workers who are required to give customized service, psychological withdrawal from the interaction can provide an escape from the role stress of conflicting demands. The process of following pre-learned rituals ("scripts") allows workers to satisfy the requirements of the role automatically, without the conscious processing of information. For example, a bank teller following a well-learned script for cashing a pay check could hold a conversation with the customer while processing the customer’s transaction (Tansik & Smith, 1991). Tansik & Smith (1991) suggest that organizations should use these scripts as a key tool in designing customer-contact jobs.

**Overacting.** Overacting is a strategy quite different from mindlessness. Shamir (1980) noted that customer-contact workers sometimes play-acted their role in order to place distance between their ego and their identification with the role. As they become absorbed in acting out their
role, customer-contact workers can attribute their actions to their received-role rather than to their sense of self. For example, a waiter might imagine that he or she is on stage performing a restaurant scene rather than in a real-world situation.

**Physical Control.** Physical control uses environmental cues to restrict the behaviors of customers Shamir (1980). Consider the following examples of physical control. Airplane flight attendants and pilots attempt to constrain the behavior of passengers by choosing to display or not to display the "Fasten Your Seatbelt" signs. The structure of ropes or chains in banks constrains customers to wait in a single line for the next available teller.

**Engaging.** Rafaeli (1989a) observed cashiers who intentionally distracted customers in order to prohibit their making any demands. For example, a cashier might ask the customer to place a produce item on the scale to be weighed, not as much for the purpose of decreasing the cashier's workload but to keep the customer too busy to ask the cashier to do anything for him or her. Rafaeli (1989a) also noted that cashiers with more tenure were more likely to use strategies like engaging than were newer, less experienced cashiers.
Rewarding. Control through rewards involves "buttering up" or "cultivating" clients (Shamir, 1980: 753) in order to influence their behavior. For example, a convenience store clerk might give a customer a free sample of recently-popped popcorn not only to increase the likelihood that the customer would purchase more popcorn but also to obligate the customer to the worker. The customer-contact worker could then "call in the favor" later in the interaction to manage the client's behavior.

Behavioral Responses to Organizational Role Stress

In addition to the research on customer-contact workers' strategies for managing service encounters, a handful of studies have analyzed behavioral responses to role conflict. While a large portion of the research on role stress focuses on consequences and antecedents, relatively little attention has been given to employees' behavioral responses to role stress. In a 1978 review of job stress, employee health, and organizational effectiveness, Beehr and Newman stated, "Job stress researchers, however, generally ignored the decision-making or response selection process of employees who have experienced a stressful situation" (p. 683). Implicit in
much of the research on role stress is the simplifying assumption that the focal person (the person occupying the role) remains passive, experiences the strain of role stress, and has negative affective responses (e.g., job dissatisfaction and intent to leave the organization). Behavioral responses are often limited to absenteeism and turnover. Yet people function as open systems and seek to maintain dynamic homeostasis in response to stress in their environments (Selye, 1976). In addition to physiological and emotional strain caused by role stress, it is reasonable to believe that role stress will cause at least some individuals to actively seek to reduce the stress in their environment by managing the expectations sent by their role-set. Several studies lend support to this proposition.

In "Exit and Voice: A Test of Hypotheses Based on Fight/Flight Responses to Job Stress," Mayes and Ganster (1988) investigated employee responses to role stress. Political behavior ("voice") was viewed as a fight response, and turnover ("exit") was treated as a flight response to organizational stress. Multiple regression analysis of questionnaires from 73 employees of a midwest correctional facility for juveniles supported the fight-or-flight hypothesis. Employees who engaged in political action tended to remain in the organization, and political action had an independent negative effect on turnover, independent
of any effect through intent to leave. Mayes and Ganster (1988) suggested that employees who experience job stress may choose to withdraw from the organization or may choose to attempt to change their situation in the organization.

Srivasta and Singh (1988) examined the effects of coping strategies on mental health in organizations. The researchers showed a sample of 300 technical supervisors a set of 24 pictures with two persons interacting. The pictures contained two people engaged in conversation. The researchers told the subjects that one of the two individuals pictured was asking questions related to role stress. The subjects were asked to imagine the other person's responses. The results from this semiprojective technique were coded into "avoidance" and "approach" categories by the researchers. Coder reliabilities were .93 for "avoidance" and .71 for "approach." The strategy most frequently projected by the subject was used to infer the subjects dominant coping strategy. Each subject also completed a standardized role stress questionnaire and a standardized mental health questionnaire. The "approach" group perceived more role stress than the "avoidance" group, but the "approach" group demonstrated stronger mental health than the "avoidance" group. In both cases, the differences were highly significant with $p < .001$. The data suggested that employees with strong mental health tend to respond
actively to role stress.

Deluga (1989) studied the responses of 184 exempt and nonexempt salaried employees in a metal fabricating firm in the northeastern United States. His questionnaire included measures of role conflict, role ambiguity (from the work of Rizzo et al., 1970), and the use of influence tactics (based on the typology proposed by Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980). Deluga found several significant correlations between role conflict and influence tactics but none for role ambiguity and the tactics. His results suggest that role incumbents use various influence tactics (such as creating goodwill with role senders, negotiating and reasoning with role senders, confronting role senders, appealing to higher authority, and building coalitions with other members of the organization) in order to manage the demands they receive from role senders.

Building on the work of Gross et al. (1958), van de Vliert (1981) proposed a three stage process model of coping with role stress. His results suggest that first, employees discern between legitimate and illegitimate demands and choose to satisfy the former while ignoring the latter. If this is not possible, employees will seek to find a compromise by bargaining with the role senders. Finally, employees will seek to avoid individuals who can prescribe legitimate role demands in order to avoid the strain of role
conflict.

Burke and Belcourt (1974) extended the work of Kahn and his colleagues (1964) by examining employee responses to stress at work. They surveyed 137 managers and managerial trainees employed by the Federal Government of Canada. Nearly all of the respondents (95%) listed at least one technique for coping with work-related stress, and the mean was 2.4 techniques per respondent. Sixty-five percent of coping responses were grouped into five categories: (1) talking to others, (2) working harder and longer, (3) changing to an engrossing non-work or play activity, (4) analyzing the situation and changing the strategy of attack, and (5) withdrawing physically from the situation.

Preliminary Qualitative Field Study

Although the literature on service encounters and on organizational boundary roles suggests that customer-contact workers are likely to engage in strategies to manage their work environments, the literature is equivocal about the nature of these strategies. As a prelude to the present research, I made informal observations while working for a low-cost shoe retailer during the early stages of this research. In addition, I conducted semi-structured interviews to obtain critical incidents (Flanagan, 1954)
from the work environment. Interviews were conducted with four retail sales clerks (three male, one female), two bank tellers (both female), a loan officer for a financial company (male) and two waiters (one male, one female). (Sample questions from the interviews appear in the appendix.)

The purpose of this preliminary study was to provide insight into the way customer-contact workers view their positions and to gain insight into how they think and feel. Spradley (1979, 1980) advocates the use of participant observation and in-depth interviews to learn about the explicit and tacit knowledge held by individuals while minimizing the risk of imposing predetermined ideas on the population under study. In addition, Kirk and Miller (1986) argue that qualitative research is particularly useful when seeking to understand questions of process, rather than quantity.

The data obtained from the preliminary field study were analyzed for patterns to identify themes of tacit knowledge. Concerning these themes, Spradley (1980: 143) writes, "People do not express them easily, even though they know the cultural principle and use it to organize their behavior and interpret experience." Consequently, he cautions that the researcher "will have to make inferences about the principles that exist" (p. 143).
The observations and interviews led me to infer that customer-contact workers use a variety of tactics to manage their encounters with customers and with other members of the organization, especially those who have the ability to make legitimate demands on them.

Three themes emerged from the interviews with customer-contact service workers. The first theme has to do with the service orientation of the workers. The second and third themes relate to the ways in which customer-contact workers deal with multiple demands on the job.

