

When Customers Disappoint: A Model of Relational Internal Marketing and Customer Complaints

Simon J. Bell

University of Cambridge, United Kingdom

Bülent Mengüç

Brock University, Canada

Sara L. Stefani

Telstra Corporation Ltd., Australia

The objective of this study is to examine internal marketing relationships and their influence on salesperson attitudes and behaviors in retail store environments. The authors investigate the moderating role of customer complaining behavior on the nature of these relationships. Specifically, they examine the relationship between organization-employee and supervisor-employee relationships and their association with salesperson job motivation and commitment to customer service. Customer complaints are expected to have differential moderating effects on the relationship between organizational and supervisory support and these salesperson outcomes. Our hypotheses were tested using a sample of 392 retail employees within 115 stores of a national retail organization. The model was partially supported. Theoretical and managerial implications are explored.

Keywords: *customer complaints; internal marketing; service quality*

The salesperson-customer interface within service environments has been, and will continue to be, researched carefully due to its potential contribution to

customer perceptions of service quality. Few elements within service organizations have as great an impact on customer perceptions as the interaction between an organization's members and its customers. It is not surprising, therefore, that much of the research in this area focuses on the elements within the organization that support customer contact employees. We have seen a body of literature emerge that has investigated the impact of controllable elements such as job design (e.g., George 1998), organizational structure (e.g., Conduit and Mavondo 2001), interpersonal relationships, rewards, and resource allocation (e.g., Morrison 1996) on the customer-oriented attitudes and behaviors of customer contact employees. By contrast, less attention has been paid to noncontrollable elements of the work environment and how they affect the impact of cheerleading initiatives of managerial and support staff. Fewer studies have considered the *outputs* of sales force management practices (e.g., customer perceptions) as inputs to, or determinants of, the internal relationship-building activities so frequently espoused in the services and internal marketing literatures. Indeed, most internal marketing concepts and other models of service employee management are decidedly recursive (e.g., Hartline and Ferrell 1996; Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser, and Schlesinger 1994).

In this study, we examine customer complaining behavior as one such external factor. Customer complaining behavior has been the focus of much research

attention (e.g., Fornell and Wernerfelt 1987; Singh and Wilkes 1996; Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekar 1998) and with good reason. Among other things, customer complaints allow an organization to pursue service recovery attempts and an opportunity to reduce customer turnover. Practitioners and academicians alike encourage the voicing of dissatisfaction from customers as a means of reducing market share attrition. It seems that soliciting customer complaints provides unequivocally positive benefits for the organization. But what of the effects on those who are responsible for the delivery of recovery efforts and toward whom many of the complaints would be directed? The demoralizing effect of negative feedback and criticism is well documented (Kohli and Jaworski 1994; Pearce and Porter 1986). Customer complaints experienced as negative feedback can have damaging implications for frontline salespeople and their attitudes toward their role. In this article, we question whether the quality of the relationship between the organization and the employee can be conceptualized independently of the customer contact environment in which service employees operate. Specifically, we take a closer look at the interaction between customer complaining behavior and internal marketing initiatives on the job motivation and commitment to customer service among retail employees.

The article is constructed in the following way. First, we provide some theoretical background to the main effects of internal marketing initiatives on performance. We also provide the theoretical underpinnings for studying the role of customer complaining behavior and its contingency effect on internal relationships. Second, we discuss the advantages of our hypothesized model, drawing on the available literature for support. Next, we outline the empirical study used to test our model and present some results. Finally, we discuss the implications of our findings and some avenues for additional research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Relational Internal Marketing

The employee-customer interface has been considered a focal point in the relationship between the organization and the customer. In many cases, the contact employee is considered *to be the service* in the customer's view (Berry, Conant, and Parasuraman 1991). In other words, the attitudes and behaviors of customer contact staff are the embodiment of those of the organization in the eyes of the customer. With this in mind, the rationale for the development of quality relationships, not only between the employee and customer but, more important, the organization and employee is compelling. Importantly contributions have been made in the management literature regarding the spillover effects that human resource management

practices have on customers. Strong relationships between the organization and the employee can improve both the employee's motivation toward their job and their willingness to provide better customer service.

The internal marketing literature provides important foundations for understanding the role of the organization in influencing the employee's job attitudes and behaviors. Internal marketing has been presented in a variety of ways; from an internally directed marketing mix (e.g., Piercy and Morgan 1991) to networks of internal transactions (e.g., Gummesson 1987). One compelling approach is to view internal marketing from a relational perspective. Gilmore and Carson (1995), for example, argued that "internal marketing management could be considered and redefined as a more holistic, systemic and organization-wide concept" (p. 308). A primary function of internal marketing, from a relational point of view, would be to coordinate relationships and tasks between boundary-spanning and support staff. Ballantyne, Christopher, and Payne (1995) see the role of internal marketing as motivating and developing customer-oriented staff through the careful development of internal relationships. Common to these views is the notion that networks of internal relationships are the building blocks of an internal marketing philosophy. We take a similar position in this article, defining internal marketing as the process of initiating, maintaining, and developing the relationships between employees, their management, and the organization, for the purposes of creating superior value for customers.