Service orientation refers to "the focus of employees' efforts and attitudes toward benefitting customers" (Parkington & Schneider, 1979: 271-272; see also, Schneider, 1980; Schneider & Bowen, 1985). The workers in the qualitative study had a very strong, pro-customer service orientation. All of the workers expressed that customer service was a key component of their jobs, and all but one indicated that it was the most important aspect of their jobs. A bank teller stated about the paperwork in her job, "I wish they would quit giving me all this busy work and let me do what they hired me to do [wait on customers]." A retail sales clerk commented,

They say 'The customer is always right.' You know, I don't believe that. Sometimes they are really wrong, but even then, I still think, 'They are the customer.' They're the
reason we're all here, right?

The one exception mentioned above was the loan officer for a finance company. His first priority was to protect the assets of the company by assuring that "only high-quality loans are approved." After that, his main agenda was customer service and satisfaction.

The employees expressed that they often felt conflict between their desire to give good customer service and their job responsibilities not directly related to customer service. This distinction in tasks corresponds to what the Customer Contact Model refers to as front-office and back-office tasks, respectively (Chase & Tansik, 1983). For example, a retail sales clerk complained that she "hated" preparing merchandise for display because "customers don't know that you have other things to do, and they keep asking you for help."

Even though customer-contact workers often prefer taking care of customers' needs, they become strained if they fail to complete tasks assigned to them by their supervisors. When faced with these conflicts, the first response of the customer-contact worker is typically to "work harder!". This, then, is the second theme which emerged from the interviews with customer-contact workers. It seems that customer-contact workers in this study first attempt to resolve the conflict inherent in their position
by increasing their efforts. If they can work harder, smarter, or faster, maybe they can get everything done and still have time to wait on customers.

If the customer-contact workers cannot satisfy the multiple demands they face, the next approach is to find a way to reduce the demands they experience. The third theme which emerged is to find a way out of the conflicting demands when the customer-contact worker cannot adequately satisfy all of the role senders. The strategies used by the workers to manage the demands placed on them range from the straightforward ("I just tell my boss I don’t have time to do that," bank teller) to the downright sneaky ("When I see my boss coming, sometimes I go into another aisle and try to look busy. If he can’t find me, he can’t give me anything else to do," retail sales clerk).

Based on the interviews with customer-contact workers, the specific tactics used by customer-contact workers were classified into two categories: tactics which aim to satisfy the demands placed on the service worker and tactics which attempt to manipulate the demands the workers receive. A complete typology of tactics based on the qualitative field study is presented in Table 2.1.
TABLE 2.1
A Typology of Tactics Used by Customer-Contact Workers in Service Industries

Satisfying Demands

**Effort/Mindlessness.** Attempting to perform various tasks efficiently enough to please organizational and customer demands (e.g., becoming so familiar with routine facets of the job that they can be done simultaneously with other tasks; putting merchandise on a shelf while answering a customer's question).

**Delegation.** Getting other organizational members (including supervisors) and/or customers to perform some of the aspects of the service (e.g., asking another waiter to "refill the iced tea at table 4"; asking the customer to put the laces in the athletic shoe while the employee measures another child's foot).
Managing Demands

**Explanation.** Giving reasons why certain expectations cannot be fulfilled (e.g., "company policy only allows us to give refunds under these circumstances..."; "the manufacturer is out of this item, and we don’t know when to expect any more"; "if we do what you are suggesting, we won’t have time to complete this other project").

**Rewarding.** Doing extra favors or providing unusually good service to customers or other organizational members in return for their requests not creating role stress for the employee (e.g., telling favored customers of special deals; calling other stores to find out where the customer can find a certain product; doing tasks normally outside the scope of the employee’s position).

**Ingratiation.** Seeking to put the customer or supervisor in a good mood or in a state of mind in which they think favorably of the employee so that they will not want to overload the employee with expectations (e.g., complimenting a customer’s sense of fashion; talking with the supervisor
about his or her favorite sports team).

**Distraction.** Engaging customers or supervisors to prevent them from having the opportunity to express expectations (e.g., talk about the weather, the "big game," the latest fashions; asking the customer or supervisor to do something which keeps them too busy to ask the employee to do something).

**Reinterpretation.** Pretending to comprehend the customers' or organization's expectations in a way which minimizes role stress (e.g., the customer asks a retail sales clerk to find a certain product, and the sales clerk acts as if she or he believes the customer is asking for general directions and tells the customer that "the item should be on the left side of aisle 6").

**Punishing.** Penalizing supervisors or customers who add to the worker's role conflict (e.g., sabotage in the extreme case; making a customer wait while finishing another task).

**Ignoring.** Providing no feedback to customers who try to get the employee's attention (e.g., a bank teller keeping his or her eyes focused on
Customer-Contact Workers' Behavioral Responses to Role Stress: An Integrative Framework

Several studies of employees' behavioral responses to role stress indicate that employees are likely to engage in behaviors which they believe will reduce the amount of strain they experience as a result of their work environment. For example, van de Vliert (1981) proposed that employees seek to fulfill the obligations of their received role, negotiate the demands of the received role with the role senders, or avoid the role senders in an attempt to prevent them from communicating any new expectations. Investigations of workers in service industries also indicate that customer-contact workers are likely to use a variety of tactics in an attempt to manage their interactions with customers (cf., Rafaeli, 1989a; Shamir, 1980). In addition, the qualitative field study
conducted as a preliminary part of the present research identified several specific tactics customer-contact workers might use in response to the demands of their environment.

Combining these streams of research with the results of the preliminary qualitative field study suggests that customer-contact workers are likely to respond to role conflict by seeking to fulfill the obligations placed on them, by seeking to negotiate and satisfy lesser demands, or by avoiding the demands placed on them.

H1: Role conflict is positively related to customer-contact workers' effort in satisfying role demands.

H2: Role conflict is positively related to customer-contact workers' use of negotiation tactics.

H3: Role conflict is positively related to customer-contact workers' use of avoidance tactics.

In as much as role ambiguity provides employees opportunities for creatively managing their role stress (Hollander, 1964), similar relationships are proposed for
role ambiguity.

H4: Role ambiguity is positively related to customer-contact workers' effort in satisfying role demands.

H5: Role ambiguity is positively related to customer-contact workers' use of negotiation tactics.

H6: Role ambiguity is positively related to customer-contact workers' use of avoidance tactics.

Operationalization of Hypotheses 1-6

The variables in the hypotheses are operationalized as follows. Role conflict refers to multiple demands being placed on the focal person such that compliance with one demand makes compliance with another demand more difficult. Role ambiguity refers to the lack of clear information about role expectations. Effort can be defined as working hard at performing tasks efficiently enough to be able to satisfy multiple demands (e.g., "Effort/Mindlessness" in Table 2.1). Negotiation refers to tactics which seek to satisfy role
demands by either reducing the demands or by obtaining help from others to satisfy the demands (e.g., "Delegation" and "Explanation" in Table 2.1). Avoidance refers to attempts by customer-contact workers to elude role senders' demands by preempting or ignoring their communication (e.g., "Reinterpretation" and "Ignoring" in Table 2.1).

Job Satisfaction and Customer-Contact Workers

A meta-analysis of studies linking job satisfaction and performance suggested that the actual population correlation between job performance and job satisfaction is fairly low (about .17) (Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985). Vroom (1964) also suggested a low correlation between job satisfaction and performance (about .14) based on his review of the literature. Iaffaldano and Muchinsky (1985: 270) concluded as a result of their analysis of the literature,

Our results indicate, similar to the findings reported in the earlier reviews published over 20 years ago, that satisfaction and performance are only slightly related to each other... It is almost as if the satisfaction-performance relation is itself [only] a perceived relation between two variables that we logically or intuitively think should interrelate, but in fact do not.

Nevertheless, a new discussion of the link between job satisfaction and performance is emerging around the nature
of the role of customer-contact workers in service industries. For example, Schneider and his colleagues (Bowen & Schneider, 1985; Parkington & Schneider, 1979; Schneider, 1980; Schneider & Bowen, 1985) have demonstrated in studies of bank employees that organizational human resource practices and employee job satisfaction are related to customer perceptions of service quality and customer satisfaction. When employees viewed their branch’s policies as employee-oriented, the bank’s customers reported higher levels of satisfaction with the bank’s service.

One explanation for this phenomenon is that organizations are open systems with permeable boundaries (Katz & Kahn, 1978) and customer-contact workers and their customers often identify with each other psychologically (Rafaeli, 1989a; Shamir 1983, 1984). For example, a customer may empathize with a dissatisfied employee and feel animosity toward the company because it appears to treat its employees poorly, regardless of the customer’s perception of the quality of the service itself.

Another explanation, however, is that satisfied employees and dissatisfied employees may treat their customers differently. This notion is supported by equity theory (Adams, 1963) which suggests that employees who feel over-worked or under-rewarded are likely to decrease the quantity and/or the quality of their work in order to bring
the ratio of effort and outcomes back into balance. For example, a customer-contact worker who feels undercompensated compared to the demands of the job might attempt fewer interactions with customers (decreasing quantity of output) or might process the same amount of customers but with less energy and enthusiasm (decreasing quality of output).

In addition, the popular management press is replete with anecdotes and prescriptions which emphasize the links between employee satisfaction, job performance, and customer satisfaction (cf., Peters & Austin, 1986; Peters & Waterman, 1982). Davidow and Uttal (1989), for example, have extolled the virtues of the employee-oriented management practices of Embassy Suites and credited these practices as being the major reason behind the company's success in the hospitality industry. Wal-Mart is another example of a company which seeks to provide excellent customer service through highly satisfied "associates" (Johnston & Moore, 1991).

Both Wal-Mart and Embassy Suites attempt to instill a strong service orientation into their customer-contact workers (and other members of the organization) through new employee orientation, workshops, detailed operations manuals, opportunities for pay increases and for promotion, sharing the companies' financial gains with their employees, and providing continuous feedback to the employees about how
their companies are performing (Davidow & Uttal, 1989; Johnston & Moore, 1991).

Walt Disney Productions also invests heavily in its customer-contact workers in order to ensure that the company's "Guests" (their euphemism for "customers") are properly cared for (Pope, 1979a,b). N. W. "Red" Pope, a long-time marketing executive in the banking industry, attributes Disney's success to how they view their people, treat their people, communicate with their people, and reward their people (Pope, 1979a,b). Pope's view is shared by others who view employee satisfaction as a key marketing tool for good customer service. Peters and Austin (1986), for example, stated that common courtesy is the key to superior service quality and "the ultimate barrier to competitor entry" into the marketplace (p. 47). They argue that the way to get employees to exhibit common courtesy is by empowering employees, providing them a sense of ownership in the enterprise, and assuring their well-being.

This is similar to what Albrecht and Zemke (1985) call a "motivating environment" which is an environment where "service people can find personal reasons for committing their energies to the benefit of the customer" (p. 107). Albrecht and Zemke (1985) assert that a motivating environment is created by four factors: (1) quality of work life, which includes job satisfaction, job security, pay and
benefits, and opportunities for advancement; (2) morale, which they define as the essence of high commitment; (3) energy level, which provides customer-contact workers with the emotional fuel to provide good customer service; and (4) optimism, a belief in new possibilities, new challenges, and new opportunities (pp. 108-109).

The importance of employee job satisfaction for customer service is also argued by Davidow and Uttal (1989), "Since service is intangible, customers judge its quality by the quality of their interactions with service providers" (p. 119). As a result, Davidow and Uttal (1989) stated that customer-contact workers should be treated as "performers" rather than as "1950s style assembly line" workers (p. 120). The reason for the difference in treatment is that customer-contact workers "must perform a kind of emotional labor that's entirely foreign to production-line workers" (p. 121).

To illustrate the importance of emotion in high-contact service jobs, Davidow and Uttal (1989) called on the experience of Wesley Henry, a researcher in the hospitality industry:

Most people who deal with paperwork feel the customer is a pain in the ass. They have resentment. It shows up in the voice. And if a customer hears that he's a bother, he'll be reluctant to ask for service again (p. 120).
The marketing literature on service quality and customer satisfaction confirms Dr. Henry's statement. In a study of the determinants of consumer satisfaction in retail outlets, Westbrook (1981) found that the most important factor in determining the customer's overall satisfaction with a large conventional department store was the customer's satisfaction with the salespeople in the store. The salespeople were evaluated on dimensions of helpfulness, friendliness, politeness, and availability. Customer's satisfaction with the salespeople accounted for 26.7 percent of the variance in overall satisfaction compared with the next highest factor, store environment (layout, spaciousness, ease in finding things, and cleanliness), which only accounted for 9.4 percent of the variance.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) conducted in-depth interviews with fourteen service industry executives and conducted twelve focus groups with service consumers to develop a model of service quality. "Courtesy" was one of the dimensions of service quality mentioned by the informants in the study. Courtesy refers to "politeness, respect, consideration, and friendliness of contact personnel" (p. 47).

As a follow up to their earlier work, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) developed a multi-item scale to measure customers' perceptions of service quality. Three of
the five dimensions of service quality measured by the instrument are "responsiveness" which refers to "willingness to help customers and provide prompt service", "assurance" which is defined as "knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence", and "empathy" which means "caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers" (p. 23). The definition of service quality developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988) has been criticized recently for its focus on the service delivery process rather than on the content of the service itself (Reeves, 1991). Their work has also been criticized for offering an incomplete description of the dimensions of service quality (Silvestro & Johnston, 1991). Nevertheless, their research on customer expectations and perceptions of the service delivery process suggests the importance of displayed emotion during the service encounter: displayed emotions are often an integral part of service roles.

Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) recently proposed a conceptual framework for research on the expression of emotion in response to role requirements. They have argued that displayed emotions are often specific, required tasks in service jobs. For example, Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) cite a handbook for supermarket cashiers:

YOU are the company's most effective representative. Your
customers judge the entire company by your actions. A cheerful "Good Morning" and "Good Evening" followed by courteous, attentive treatment, and a sincere "Thank you, please come again," will send them away with a friendly feeling and a desire to return. A friendly smile is a must. (p. 23).

"Feelings: Customer Service Excellence," a generic training program for customer-contact workers developed by a private consulting firm, admonishes service workers with the same kind of role expectations:

People in [service] jobs often think a robot could do their work. They view people as numbers, and treat them with indifference. A smile, genuine concern, a laugh, or a helping hand are all types of positive communication that robots can't provide. They're also the same types of positive communication that make our dealings "people to people," instead of "number to number." They are the responses we need as human beings. They are Warm Fuzzies. (Tschohl, 1988: 25).

The impact of customer-contact workers' job satisfaction on customer satisfaction is further argued by Schneider and Bowen (1984). Drawing on the fields of organizational behavior and consumer behavior, they admonish organizations to treat "employees as highly valued customers" as a means of encouraging "employees to, in turn, treat customers better" (p. 98). The same notion is reflected in "The Service Profit Chain" proposed by
Schlesinger and Heskett (Harvard Business Review, 1991: 149; see also Schlesinger & Heskett, 1991). The chain suggests that employee satisfaction is related to overall organizational profit through the following links: employee satisfaction contributes to employee retention and employees' desire to give good service, both of which contribute to customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction, in turn, contributes to customer retention which has a major impact on an organization's long-term profitability.

Dinah Nemeroff, Director of Customer Affairs for Citibank, shares the view of Schlesinger and Heskett that employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction are strongly related to profitability (Harvard Business Review, 1991). She has argued that sound human resource management leads not only to more satisfied employees, but also to a better bottom line. Analysis of Citibank customers' banking habits revealed that highly satisfied customers increase their business nearly 50 percent more than customers who are less satisfied (Harvard Business Review, 1991).