Relational internal marketing focuses on the vertical and lateral relationships that exist within organizations. Vertical relationships include, for example, employee-manager, employee-supervisor, and employee-organization relationships. Lateral relationships include employee-team member and employee-coworker relationships. Consistent with the managerial focus of earlier conceptualizations of internal marketing and in the interests of model parsimony, we focus on two of the more frequently studied vertical relationships: the organization-employee relationship and the supervisor-employee relationship.

The developing literature in perceived organizational support provides some insight into the employee-organization relationship. The level of perceived organizational support reflects the employee's belief about the degree to which the organization values his or her contribution (Eisenberger, Fasolo, and Davis-LaMastro 1990). It is through this judgment that the employee makes decisions about his or her worth to the organization and the manner in which such support will be reciprocated.

A second important vertical relationship is the supervisor-employee interface. The leader-member exchange literature offers insight into the relationship that exists between an employee and his or her supervisor. Leader-member exchange theory maintains that the leader and each individual member of a work group have a unique

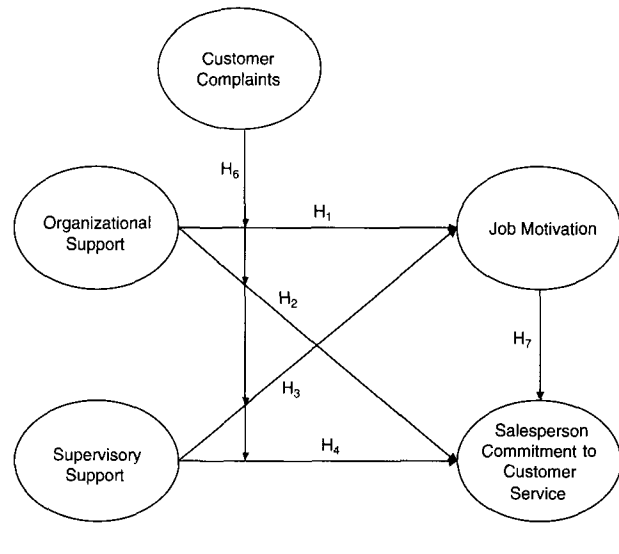
relationship (Burns and Otte 1999). As with perceived organization support, the superior-subordinate relationship is conceived of as a social exchange or negotiated transaction. Where a subordinate is appraised favorably and encouraged to feel comfortable in his or her role, the supervisor is rewarded with a more committed and competent staff member (Deluga 1994).

Complaining Customers and Why Their Comments Make a Difference

The concept of feedback is extremely important to our understanding of individual, organization, and system performance. Broadly, feedback plays an important role in individual and organizational learning. It is a critical ingredient for the homeostatic nature of systems. In the marketing literature, feedback is often regarded as a tool for improving performance (Kohli and Jaworski 1994; Teas 1981). To change employee attitudes and behaviors, it is often necessary to provide feedback. The expectation is that the recipients of this feedback will use that information to improve their performance (Fedor, Davis, Maslyn, and Mathieson 2001). Much of the marketing literature has examined the effects of feedback from internal sources such as supervisors and the organization (e.g., Teas 1981) and from coworkers (e.g., Kohli and Jaworski 1994). Fewer studies, however, have considered the effect of feedback from external sources (such as customers) on salesperson performance and the nature of internal relationships between salespeople and their supervisors and organization as a whole.

To understand the effects of customer feedback on salesperson attitudes and performance, we turn to role theory (Rizzo, House, and Litzman 1970). Briefly, role theory proposes that when competing behaviors expected of an individual are inconsistent (a source of role conflict), the individual may experience stress, become dissatisfied, and not perform as effectively as when expectations imposed on him or her do not conflict. Such divergence in expected behaviors is possible where salespeople—performing to the expectations of the organization—are confronted with consumer complaints that demand a different set of behaviors from the norms of their organization. The degree of pressure or conflict that the salesperson perceives will be a function of the credibility of, and importance attributed to, both the customer's and the organization's wishes. Employees experiencing a high degree of role conflict may personally disengage from their work role. This may lead to less enthusiasm for the role, less commitment to the organization, and engaging in half-hearted customer service behaviors. Alternatively, employees may seek the support, advice, and guidance of supervisors or coworkers in dealing with such tension—a possibility we will explore shortly.

FIGURE 1
Hypothesized Model of Internal Marketing Relationships and Customer Complaining Behavior



A MODEL OF INTERNAL MARKETING RELATIONSHIPS AND CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

The hypothesized model (Figure 1) proposes that an employee's commitment to customer service will result from the direct and indirect effects of organizational support, supervisory support, and job motivation. Job motivation is related positively to commitment to customer service. Both organizational support and supervisory support are proposed to have a direct relationship with an employee's commitment to customer service and an indirect effect through his or her relationship with job motivation. In other words, job motivation will partially mediate the relationships between organizational support and supervisory support and commitment to customer service. Finally, we propose that customer complaints will moderate the relationships between organizational support and supervisory support and both job motivation and commitment to customer service, respectively. The following section offers the rationale for the proposed relationships.