Schlesinger and Heskett (1991) have criticized service industry managers who view profitability in the same manner as their manufacturing industry counterparts. Traditionally, profitability is viewed as a function of marketing strategies driving revenue and unit-level managers keeping operating costs low. "But what these assumptions
omit is the role that workers who are in direct contact with customers play in enhancing or diminishing customer satisfaction and therefore profits" (p. 75). As a result, Schlesinger and Heskett (1991) urge service industry managers to rethink the impact of employee job satisfaction on customer satisfaction and organizational profitability.

**Does Job Satisfaction have an Impact on Performance in Service Industries? Asking an Old Question in a New Context**

Even though numerous studies have failed to demonstrate a strong link between job satisfaction and employee performance (Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985; Vroom, 1964), it is reasonable to believe that a link between job satisfaction and employee performance might exist for customer-contact service workers for several reasons.

First, most of the research on the satisfaction-performance link has been conducted on populations which are not in high-contact service jobs (Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985).

Second, equity theory (Adams, 1963) suggests that employees who are dissatisfied with the balance of effort and reward in their jobs are likely to decrease either the quantity or quality of their output, and for customer-contact workers, output is directly related to customer

Third, expressed emotion is typically a role requirement for service industry workers (Rafaeli, 1989a,b; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987, 1990, 1991; Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988), and workers often find it difficult to express emotions they do not truly feel (Rafaeli, 1989a,b).

Fourth, organizational researchers who study service industries have begun to find some evidence for a link between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction (Parkington & Schneider, 1979; Schneider, 1980; Schneider & Bowen, 1984, 1985; Schneider, Parkington, & Buxton, 1980; Schlesinger & Heskett, 1991). Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that employee job satisfaction may have an impact on employee behaviors in a way that would impact customers' perceptions of service quality.

In the present study, it is argued that customer-contact workers who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to work hard to satisfy customers than would be their less satisfied coworkers. Also, it is argued that dissatisfied employees are more likely to engage in behaviors which seek to avoid satisfying customer and organizational demands. No a priori hypotheses about the relationship between job satisfaction and negotiation tactics are made.
H7: Job satisfaction is positively related to customer-contact workers' effort in satisfying role demands.

H8: Job satisfaction is negatively related to customer-contact workers' use of avoidance tactics.

Operationalization of Hypotheses 7 and 8

The variables in these hypotheses are operationalized as follows. Job satisfaction refers to the degree to which employees have a positive affective orientation toward employment in their present organization (Vroom, 1964: 99-105). Effort, negotiation, and avoidance are operationalized in the same manner as in hypotheses one through six. Effort can be defined as working hard at performing tasks efficiently enough to be able to satisfy multiple demands (e.g., "Effort/Mindlessness" in Table 2.1). Negotiation refers to tactics which seek to satisfy role demands by either reducing the demands or by obtaining help from others to satisfy the demands (e.g., "Delegation" and "Explanation" in Table 2.1). Avoidance refers to attempts by customer-contact workers to elude role senders' demands by preempting or ignoring their communication (e.g.,
"Reinterpretation" and "Ignoring" in Table 2.1).

Hypotheses one through eight are summarized in Table 2.2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Proposed Relationship</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>role conflict</td>
<td>positive</td>
<td>effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>role conflict</td>
<td>positive</td>
<td>negotiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>role conflict</td>
<td>positive</td>
<td>avoidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
<td>role ambiguity</td>
<td>positive</td>
<td>effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5</td>
<td>role ambiguity</td>
<td>positive</td>
<td>negotiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6</td>
<td>role ambiguity</td>
<td>positive</td>
<td>avoidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7</td>
<td>job satisfaction</td>
<td>positive</td>
<td>effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H8</td>
<td>job satisfaction</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td>avoidance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3

Method

The purpose of the present research is to investigate how customer-contact workers manage the multiple demands they experience as a result of the role stress in their front-line service jobs. To gain insight into this issue, a field survey was conducted to examine the relationships between key role variables, employee job satisfaction, and employee behaviors. A survey was used because it provided an economical means of assessing specific behaviors in the condition of actual customer-contact workers.

Context of the Field Survey

The field survey was conducted in a regional division of a large international convenience store chain. Convenience stores were chosen as the context for the field survey for several reasons. First, the convenience store (c-store) industry is a fast-paced industry with front-line workers who typically have many contacts with customers during their regular business day. Second, the workload on c-store employees is quite tough. From experience as a supervisor of c-stores, I know that managers often work 60
to 80 hours per week in an attempt to fulfill their responsibilities. Third, c-stores have proven to be valuable for studying service industries by other researchers (Rafaeli, 1989b; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990; Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988). In addition, the role of c-store employees shares common elements with the role of supermarket cashiers studied by Rafaeli (1989a). Finally, conducting the survey in a company with 132 locations in a single metropolitan area allowed the data to be collected under tight economic and time constraints.

Survey Sample

Store managers were chosen as respondents for the survey because of their multiple roles. C-store managers have administrative and operations responsibilities, supervision and human resources responsibilities, and merchandising and marketing responsibilities. Also, c-store managers have customer-contact responsibilities. Thus, the roles of these managers have critical strategic implications for operations, marketing, and human resources management in addition to their impact on customer perceptions of service quality. Demographic information about the managers who participated in the study are presented in Table 3.1.
## TABLE 3.1

Respondent Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>51.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>48.9</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>57.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 25 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 to 35 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 to 45 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 to 55 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 55 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school completion</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed high school</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational school/certificate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college or two-year college degree</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baccalaureate (bachelor’s) degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some graduate work</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Time with the Company</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6 months</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months to 1 year</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 5 years</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 10 years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
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</table>
TABLE 3.1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Time as a Store Manager</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6 months</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months to 1 year</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 5 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 10 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 45

Survey Development

The questionnaire was first pilot tested with several academic colleagues and three retail sales clerks. The survey was then presented to the senior managers of the regional division of the c-store chain for their review and approval. Next, questionnaires, cover letters, and postage-paid return envelopes were distributed through the company's courier service to 132 store managers in a large metropolitan area in the southwestern United States. The
cover letter explained that the purpose of the survey was to find out "how people handle demanding situations at work," and assured the respondents of complete confidentiality. The cover letter also encouraged the respondents to mail their completed surveys directly to me at the university using the self-addressed, stamped envelope. To increase the response rate, a follow-up letter was also delivered to the store managers two weeks after they received the initial letter and survey. The complete questionnaire and related correspondence are reproduced in the appendix.

Response Rate

Of the 132 questionnaires delivered to store managers, 45 usable questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 34 percent. Although the response rate is marginal, managers from each of the eleven zones in Tucson participated in the study.

One of the dilemmas of studying individuals in highly-demanding occupations is the threat that they may be "too busy" to participate. McGrath, Martin and Kulka (1982) state that data collection is often a process of compromise between suitability and accessibility, and they argue that researchers may choose at times to forego some of the usually desired characteristics of scientific research
(e.g., randomness, sample size, response rate) in exchange for mundane considerations such as how well the respondent pool typifies the behavior under study or how accessible the respondents are.

In other studies of organizational members, meaningful results have been obtained with response rates ranging from 15 percent (John, 1984) to 20 percent (Etgar, 1976) to 36 percent (Frazier & Rody, 1991) and above. Thus, the response rate in this study appears to be adequate for the type of investigation being conducted.

Measures

Role conflict and role ambiguity were assessed using the abridged 14-item instrument developed by Rizzo et al. (1970; see also Murphy & Gable, 1988). The survey included eight role conflict items and six role ambiguity items with seven-point Likert-type scales. Although the measure has come under some criticism for its construct validity (King & King, 1990), other researchers have argued for its usefulness based on factor analysis (House, Schuler, & Levanoni, 1983; Kelloway, & Barling, 1990) and on structural equations analysis (Netemeyer, Johnston, & Burton, 1990). Table 3.2 lists the items used to measure role conflict and role ambiguity and the reliabilities of the scales.
### TABLE 3.2

**Items for Role Conflict & Role Ambiguity**

**Role Conflict** (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$)

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 oppose a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment.
4. I work with two or more groups that operate quite differently.
5. I receive incompatible requests from two or more persons.
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.