Organizational Support

Organizational support is defined as a general perception of the extent to which an organization values an employee's contributions and cares for his or her well-being (Eisenberger et al. 1990). We propose that organizational support is related directly to both salespersons' job moti-

vation and their commitment to customer service. Organizational support provides employees with the necessary resources to perform their responsibilities effectively as well as creating an environment in which employees are likely to feel better about their jobs and the outcomes required of them. DeCarlo, Teas, and McElroy (1997) found that organizational support attributions can have a positive moderating effect on the salesperson performance–job motivation relationship. Wayne, Shore, and Liden (1997) found that a high level of organizational support leads to reduced turnover intentions in employees. Those employees who perceive that the organization supports them are more likely to be affectively committed to the organization (Eisenberger et al. 1986). Consequently, they are less likely to seek employment elsewhere. We might expect such employees to be more motivated to perform their jobs well. Accordingly, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 1: There will be a positive relationship between organizational support and job motivation.

Organizational support will also be positively related to an employee's commitment to customer service. Recent research has demonstrated a positive association between top management support and the customer orientation of members within an organization (Conduit and Mavondo 2001). Shore and Wayne (1993) adopted a social exchange perspective of employee–organization relations. They argued that organizational support creates feelings of obligation in employees, leading them to reciprocate with behaviors that benefit the organization. Their data supported this expectation. A number of other studies have found that perceived organizational support is positively related to an employee's effort in carrying out conventional job responsibilities (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, and Rhoades 2001; Eisenberger, Fasolo, et al. 1990). Based on this, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: There will be a positive, direct relationship between organizational support and commitment to customer service.

Supervisory Support

Supervisory support is defined as the degree of consideration expressed by the immediate manager or supervisor for his or her subordinates (Michaels and Spector 1982). It is both conceptually and empirically distinct from organizational support (Wayne et al. 1997). However, to the extent that it often reinforces the climate and tone of employee relations, we expect to find similar positive associations between supervisory support and both job motivation and commitment to customer service. Liden and Graen (1980) suggested that high-quality exchanges

are typically friendly and supportive. Furthermore, supportive supervisor–employee relationships are characterized by greater communication and role definition (Dubinsky, Howell, and Ingram 1986). It is reasonable to expect that a friendly work climate and clarity in both role definition and communication will lead to greater work motivation among salespeople. Prior studies have found that trusting (Flaherty and Pappas 2000) and supportive (Babin and Boles 1996) supervisor–subordinate relations lead to an employee's greater organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Consequently, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 3: There will be a positive, direct relationship between supervisory support and job motivation.

Supervisory support is also likely to lead to work behaviors that benefit the organization. Salespeople who perceive that they have support from their supervisor are more likely to perform behaviors that are consistent with the organizational values (e.g., customer service orientation) espoused by the supervisor (O'Hara, Boles, and Johnston 1991). Researchers have found a positive association between supervisory support and both in-role and extra-role behaviors (e.g., VanYperen, van den Berg, and Willering 1999). Accordingly, we would expect to observe a positive relationship between supervisory support and a salesperson's commitment to customer service.

Hypothesis 4: There will be a positive, direct relationship between supervisory support and commitment to customer service.

Job Motivation

Employee job motivation is defined as the degree to which the employee psychologically identifies with his or her job (Kanungo 1982). We expect that an employee's level of job motivation is likely to influence his or her commitment to customer service. Much of the internal marketing literature supports the view that initiatives to build employee satisfaction and motivation are an important precursor to increased levels of customer-oriented sales behaviors (e.g., George 1990). Hartline and Ferrell (1996) proposed that to increase customers' perceptions of service quality, supervisors must increase (among other things) employees' self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Underlying this is the notion that employee attitudes will influence customer attitudes toward the service (Bowen, Gilliland, and Folger 1999). Motivated employees will engage diligently and conscientiously in their ascribed work behaviors (Liden and Graen 1980). Accordingly, we expect the following:

Hypothesis 5: There will be a positive, direct relationship between job motivation and commitment to customer service.

The Moderating Role of Customer Complaints

A customer complaint is defined as negative customer feedback. When organizations receive unanticipated complaints, employees' future comfort levels within the organization are likely to be affected (Piercy 1995). The complaining customer "disappoints" the employee whose expectations, built up by organizational cheerleading and support, are frustrated. Salespeople are likely to become skeptical, perceiving organizational support as hollow and misdirected. Furthermore, employees' sense of meaningfulness in their roles will diminish as customers convey a lack of respect and appreciation for their work (Kahn 1990). Complaints convey to the employees that their work is not valued or appreciated. Salespeople will personally disengage from their work, demonstrating a lack of motivation. In observing the ineffectiveness of organizational support, salespeople will be less convinced that a commitment to customer service is the best way to reciprocate organizational support. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 6a: The positive relationship between organizational support and job motivation will be diminished as the number of customer complaints increases.

Hypothesis 6b: The positive relationship between organizational support and commitment to customer service will be diminished as the number of customer complaints increases.

In contrast with this, we expect that the moderating effect of customer complaints on the relationships between supervisory support and both job motivation and commitment to customer service will be positive. When confusion arises as a result of customer feedback contradicting organizational direction, salespeople will turn to supervisors. In other words, the supervisor may be relied on to resolve the conflict between the expectations of customers and the direction from the organization.

The stress and coping literatures discuss problem-focused coping strategies (e.g., active attempts to get task help) as a means to eliminating job stressors (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, and Gruen 1986). High levels of customer complaints create a tension or crisis for individual stores. In many instances, the solution to this tension will lie at the store level. Organizational strategy and directives may be discounted in favor of solutions developed at the store level between coworkers and supervisors. A supervisor is an obvious source of help in situations of high complaint behavior. In addition, social

support is considered as a means by which salespeople can "buffer" the effect of workplace stressors (Daniels and Guppy 1994). Social resources such as information, empathy, and social contact can reduce the strain that job stressors produce (Srivastava and Sager 1999). Clearly, organizations, as nonpersonal entities, cannot provide such social support. Supervisors, on the other hand, are able to provide these social resources. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 6c: The positive relationship between supervisory support and job motivation will increase as the number of customer complaints increases.

Hypothesis 6d: The positive relationship between supervisory support and commitment to customer service will increase as the number of customer complaints increases.

Control Variables

To avoid problems of model misspecification, we incorporate a range of control variables based on the perceived psychological contract employees have with the organization (Rousseau 1990). Psychological contracts are composed of the *perceived obligations* of the parties. As an example, the literature describes employer obligations perceived by employees as including opportunities for promotion and advancement, fair pay, sufficient tools and resources, long-term job security, career development, sufficient power and responsibility, and a supportive work environment (Rousseau 1990). While the content of psychological contracts is very often idiosyncratic, there remain theoretically meaningful domains that can be generalized across individuals and firms. Accordingly, we looked to dimensions of the psychological contract other than the support dimensions that are the main effects within our hypothesized model.

As promotion and advancement are considered central to the psychological contract, a measure of perceived promotion opportunity was included as a control variable. Promotion opportunity is defined as the degree of movement between different status levels in an organization (Price and Mueller 1981). A second component of the psychological contract is fair pay. To accommodate this, we include a measure of distributive justice, which is defined as the fairness of the outcomes an employee receives from an organization (Price and Mueller 1986). A third component is an organization's obligation to provide sufficient resources to its employees for carrying out day-to-day tasks. Accordingly, we employ a measure of resource adequacy (Iverson 1992). A fourth obligation is long-term job security. Job security is the extent to which an organization provides stable employment for employees (Oldham, Kulik, Stepina, and Ambrose 1986). The provision of power and responsibility, a fifth component of the

psychological contract, supported the inclusion of a measure of job autonomy, which indicates the degree to which an employee can influence the way his or her job is performed (Peccei and Rosenthal 1997). To the extent that psychological contracts may be violated, we employ measures of job routinization and role ambiguity to indicate potential weaknesses in the employee-organization relationship. Job routinization is the degree to which employees' jobs are repetitive (Price and Mueller 1981). Role ambiguity is defined as the degree to which an employee's role expectations are unclear (Rizzo et al. 1970).

Finally, we include a measure of coworker support to capture the full range of intraorganizational relations. Coworker support is the degree of consideration expressed by coworkers (House 1981). In addition, we incorporate a measure of team orientation (Hult and Ferrell 1997)—the degree to which organizations stress collaboration and cooperation—as an overall indication of the *closeness* of intraorganizational relations.

Finally, we control for store size as an indication of the amount of support an employee can expect from his or her supervisor. The small group literature, for example, suggests that a supervisor's span of control increases with team size. This affects the amount of individual support that can be provided to employees (e.g., Campion, Papper, and Medsker 1996).

RESEARCH METHOD

Sample and Data Collection Procedure

The research setting for the survey is a national retail organization. The organization employs approximately 20,000 people. More than three quarters of these people are employed in stores, which were the focus of this study. The organization comprises 130 stores nationally. Three stores, however, sold vastly different lines of merchandise and competed in different markets. To preserve industry and market homogeneity, these were removed from the sample. A further 3 stores, selling traditional product lines and serving core markets, had only just been opened at the time of the study. These stores were also excluded from the sample. Although these stores employed experienced managers who understood the organization, it was felt that too little time had elapsed for the store to have developed a consistent set of internal relationships and processes about which respondents could report.

Respondents were selected on the basis that they had sufficient contact with an immediate supervisor and had sufficient experience to be able to comment on the nature of their relationship with the organization. In addition, they were required to have consistent and ongoing customer contact. Accordingly, we selected respondents at entry-level management positions or area sales managers

(ASMs). Typically, ASMs have responsibility for managing an area of merchandise and a number of sales assistants on the retail floor (e.g., footwear, ladies apparel, white goods). For larger stores, this may amount to a subdivision of a particular department (e.g. men's, women's, and children's clothing), while for smaller stores, respondents may have responsibility for managing an entire department (e.g., clothing). Employees at the ASM level had an average tenure of 3 years and were usually employed on a full-time basis. In selecting ASMs as respondents, we were excluding casual and part-time sales staff and store managers (who had little contact with customers).

At the time of the survey, there were 520 ASMs employed by the organization across 124 stores. A total of 432 questionnaires were returned from the 124 stores. This represented an initial response rate of 83 percent of ASMs and 100 percent of stores. The number of responses per store ranged from 1 to 6, with an average of 3.5 responses per store. As we used stores as the unit of analysis in this study, and consistent with the multi-informant design of this study, we took a conservative stance and deleted 9 stores for which less than three ASMs responded. Consequently, this deletion of ineligible stores resulted in a usable sample of 115 stores with a total of 392 employees.

Measures

Scales used to measure the constructs were drawn from the available literature and are outlined below. The appendix provides all scale items. Items were measured on 5-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Each scale has a history of reliable measurement.

Organizational Support is defined as the extent to which employees believe the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al. 1986). It was measured using a three-item scale adapted from House (1981).