**Role Ambiguity** (reverse scored; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.78$)

1. I feel certain about how much authority I have.
2. There are 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 of what has to be done is clear.
Job satisfaction was measured using a two-item facet-free job satisfaction measure taken from the University of Michigan Quality of Employment Survey (Quinn & Staines, 1979). The two-item job satisfaction measure was adapted by Gutek and has been used in several of her studies (cf., Gutek & Winter, 1990a,b). The first item measured global job satisfaction: "All in all, how satisfied would you say you are with your job?": "not at all satisfied, not too satisfied, somewhat satisfied, very satisfied." The second item was "Knowing what you know now, if you had to decide all over again whether to take the job you now have, what would you decide?": "would decide definitely not to take the same job, would have some second thoughts, would decide without any hesitation to take the same job." The two items provided a fairly reliable estimate of job satisfaction (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.59$).

Employees’ use of tactics was measured with 17 questions based on the typology of tactics developed during the preliminary qualitative field study. Each item represented the respondent’s use of a specific tactic on a specific target. Response options included "never, seldom (less than once a month), occasionally (once or twice a month), moderately often (once or twice a week), very often (nearly every day)." Analysis of the basic structure of respondents’ use of tactics was evaluated with factoring
Based on principal components analysis. Based on an examination of the scree plot of eigenvalues and theoretical considerations, the items were constrained to three factors. The question relating to the employee’s use of effort as a tactic ("I work extra hard to get everything done without neglecting the customer’s needs.") related to each of the factors negatively with factor loadings being relatively equal for each of the factors (-0.47, -0.33, and -0.35). Effort was then separated from the other tactics (which represent tactics the respondent would choose as options to effort), and the factor analysis was repeated. Various orthogonal and oblique rotations were examined, with the factor loadings remaining fairly consistent. However, oblique promax rotation provided the most interpretable factor structure. Together, the three factors accounted for 8.16 percent of the total variation of the items.

The factor structure of the items is shown in Table 3.3. Factor loadings are shown in bold type. The first factor appears to be a preemptive strategy which uses tactics designed to prevent role senders from communicating their expectations to the customer-contact worker. Factor 2 appears to be a negotiation strategy which seeks to satisfy the demands of the role senders by either adjusting the role demands ("explanation") or by enlisting the help of others to satisfy the demands ("delegation"). Factor 3 appears to
TABLE 3.3
Factor Analysis of Use of Tactics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preempt</td>
<td>Negotiate</td>
<td>Avoid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinterpretation</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Boss</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishing</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Boss</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distraction</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Boss</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingratiation</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Boss</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distraction</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Customer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingratiation</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Customer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegation</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Customer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewarding</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Customer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewarding</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Boss</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Customer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
be an avoidance strategy which uses tactics that ignore the demands by pretending not to have received the sent-role ("reinterpretation" and "ignoring").

Two of the items (explaining to the boss and explaining to the customer) had factor loadings of 0.30 or greater on more than one item. This suggests that explanation may be used as a negotiation tactic or as an avoiding tactic. For example, if a customer were to ask a convenience store clerk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Boss</th>
<th>Customer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishing</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegation</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinterpretation</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignoring</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Total Variance Explained</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>2.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 3.3 (continued)

to carry out the customer's groceries, the clerk could explain that company policy prohibits them from leaving the store as long as other customers are present. On the other hand, the same c-store clerk might use explanation as an avoidance tactic by telling the boss not to expect very much to get accomplished during the worker's shift because "Friday nights are always really busy." For the purpose of analyzing the data from the survey, the explanation variable were grouped with the negotiation tactics since they had the highest loading on that factor.

Only one of the tactic's relation to the factors did not make sense intuitively, punishing the customer as a negotiation tactic. It is possible that the wording of the item was interpreted by the respondents as sequencing events in order to be able to satisfy all of the legitimate role demands ("I punish the customer — e.g., make them wait longer than necessary) when he or she asks me to do too much"). The data were analyzed with and without this item without any real difference in results. Thus, the item was deleted from the final data analysis because its theoretical link to the other items was not clear.

In all, four specific variables were created to indicate the behavioral responses of customer-contact
workers to the demands of their roles: Effort, Negotiation, Preempting, and Avoiding. Both Preempting and Avoiding appear to be different aspects of a strategy of not responding to role senders' expectations. Therefore, both of these variables will be used to analyze hypotheses relating to avoidance strategies (H3, H6, & H8). The items used to measure these variables and their reliabilities are shown in Table 3.4.
TABLE 3.4

Items for Customer-Contact Workers' Use of Tactics

**Effort** (1 item)

1. I work extra hard to get everything done without neglecting the customer’s needs.

**Negotiation** (6 items, Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.72$)

1. I teach the customer how to do something for himself or herself.
2. I’ll do a favor for a customer who makes my job easier.
3. I’ll do a favor for a boss who makes my job easier.
4. I explain to the customer why it is impossible to do what he or she wants.
5. I explain to my boss why it is impossible to do what he or she wants.
6. I get someone else in the organization to do something for me.

**Preempting** (6 items, Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.79$)

1. I pretend not to understand what my boss is asking for and act as if he or she is asking for something else.
2. I punish my boss (e.g., make him or her wait longer than necessary) when he or she asks me to do too much.
3. I try to keep my boss busy so he or she won’t be able to ask me to do something.
### TABLE 3.4 (continued)

4. I try to put my boss in a good mood so he or she won’t want to ask me to do too much.

5. I try to keep the customer busy so that he or she won’t be able to ask me to do something.

6. I try to put the customer in a good mood so that he or she won’t want to ask me to do too much.

#### Avoiding (3 items, Cronbach’s α = 0.95)

1. I pretend not to understand what the customer is asking for and act as if the customer is asking for something else.

2. I ignore my boss and pretend that I did not hear his or her request.

3. I ignore the customer and pretend that I did not hear his or her request.
CHAPTER 4

Results

The data from the survey were analyzed using simple correlational analysis since the hypotheses represent statements of associations between constructs. Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among the key variables are displayed in Table 4.1.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: Role conflict is positively related to customer-contact workers' effort in satisfying role demands. The null form of this hypothesis is that no relationship would exist between role conflict and effort. As shown in Table 4.1, the two variables are not statistically related ($r = -0.21$, non-significant). Thus the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Hypothesis 2: Role conflict is positively related to customer-contact workers' use of negotiation tactics. The null form of this hypothesis is that no relationship would exist between role conflict and negotiation. However, Table 4.1 shows a significant, positive correlation between the
TABLE 4.1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations Among the Independent & Dependent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>mean</th>
<th>std. dev.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Role Conflict</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Role Ambiguity</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Satisfaction</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Effort</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Negotiation</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Preempting</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Avoiding</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* α < .05, † α < .01, ‡ α < .001
**TABLE 4.1 (continued)**

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Role Conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Role Ambiguity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Effort</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Negotiation</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Preempting</td>
<td>-0.45⁺</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Avoiding</td>
<td>-0.51‡</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.50‡</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* α < .05, ⁺ α < .01, ‡ α < .001
two variables \((r = 0.28, \alpha < .05)\). The null hypothesis is rejected, and Hypothesis 2 is supported.

**Hypothesis 3:** Role conflict is positively related to customer-contact workers' use of avoidance tactics. The null form of Hypothesis 3 is that there would be no relationship between role conflict and either avoidance strategy variable (preempting, avoiding). As shown in Table 4.1, both relationships are not statistically significant (role conflict—preempting: \(r = -0.06\), non-significant; role conflict—avoiding: \(r = -0.21\), non-significant). Thus the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. Hypothesis 3 is not supported.