Supervisory Support is defined as the degree of consideration expressed by the immediate manager or supervisor for his or her subordinates (Michaels and Spector 1982). A three-item scale adapted from House (1981) was used to measure this construct.

Job Motivation is defined as the degree to which the employee psychologically identifies with his or her job (Kanungo 1982). It was measured using a three-item scale drawn from Iverson (1996).

Commitment to Customer Service is defined as the relative propensity of an employee to engage in continuous improvement and to exert effort on the job for the benefit of customers (Peccei and Rosenthal 1997). We employ a six-item measure of the construct adapted from Peccei and Rosenthal (1997).

TABLE 1
Correlation Matrix and Summary Statistics (N = 115)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Store size															
2. Promotion opportunity	.13														
3. Job autonomy	.24	.08													
4. Job security	.09	.31	.33												
5. Distributive justice	.14	.52	.40	.39											
6. Team orientation	.09	.46	.27	.14	.44										
7. Coworker support	-.03	.44	.32	.26	.48	.66									
8. Job routinization	-.09	-.17	-.23	-.31	-.23	-.44	-.20								
9. Role ambiguity	.01	-.27	-.37	-.40	-.35	-.36	-.40	.12							
10. Resource adequacy	.23	.35	.04	.07	.21	.33	.43	-.15	-.22						
11. Organizational support	.01	.29	.18	.25	.50	.46	.42	-.36	-.21	.39					
12. Supervisory support	.11	.47	.27	.17	.45	.39	.35	-.20	-.35	.14	.37				
13. Customer complaints	.07	.17	-.01	.26	.04	-.05	.09	-.21	-.27	-.22	-.04	.20			
14. Commitment to customer service	-.28	.15	.14	.35	.23	.36	.46	-.38	-.26	-.06	-.32	.25	.03		
15. Job motivation	.05	.20	.07	.46	.36	.39	.23	-.37	-.37	.16	.37	.10	.17	.33	
Mean	7.22	3.34	3.49	4.03	3.03	3.50	3.79	2.12	2.02	3.61	2.93	3.79	6.03	3.81	2.99
Standard deviation	3.78	.49	.47	.39	.65	.51	.52	.44	.42	.43	.50	.63	3.97	.40	.52
Cronbach's alpha ^a	—	.73	.83	.79	.89	.84	.70	.70	.64	.51	.72	.91	—	.89	.81
Composite reliability	—	.75	—	—	—	.86	—	—	—	—	.74	.93	—	.89	.82
Average variance extracted	—	.50	—	—	—	.67	—	—	—	—	.50	.81	—	.57	.60
η^2	—	.38	.25	.38	.33	.37	.28	.25	.34	.34	.43	.40	—	.40	.32
r_{wg}	—	.97	.94	.96	.94	.95	.95	.95	.95	.97	.95	.92	—	.99	.95

NOTE: Correlations greater than .17 are significant at the $p < .05$ level.

a. For two-item scales, interitem correlations have been reported (Cortina 1993).

A *Customer Complaint* is defined as negative customer feedback provided at the organizational level—in this instance, the store level. Customer complaints, in this study, comprised customer feedback provided formally to store management either in written form or verbally (i.e., person-to-person or by telephone). In both cases, the complaint was formally recorded and disseminated regularly among full-time staff at the ASM level and above during monthly staff meetings. In this study, we do not identify the specific nature of the customer complaint; however, most comments pertained to issues such as customer service, product availability, store policy, and service recovery. Irrespective of the nature of the complaint, the feedback process is mediated by the store. Data for the complaints variable were drawn from company archives for a 3-month period prior to the administration of the survey.

The literature was consulted in deriving measures for the *control variables*, coworker support (House 1981), promotion opportunity (Price and Mueller 1981), resource adequacy (Iverson 1992), job autonomy (Peccei and Rosenthal 1997), job security (Oldham et al. 1986), job routinization (Price and Mueller 1981), role ambiguity (Rizzo et al. 1970), distributive justice (Price and Mueller 1986), and team orientation (Hult and Ferrell 1997). We also included store size (i.e., number of employees) as a control variable.

ANALYSIS

Unit of Analysis and Aggregation

The data for the independent and dependent variables were collected from store employees, while the complaints variable was a store-level measure. As respondents were nested within stores, aggregation of employee-level data was deemed appropriate to match the levels of analysis (Klein, Dansereau, and Hall 1994). We employed two statistical analyses to check if this aggregation procedure was appropriate. First, using the eta-squared (η^2) statistics (James 1982), we tested whether any two employees within the same store are more similar than those who are in different stores. Eta-squared (η^2) values that exceeded the threshold of .20 (Georgopoulos 1986) indicated that store-level data aggregation was appropriate. Second, we computed within-store agreement with the use of r_{wg} (James, Demaree and Wolf 1984). The r_{wg} exceeded the threshold of .70, which indicated a high level of within-store agreement among respondents. Overall, these findings suggested that store-level data aggregation was appropriate (Table 1).

Measurement Validation

We employed exploratory factor analysis to purify the measurement items for each construct, based on poor factor loadings ($.40$) and/or cross-loadings ($.40$). Initial results revealed that several items loaded poorly on their respective scales and/or had high cross-loadings. Consequently, we deleted these items from their respective scales. We then subjected all the scale items from all variables to a second principal component analysis. Exploratory factor analysis resulted in 13 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, which explained 86 percent of the total variance. The first factor explained 28 percent of the variance, and there was no general factor in the unrotated factor structure (e.g., Podsakoff and Organ 1986). These findings also suggest that common method bias was not a significant threat to interpreting the results of hypotheses.

Next, we further validated our measures via confirmatory factor analysis. Our proposed model consisted of 13 multi-item constructs with a total of 35 indicators. Given a sample size of 115 stores, we were not able to employ the standard procedures of measurement validation for multi-item scales. This would violate the conventional wisdom of maintaining an adequate parameter-to-sample size ratio of at least 1:5 (Bentler and Chou 1987). In our model, the number of parameters to be estimated was well above 140, which required at least a sample of 700 observations. One possible technique to resolve this is to divide the model's multi-item constructs into theoretically plausible groups and to run separate measurement models for these groups (Bentler and Chou 1987). We followed this recommendation (see appendix).

We estimated two confirmatory factor models (measurement models) in LISREL 8.3 using the maximum likelihood method (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1996). Measurement Model 1 included control constructs only (i.e., job routinization, role ambiguity, promotion opportunity, resource adequacy, job security, job autonomy, distributive justice, team orientation, and coworker support). Measurement Model 2 included the main constructs of this study (i.e., organizational support, supervisory support, job motivation, and commitment to customer service). The results of the confirmatory factor analyses indicated that the measurement models provided very good fit to the data: (1) Model 1: $\chi^2(134) = 263.9$, Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) = .90, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = .93, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .95, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .06 and (2) Model 2: $\chi^2(84) = 151.2$, GFI = .91, TLI = .93, CFI = .94, RMSEA = .06.

We employed a series of previously suggested procedures to check for convergent validity (Bagozzi and Yi 1988) and discriminant validity (Anderson and Gerbing 1988; Fornell and Larcker 1981). The convergent validity of the scales was supported; the estimated coefficients of all the indicators were significant, and the estimates for the

average variance extracted were higher than .50 (Bagozzi and Yi 1988). Likewise, all the tests for discriminant validity were supportive. That is, no confidence intervals of the correlations for the constructs (ϕ values) included 1.0 ($p < .05$) (Anderson and Gerbing 1988), and the square of the intercorrelations between two constructs, ϕ^2 , was less than the average variance extracted estimates of the two constructs for all pairs of constructs (Fornell and Larcker 1981).¹ Table 1 shows the reliability coefficient of the constructs and intercorrelations between constructs employed in this study.

Hypotheses Testing

We tested our hypotheses using a hierarchical moderated regression analysis in three steps (i.e., three models). Model 1 regressed the dependent variable on control variables only. Model 2 included control variables plus the hypothesized main effects. Finally, Model 3 included control variables, main effects, plus the hypothesized interaction terms. We mean-centered all main effects variables to minimize the threat of multicollinearity in equations where we had included interaction terms (Aiken and West 1991). We tested for collinearity among variables by calculating the variance inflation factor (VIF) for each of the regression coefficients. Calculations of VIF ranged from a low of 1.27 to a high of 3.29. These were well below the cutoff figure of 10 recommended by Neter, Wasserman, and Kutner (1985).

Before presenting our findings, two points are worth noting. First, we use a one-tailed test for significance for the hypothesized main and interaction effects. These are directional hypotheses for which either a positive or negative effect is proposed on the basis of a strong theoretical rationale. A two-tailed test is employed for nondirectional associations (i.e., between control variables and other variables in the model) (Robinson 1988). Second, we report the unstandardized coefficients and the corresponding t -values, as they are neither affected by "changes in the means or zero points of the variables" nor by the "addition of arbitrary constants to the variables in the model" (Allison 1977:144-148).

RESULTS

Job Motivation

Table 2 shows that 4 of the 10 control variables were found to be significantly related to job motivation. Specifically, role ambiguity ($\beta = -.24$) and job autonomy ($\beta = -.24$) were negatively and significantly related to job motivation, whereas job security ($\beta = .37$) and team orientation ($\beta = .37$) were positively and significantly related to job motivation.

TABLE 2
Hierarchical Moderated Regression Analysis (Dependent Variable = Job Motivation)

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	b	t-Value	b	t-Value	b	t-Value
Control variables						
Store size	.01	0.32	.01	0.44	.01	0.28
Job routinization	-.14	-1.58	-.10	-1.09	-.11	-1.13
Role ambiguity	-.22	-2.42*	-.24	-2.41*	-.22	-2.10*
Promotion opportunity	-.22	-2.21*	-.17	-1.64	-.17	-1.65
Resource adequacy	-.03	-0.30	-.03	-0.28	-.06	-0.52
Job security	.40	4.37***	.37	3.92***	.37	3.92***
Job autonomy	-.28	-3.03**	-.24	-2.61**	-.24	-2.49*
Distributive justice	.21	2.06*	.18	1.68	.18	1.65
Team orientation	.37	3.04**	.37	2.92**	.37	2.90**
Coworker support	-.15	-1.36	-.18	-1.65	-.16	-1.39
Main effects						
Organizational support			.18	1.79*	.19	1.86*
Supervisory support			.18	1.89*	.17	1.72*
Customer complaints			-.06	-0.63	-.08	-0.80
Interaction effects						
Supervisory Support \times Complaints					.07	0.64
Organizational Support \times Complaints					.10	0.99
R^2	.44		.46		.47	
F	7.91***		6.51***		5.72***	
ΔR^2	—		.03		.01	
ΔF	—		1.97*		.78	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2 (Model 2) shows that organizational support ($\beta = .18$) was positively and significantly related to job motivation, supporting Hypothesis 1. Similarly, supervisory support ($\beta = .18$) was found to be positively and significantly related to job motivation. Consequently, Hypothesis 3 was supported. Overall, Model 2 explained 46 percent of variance in job motivation. Inclusion of interaction terms in the model did not cause a significant change in the explanatory power of Model 3 over Model 2 ($\Delta R^2 = .01$, ns). Indeed, the interaction effects of organizational support and supervisory support and customer complaints were not significantly related to job motivation. Consequently, Hypotheses 6a and 6c were not supported.