**Hypothesis 4:** Role ambiguity is positively related to customer-contact workers' effort in satisfying role demands. The null form of this hypothesis is that role ambiguity and effort would be unrelated. The correlations in Table 4.1 indicate that the two are not statistically related \((r = -0.23\), non-significant\). Hypothesis 4 is not supported since the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

**Hypothesis 5:** Role ambiguity is positively related to customer-contact workers' use of negotiation tactics. The null form of Hypothesis 5 is that role ambiguity and
negotiation would be unrelated. However, Table 4.1 shows a positive, significant relationship between the two variables ($r = 0.33, \alpha < .05$), rejecting the null hypothesis. Hypothesis 5 is supported.

**Hypothesis 6:** Role ambiguity is positively related to customer-contact workers' use of avoidance tactics. The null form of Hypothesis 6 is that role ambiguity would be unrelated to both avoidance strategies (preempting and avoiding). Table 4.1 shows no correlation between role ambiguity and preempting ($r = 0.06$, non-significant) and no correlation between role ambiguity and avoiding ($r = 0.02$, non-significant). Hypothesis 6 is not supported since the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

**Hypothesis 7:** Job satisfaction is positively related to customer-contact workers' effort in satisfying role demands. The null form of this hypothesis is that no relationship would exist between employees' job satisfaction and their use of effort in their attempt to fulfill role demands. Table 4.1 shows a strong, positive relationship between the two ($r = 0.33, \alpha < .05$). The null hypothesis is rejected, and Hypothesis 7 is supported.

**Hypothesis 8:** Job satisfaction is negatively related
to customer-contact workers' use of avoidance tactics. The null form of Hypothesis 8 is that job satisfaction would be unrelated to either avoidance strategy (preempting or ignoring). Table 4.1 shows no significant relationship between satisfaction and preempting ($r = -0.19$, non-significant). However, satisfaction and avoiding appear to have a significant, negative relationship ($r = -0.33$, $\alpha < .05$). Although the null hypothesis cannot be rejected unequivocally, the data provide partial support for Hypothesis 8.

Implications of the findings and the limitations of the present study will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5
Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to investigate how customer-contact workers manage the multiple demands they experience as a result of the role stress in their front-line service jobs. The preliminary qualitative field study suggested a typology of nine tactics which was reduced to four basic strategies: working hard (effort), negotiating, preempting, and avoiding. These strategies were examined in relation to three other variables: role conflict, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction. These relationships provide some insight into the behaviors of customer-contact workers.

Customer-Contact Workers' Strategies and Tactics

Apparently, customer-contact workers use a variety of tactics—"tricks of the trade," perhaps—in an attempt to control their work environment. The battle waged for control by service industry workers has been described by Bateson (1985), Rafaeli (1989a), and Shamir (1980). Rafaeli (1989a) and Shamir (1980) both suggest specific tactics used by customer-contact workers. The typology of tactics
presented in this thesis (Table 2.1) both confirms their research and suggests a more comprehensive typology.

Factor analysis of the respondents' use of these tactics suggests that they can be classified into four basic strategies: working harder, negotiating, preempting, and avoiding. In response to role demands, the customer-contact worker's first response typically is to work harder in an attempt to get everything done and still have time to serve customers. Another option, however, is negotiating the demands of the environment. Negotiating provides customer-contact workers a way to satisfy role demands without requiring them to fulfill all of the demands themselves. Negotiating involves bargaining with the role senders for lessened demands and/or getting someone else to satisfy the role expectations. Customer-contact workers are likely to enlist coworkers, bosses, and customers in producing the service. Preempting refers to tactics which seek to prevent role senders from communicating their expectations to the customer-contact worker. For example, customer-contact workers might try to keep their boss or their customers busy and distracted in order to prevent them from making any demands. Avoiding, on the other hand, relates to customer-contact workers' response after the expectations have been communicated: they pretend not to have noticed. They might act as if they misunderstood the original request and
instead do something similar but less demanding, or they might ignore the person's request altogether. One example of this "playing dumb" strategy would be when a customer-contact worker says to his or her boss, "Oh, I didn't realize you wanted me to rearrange all of the merchandise in this section. I just thought you wanted me to switch the peanuts and the cashews."

Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity, and Customer-Contact Workers' Strategies

Apparently, customer-contact workers employ different strategies in response to different contexts. Role ambiguity and role conflict were both positively related to the workers' use of negotiating tactics but not to their use of hard work or avoidance tactics.

Customer-contact workers' use of negotiating tactics supports and enhances the relatively small literature on behavioral responses to role stress. For example, Deluga (1989) found that employees were likely to use a variety of influence tactics in response to role conflict. However, he found no links between role ambiguity and the use of these tactics. In the present study, customer-contact workers used negotiating tactics in relation to both role conflict and role ambiguity. These results support not only Deluga's
(1989) finding that employees use a variety of tactics to minimize role conflict, but also confirm Hollander's (1964) notion that role ambiguity often provides opportunity for creatively managing role conflict. While Deluga (1989) only examined influence tactics, the present study also examined employees' use of other people to satisfy role demands.

**Job Satisfaction and Customer-Contact Workers' Strategies**

Although job satisfaction was not related to customer-contact workers' use of negotiation tactics, job satisfaction was related to their use of effort and hard work to satisfy role demands. Job satisfaction was also negatively related to service workers' use of avoidance tactics. The data in the present study suggest that satisfied customer-contact workers are more likely to work hard to satisfy organizational and customer expectations, and dissatisfied customer-contact workers are more likely to "play dumb" and act as if they were unaware of the expectations incumbent in their role as front-line service workers. This thesis thus provides tentative support for a link between job satisfaction and attributes of employee performance for front-line service workers.
Limitations

Meaningful results have been obtained from field surveys with a variety of response rates. Depending on the nature of the population investigated, response rates typically range "from as low as 10 percent to as high 90 percent" for mail surveys (Kalton, 1983: 66). Although the present response rate (34%) is adequate for the type of analysis conducted, there is a possibility that respondents and nonrespondents are different in a way which could limit the generalizability of the findings from the present study. It would have been advantageous to have compared the demographic profile of the respondents with the rest of the sample to identify any characteristics which might distinguish respondents and nonrespondents; unfortunately, that information was unavailable for analysis in this thesis.

With the exception of the measure for job satisfaction, reliabilities of the multi-item measures ranged from .72 for the use of negotiation tactics to .95 for the use of avoiding tactics. The reliability for the two-item satisfaction measure was .59, which indicates a moderate degree of measurement error for the job satisfaction measure. As a result, the correlations between job satisfaction and the other items may be higher than the
present study suggests (Cohen & Cohen, 1983).

Finally, a social desirability bias may have influenced the way respondents answered the questionnaire. Behaviors like hard work are perhaps likely to be over-reported and behaviors like ingratiating and ignoring may be under-reported (Fowler, 1984). If the respondents were influenced by a social desirability bias, it is possible that relationships exist between the role stress variables and socially undesirable strategies like avoiding and preempting. Also, social desirability might have influenced some respondents to over-report their satisfaction level or their use of effort and under-report their use of avoidance strategies which could have impacted the results for Hypotheses 7 and 8. If respondents did overestimate their use of effort and their level of job satisfaction, the relationship between effort and satisfaction in this study might be partially attributed to a correlation in measurement error (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). However, if social desirability influenced respondents to under-report their use of avoidance tactics, the relationship between job satisfaction and the use of avoidance tactics might possibly be larger than has been estimated here.

Implications for Managers
The present research has implications for service industry managers for job design, employee training, performance appraisal, and quality of work life.

As proposed in the Customer Contact Model (Chase & Tansik, 1983), customer-contact jobs are different from jobs which have no customer contact. In designing jobs for customer-contact workers, organizations need to clearly identify and separate customer-service tasks and non-customer-service tasks. Although there may be some efficiency in having customer-contact workers completing "back office" tasks, there may also be a negative impact on customer service. If customer-contact workers will be doing both customer-service tasks and tasks which are not immediately related to serving the customer, clear direction needs to be given to the front-line employee about which tasks have higher priority under different circumstances.