Commitment to Customer Service

The results (Table 3) indicated that coworker support ($\beta = .33$) and job security ($\beta = .32$) were positively and significantly related to commitment to customer service, whereas store size ($\beta = -.06$) and job routinization ($\beta = -.27$) were negatively and significantly related to commitment to customer service.

Organizational support and supervisory support were not significantly related to commitment to customer service. Thus, Hypotheses 2 and 4 were not supported. Contrary to expectations, the results revealed that job

motivation was not significantly related to commitment to customer service. Hence, Hypothesis 5 was not supported.

The inclusion of interaction terms explained a significant portion of the variance in commitment to customer service (Model 3: $\Delta R^2 = .05$, $p < .01$). We found that customer complaints had a significant positive interaction with supervisory support ($\beta = .28$) and a significant negative interaction with organizational support ($\beta = -.22$). These findings supported Hypotheses 6b and 6d. Overall, the model explained 55 percent of the variance in commitment to customer service.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

This study provides a starting point for understanding the situational or external influences (e.g., customer complaints) that might moderate the strength of the organization-employee relationship. Two important findings emerge from this study. First, it provides partial support for a positive relationship between internal relationships and salesperson work attitudes and behaviors. Second, it demonstrates support for the moderating effects of customer complaints on intraorganizational relationships and their association with commitment to customer service.

TABLE 3
Hierarchical Moderated Regression Analysis (Dependent Variable = Commitment to Customer Service)

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	b	t-Value	b	t-Value	b	t-Value
Control variables						
Store size	-.08	-3.74***	-.08	-3.58***	-.06	-3.06**
Job routinization	-.25	-2.79**	-.29	-3.09**	-.27	-3.05**
Role ambiguity	-.01	-0.12	-.03	-0.31	-.11	-1.12
Promotion opportunity	-.14	-1.40	-.16	-1.53	-.16	-1.65
Resource adequacy	-.01	-0.05	-.10	-0.96	-.14	-1.30
Job security	.26	2.78**	.29	2.88**	.32	3.37***
Job autonomy	-.03	-0.29	-.05	-0.50	.01	0.14
Distributive justice	-.03	-0.32	-.13	-1.20	-.16	-1.53
Team orientation	.06	.50	-.06	-.45	-.01	-.01
Coworker support	.37	3.38***	.42	3.90***	.33	3.04**
Main effects						
Organizational support			-.01	-0.04	-.02	-0.21
Supervisory support			.27	2.85**	.15	1.53
Customer complaints			-.21	-2.38**	-.27	-3.08**
Job motivation			.10	1.01	.09	0.98
Interaction effects						
Supervisory Support \times Complaints					.28	2.62**
Organizational Support \times Complaints					-.22	-2.45**
R^2	.44		.50		.55	
F	7.98***		6.99***		7.44***	
ΔR^2	—		.06		.05	
ΔF	—		2.96*		5.80**	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

As anticipated, the level of customer complaints was found to moderate negatively the relationship between organizational support and commitment to customer service, while having a positive moderating effect on the relationship between supervisory support and commitment to customer service. The interaction between customer complaints and both the supervisory support–job motivation and organizational support–job motivation relationship were insignificant.

Our initial expectation was that organizational support would have a positive direct relationship with both job motivation and commitment to customer service. This was supported only for job motivation. Sales employees are more likely to view their job with greater enthusiasm when they perceive their contribution is valued by the organization. This is further supported by the significant associations between job motivation and job security, role ambiguity, and distributive justice—other elements of the psychological contract between employees and the organization (Rousseau 1990). On the other hand, organizational support does not lead to a greater commitment to customer service activities. This is possibly due to the distance between “coalface” customer service behaviors and head office initiatives. In addition, it is likely that ASMs—as entry-level managers—have been promoted on the basis of their already high levels of customer service.

Consistent with expectations, we found a significant, positive relationship between supervisory support and job motivation. Clearly, the encouragement and support from immediate supervisors is valued by employees who respond with a more positive outlook toward their job responsibilities.

As anticipated, when customer complaints increased, the strength of the positive relationship between organizational support and commitment to customer service was reduced. Sales employees become “sandwiched” between the expectations of senior management and the customers they serve. Supportive organizational initiatives, as a means for building sales force customer orientation, are seen as ineffectual by employees who observe an increase in customer complaints despite the organization’s best intentions and efforts.

Consistent with expectations, customer complaints had a positive moderating effect on the supervisory support–commitment to customer service relationship. Supervisory support—a form of social support—provides the means by which individuals can exercise some control over their working environment (Daniels and Guppy 1994). In the context of this study, store-based employees seek control over the stressor of increasing customer complaints.