In addition, it appears that customer-contact workers learn and use several tactics for managing their role stress. Some of the tactics may not be what the organization prefers. For example, some customer-contact workers indicate that they ignore or avoid their bosses and customers when they experience role stress. Krayer (1986) recommends that organizations use training programs to reduce role conflict and role ambiguity. Results from the present study suggest that organizations may also want to
include in their training programs positive alternative strategies for managing role stress. For example, enhancing an employee's communication skills might encourage the employee to give feedback to his or her boss about having too much to do instead of avoiding the boss or the customer. In addition, when new customer-contact employees are hired into an organization, the company might want to use the new-employee orientation program to indoctrinate the incoming employees with a corporate value system that would sanction the use of some strategies and censure the use of strategies which are dysfunctional for the organization, the customer, or the employee.

Organizations may also want to develop performance appraisal systems which take into account customer-contact workers' use of various tactics in response to role stress. For example, employees may be evaluated negatively for their use of tactics, like ignoring customers or pretending to misunderstand the boss, and positively evaluated for their use of tactics which enhance and strengthen the service production system, such as providing feedback to supervisors when too many demands are made on the worker or delegating some of their tasks to other individuals in the system.

Finally, managers need to pay attention to creating what Albrecht and Zemke (1985) call a "motivating environment" in which "service people can find personal
reasons for committing their energies to the benefit of the customer" (p. 107). Respondents in this thesis indicated that their willingness to work hard to satisfy the demands placed on them is positively related to their overall sense of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction has been related to factors such as pay, supervision, and opportunity for advancement (Quinn & Staines, 1979). Consequently, companies should build opportunities for advancement and for pay increases into the career ladders of customer-contact workers, and supervisors should treat their employees as they want their employees to treat their customers.

Implications for Service Industry Researchers

This study has several implications for service industry researchers. First, the present study demonstrates the advantage of combining qualitative and quantitative field studies for understanding the nature of service industry jobs. In addition, results from this study suggest that a re-examination of the job satisfaction-performance question may prove fruitful in the context of front-line service industry workers. Finally, the varied nature of tactics used by customer-contact workers indicates that both descriptive (what actually happens) and prescriptive (what ought to happen) research from a variety of disciplinary
perspectives needs to be conducted in order to understand and provide insight into service industry jobs. For example, a field investigation in which researchers observe and analyze service encounters would provide more specific information about contextual and environmental cues which may be associated with the behaviors of customer-contact workers.

Further field research on service encounters and the behaviors of customer-contact workers needs to be conducted to examine the relationship between various facets of job satisfaction (e.g., pay, supervisors, relationships with co-workers, etc.) and aspects of employee performance. For example, the relationship between satisfaction with pay or satisfaction with supervisors and the customer-contact workers' use of strategies to manage the service encounter needs to be investigated. Also, the relationship between job satisfaction and expressed emotion by service workers needs to be examined since expressed emotion is often a critical (and expected) part of service worker performance (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Finally, the research presented in this thesis needs to be duplicated in other service industry contexts to determine the generalizability of the results from this investigation.
Summary

This study has examined a variety of strategies used by customer-contact workers to manage role stress and the relationships between these strategies and three contextual variables, role conflict, role ambiguity and job satisfaction. The data suggest that role conflict and role ambiguity are both positively related to customer-contact workers' use of negotiation tactics. Also, the data suggest that customer-contact workers' job satisfaction is positively related to their working hard in an attempt to satisfy the multiple demands of their role, and their job satisfaction is negatively related to their use of avoidance tactics. The use of some of these tactics may have a negative impact on customer perceptions of service quality and, in the long run, on organizational profitability. Consequently, organizations are encouraged to design jobs which minimize role conflict for customer-contact workers and to provide training programs which give employees positive alternative strategies for managing their role stress. Additionally, researchers are encouraged to re-examine the relationship between job performance and job satisfaction in the service industry context from a variety of disciplinary and methodological perspectives.
APPENDIX A

Questionnaires and Correspondence

Used in Field Studies
Questions from semi-structured interviews with customer-contact workers.

1. Have you ever had a time in your job when you felt like you had too much to do and you couldn't get it all done? (Prompts: Can you give me an example? How did you handle it? What did you do?)

2. Can you think of a time when you felt caught between what your company wants you to do and what customer wants you to do? (Prompts: Can you give me an example? How did you handle it? What did you do?)

3. How do you deal with your boss when (he/she) is giving you too much to do? (Prompt: Can you give me an example?)

4. How do you deal with difficult customers when they make your job more difficult? (Prompt: Can you give me an example?)

5. What are some of the "tricks of the trade" for handling tough bosses or tough customers that you have learned since you started working here?
February 1991

Dear Manager:

Your organization is participating in a study conducted by researchers in the department of Management and Policy at the University of Arizona. We are asking your help in filling out the following short survey which will take less than a half hour to complete. Other than the first two questions, you will be asked to circle a number. I hope you can take the time to fill it out today, preferably right now!

The purpose of this study is finding out how people handle demanding situations at work. All of your responses will be treated as confidential, and the identity of all who participate in this study will remain anonymous. My agreement in conducting this study is that they will receive only summaries of the data. NO ONE at will see any of the surveys.

When you have completed the questionnaire, please place it in the accompanying self-addressed, stamped envelope. The pre-addressed envelope makes it easy to mail the survey back to me at the university and ensures that your survey will be kept confidential.

If you would like a copy of the results of this survey, call me at 323-7043 and leave your name and store number.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Kristopher A. Weatherly
Research Project Director
Dear Manager:

I need your help. A couple of weeks ago I sent a survey to each store manager in Tucson. If you have filled out and returned your survey, THANK YOU! If not, please take a few minutes to complete and return the questionnaire today.

The questionnaires are part of a project to further the advancement of scientific knowledge. The information obtained from this project will help organizations design better jobs and give better training to their employees.

All of your responses will be treated confidentially -- no one will see your survey. My agreement is that they will receive only a summary of the data.

If you have misplaced your survey, please give me a call, and I’ll get another one to you. If you would like the results of the survey, just call and let me know. My phone number is 323-7043. (Please leave your name, store number and zone number.) I would also be happy to answer any questions about the scope and purpose of the research project.

I know you are busy; that’s why your responses are so valuable. Please take a moment to fill out and return the questionnaire today! Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Kristopher A. Weatherly
Research Project Director

P.S. Please mail the survey directly to me at the university. For your convenience, there should be a stamped, pre-addressed envelope in your survey packet. Thanks!
Most of us at one time or another feel that we have too many things to do in a limited amount of time. This seems to be a part of life in any organization. Sometimes we handle the overload well; sometimes we don't. THE NEXT 2 QUESTIONS ARE ABOUT THESE KINDS OF SITUATIONS.

1. Think of a time in your work (how long ago doesn't really matter, as long as you can recall it well) when you may have had too much to do, a time when it was hard to complete the tasks which are a part of your job and take care of customers at the same time. Perhaps you felt caught between your organization and the customer. Think of a situation like that in which you believe that you did a fine job and handled the situation well. In a few sentences, describe the situation, what the demands were, what you did to handle the situation, and briefly why you think you did a fine job.

2. Now think of a time when you may have had too much to do, you were caught between the organization and the customer, and you believe that you did not do a fine job or handle the situation well. Again in a few sentences, describe the situation, what the demands were, what you did to handle the situation, and briefly why you think this situation turned out poorly.
THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS REFER TO YOUR PRESENT POSITION. HOW TRUE ARE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT YOUR JOB? FOR EACH STATEMENT PLEASE CIRCLE THE NUMBER WHICH CORRESPONDS TO YOUR ANSWER.

3. I feel certain about how much authority I have.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very False</th>
<th>Somewhat False</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat True</th>
<th>Very True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

4. There are clear, planned goals and objectives for my job.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very False</th>
<th>Somewhat False</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat True</th>
<th>Very True</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

5. I have to do things that should be done differently.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very False</th>
<th>Somewhat False</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat True</th>
<th>Very True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. I know that I have divided my time properly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very False</th>
<th>Somewhat False</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat True</th>
<th>Very True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. I receive an assignment without the manpower to complete it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very False</th>
<th>Somewhat False</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat True</th>
<th>Very True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

8. I know what my responsibilities are.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very False</th>
<th>Somewhat False</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat True</th>
<th>Very True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. I have to oppose a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very False</th>
<th>Somewhat False</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat True</th>
<th>Very True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

please go on to page 3
10. I work with two or more groups that operate quite differently.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very False</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>Somewhat False or Unsure</th>
<th>Somewhat True</th>
<th>Very True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. I know exactly what is expected of me.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very False</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>Somewhat False or Unsure</th>
<th>Somewhat True</th>
<th>Very True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. I receive incompatible requests from two or more persons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very False</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>Somewhat False or Unsure</th>
<th>Somewhat True</th>
<th>Very True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very False</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>Somewhat False or Unsure</th>
<th>Somewhat True</th>
<th>Very True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. I receive an assignment without adequate resources and materials to execute it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very False</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>Somewhat False or Unsure</th>
<th>Somewhat True</th>
<th>Very True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. Explanation of what has to be done is clear.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very False</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>Somewhat False or Unsure</th>
<th>Somewhat True</th>
<th>Very True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. I work on unnecessary things.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very False</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>Somewhat False or Unsure</th>
<th>Somewhat True</th>
<th>Very True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

please go on to page 4
THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS REFER TO YOUR PRESENT POSITION WITH
FOR EACH QUESTION, PLEASE CIRCLE THE NUMBER WHICH
CORRESPONDS TO YOUR ANSWER.

17. All in all, how satisfied would you say you are with your
job?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>not at all satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>not too satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>somewhat satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>very satisfied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. Knowing what you know now, if you had to decide all over
again whether to take the job you now have, what would you
decide?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>would decide definitely not to take the same job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>would have some second thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>would decide without any hesitation to take the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>same job</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. How strongly do you feel about leaving or staying with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>strongly inclined to leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>inclined to leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>don't know whether I want to stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>inclined to stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>strongly inclined to stay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20. In the past two months, which of the following have you
done? (Please circle all that apply).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>scanned the help-wanted ads in a newspaper</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asked friends or family for job leads</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>filled out a job application</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>registered with an employment agency</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>been on a job interview</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conducted other job-seeking activities not listed here</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>none of the above</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21. How long have you worked for this company?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>less than 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 months to 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>more than 10 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22. How long have you worked as a store manager?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>less than 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 months to 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>more than 10 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

please go on to page 5
THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS REFER TO HOW YOU MIGHT RESPOND TO THE DEMANDS PLACED ON YOU BY YOUR ORGANIZATION AND YOUR CUSTOMERS. SOME QUESTIONS ARE ABOUT YOUR CUSTOMERS, AND SOME ARE ABOUT YOUR BOSS. FOR EACH QUESTION, PLEASE CIRCLE THE NUMBER WHICH CORRESPONDS TO YOUR ANSWER.

23. I work extra hard to get everything done without neglecting the customer's needs.
   never...........................................1
   seldom (less than once a month)..............2
   occasionally (once or twice a month).........3
   moderately often (once or twice a week)....4
   very often (nearly every day)..............5

24. I teach the customer how to do something for himself or herself.
   never...........................................1
   seldom (less than once a month)..............2
   occasionally (once or twice a month).........3
   moderately often (once or twice a week)....4
   very often (nearly every day)..............5

25. I get someone else in the organization to do something for me.
   never...........................................1
   seldom (less than once a month)..............2
   occasionally (once or twice a month).........3
   moderately often (once or twice a week)....4
   very often (nearly every day)..............5

26. I explain to the customer why it is impossible to do what he or she wants.
   never...........................................1
   seldom (less than once a month)..............2
   occasionally (once or twice a month).........3
   moderately often (once or twice a week)....4
   very often (nearly every day)..............5

27. I'll do a favor for a customer who makes my job easier.
   never...........................................1
   seldom (less than once a month)..............2
   occasionally (once or twice a month).........3
   moderately often (once or twice a week)....4
   very often (nearly every day)..............5

28. I pretend not to understand what the customer is asking for and act as if the customer is asking for something else.
   never...........................................1
   seldom (less than once a month)..............2
   occasionally (once or twice a month).........3
   moderately often (once or twice a week)....4
   very often (nearly every day)..............5
29. I try to keep the customer busy so that he or she won't be able to ask me to do something.
never........................................1
seldom (less than once a month)..............2
occasionally (once or twice a month)........3
moderately often (once or twice a week)......4
very often (nearly every day)..................5

30. I punish the customer (e.g., make them wait longer than necessary) when he or she asks me to do too much.
never........................................1
seldom (less than once a month)..............2
occasionally (once or twice a month)........3
moderately often (once or twice a week)......4
very often (nearly every day)..................5

31. I try to put the customer in a good mood so that he or she won't want to ask me to do too much.
never........................................1
seldom (less than once a month)..............2
occasionally (once or twice a month)........3
moderately often (once or twice a week)......4
very often (nearly every day)..................5

32. I ignore the customer and pretend that I did not hear his or her request.
never........................................1
seldom (less than once a month)..............2
occasionally (once or twice a month)........3
moderately often (once or twice a week)......4
very often (nearly every day)..................5

33. I explain to my boss why it is impossible to do what he or she wants.
never........................................1
seldom (less than once a month)..............2
occasionally (once or twice a month)........3
moderately often (once or twice a week)......4
very often (nearly every day)..................5

34. I'll do a favor for a boss who makes my job easier.
never........................................1
seldom (less than once a month)..............2
occasionally (once or twice a month)........3
moderately often (once or twice a week)......4
very often (nearly every day)..................5

35. I pretend not to understand what my boss is asking for and act as if he or she is asking for something else.
never........................................1
seldom (less than once a month)..............2
occasionally (once or twice a month)........3
moderately often (once or twice a week)......4
very often (nearly every day)..................5

please go on to page 7
36. I try to keep my boss busy so he or she won't be able to ask me to do something.
   never...........................................1
   seldom (less than once a month)...........2
   occasionally (once or twice a month)......3
   moderately often (once or twice a week)....4
   very often (nearly every day)...............5

37. I punish my boss (e.g., make him or her wait longer than necessary) when he or she asks me to do too much.
   never...........................................1
   seldom (less than once a month)...........2
   occasionally (once or twice a month)......3
   moderately often (once or twice a week)....4
   very often (nearly every day)...............5

38. I try to put my boss in a good mood so he or she won't want to ask me to do too much.
   never...........................................1
   seldom (less than once a month)...........2
   occasionally (once or twice a month)......3
   moderately often (once or twice a week)....4
   very often (nearly every day)...............5

39. I ignore my boss and pretend that I did not hear his or her request.
   never...........................................1
   seldom (less than once a month)...........2
   occasionally (once or twice a month)......3
   moderately often (once or twice a week)....4
   very often (nearly every day)...............5

NOW, HERE ARE SOME BASIC ITEMS TO HELP US COMPARE YOUR ANSWERS TO THOSE OF OTHER PEOPLE. REMEMBER, ALL OF YOUR ANSWERS ON THIS QUESTIONNAIRE ARE COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL. NO ONE IN YOUR COMPANY WILL SEE ANY OF YOUR ANSWERS TO THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.

40. Are you: male......1  41. Are you: married......1
    female......2  unmarried......2

42. Your age is:  
   Under 25 years...............................1
   26-35.........................................2
   36-45.........................................3
   46-55.........................................4
   over 55......................................5

43. Which of the following best describes your formal education?
   less than high school completion...........1
   completed high school......................2
   vocational school/certificate..............3
   some college or two-year college degree....4
   baccalaureate (bachelor's) degree..........5
   some graduate work..........................6

PLEASE RETURN THIS SURVEY IN THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE. THANK YOU!
REFERENCES


Tansik, D. A. 1990. Managing human resource issues for high-contact service personnel. In D. E. Bowen, R. B. Chase,