Contrary to expectations, no moderating effect of customer complaints was observed on the supervisory

support–job motivation and the organizational support–job motivation relationship. Neither forms of support are critical in buffering sales employees' job attitudes against external stressors. In other words, employees, in this study, elect to deal with the stress of customer complaints by taking a problem-focused (i.e., active attempts to get task help) rather than an emotion-focused (i.e., avoidance behaviors, selective attention) approach to eliminating job stressors (Srivastava and Sager 1999). This may also stem from our somewhat circumscribed measure of complaints. Supervisory support, for example, may have a stronger impact on job motivation in the event of complaints made directly to ASMs during the shopping experience.

The foregoing discussion highlights something of an ironic tension in the application of the internal marketing philosophy. Internal marketing initiatives often elevate customer importance to high levels. Through the rhetoric of consumer sovereignty and the importance of customer-oriented behaviors, organizations bestow on the customer a high degree of referent power or authority (Ilgen, Fisher, and Taylor 1979). At the same time, organizations attempt to increase their own referent power via the same internal marketing initiatives (e.g., employment of high-performance human resource management practices, forging of greater trust and commitment). As the referent power of both the customer and management is increased, customer service personnel face the potential for high role conflict. In effect, there is a "double jeopardy" situation created by internal marketing that potentially will be exposed by complaining customers. Piercy (1995) highlighted this tension, noting that customer complaining behavior is likely to affect sales employees' future behaviors and comfort factor within the organization. Blancero and Johnson (2001) confirmed this possibility, proposing that salesperson performance is delicately poised between the feedback from customers and the nature of the salesperson's relationship with the organization.

Two main implications for management emerge from this study. First, the findings encourage management to develop supportive internal relationships with frontline sales staff through the provision of resources (e.g., training, information technology systems, flexible work arrangements) and social support (e.g., contact and communications). Of particular importance is the building of supportive supervisory relations, not only for engendering motivation among employees but also for buffering sales staff from the effects of customer complaining. For management, this might have implications for the selection and training of supervisors, particularly with regard to helping sales staff deal with organizational stressors.

A second implication relates to the way in which complaints are used within the organization. Customer feedback must be seen to have a meaningful effect on the configuration of business policies and practices. If this is

done, there is likely to be a reduction in conflict between organizational policies—including the way in which support for employees is demonstrated—and the desires and preferences of customers.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has some limitations. First, the sample was drawn from one organization in the retail industry. While this allowed us to control for interindustry differences, there are limits to our ability to apply these findings to other industries and organizations, especially given that complaining and satisfaction rates can vary significantly across industries (Grønholdt, Martensen, and Kristensen 2000). This might have affected the extent to which the hypothesized *positive* moderating effect of complaints on the supervisory support–commitment to customer service relationship was observed. In other organizations, supervisors may not act independently from the head office to the degree that was apparent in our sample. In such organizations, supervisors might be perceived more as "organizational mouthpieces" than sources of social and professional support in the event of customer complaints.

Another limitation relates to the measure of customer complaints used in the study. We were unable to determine to which aspect of the organization the complaints were directed. That is, complaints may have pertained to product quality, customer service, delays in queues, failure to stock a particular item, insufficient assistance, among others. It is plausible that a person will be more affected by complaints directed at variables over which they have control, such as personal characteristics or their behaviors, rather than store- or product-related factors. Further to this, we did not measure employees' locus of control, which might have shed additional light on the likely attributions employees make when faced with customer complaints.

From a methodological point of view, we note two limitations. The absence of a longitudinal research design means that we are unable to make firm conclusions about causality between dependent and independent variables. Further, a study of organization or employee feedback and its consequent effects should be considered over a number of iterations to obtain a more concrete understanding of the hypothesized relationships and interactions between variables. Finally, despite undertaking statistical checks for common methods variance, one cannot definitively rule it out as a possibility. In our study, for example, it would have been desirable to measure customer service performance by consulting customers of the organization.

Nonetheless, our study begins to outline some potential issues involved in integrating customer feedback within organizations. Future studies might distinguish further

between the nature of customer complaints and their differential effects. As noted, customer complaints about factors outside the salesperson's control could have different effects to complaints attributable to individual sales employees. Considering the way in which complaints filter into organizations (e.g., formal and considered letters of complaint versus in-store quarrels) and the nature of the complainant (e.g., loyal customer versus serial complainer) might also offer some additional insight.

Another fruitful direction for research would include additional efforts to conceive, and empirically measure, internal relational networks within organizations. In this study, we have focused on the provision of support. Future studies might consider additional relational factors such as trust, commitment, information sharing, and norms, among other things. Indeed, future studies could pursue more comprehensive approaches to measuring the nature of the psychological contract between employees and their organizations.

CONCLUSION

The development of strong internal relationship networks within organizations is an important condition for successful customer-organization relations. Adopting a relational approach to internal marketing is a meaningful way in which this concept can be implemented within organizations. The nature of the association between internal relationship strength and job performance, however, will be affected differently by the dissemination of customer complaints throughout the organization. In particular, as customer complaints increase, the effectiveness of the employee-organization relationship is limited, while the supervisor-employee relationship becomes a more important determinant of sales staff job behaviors.

APPENDIX

<i>Measure</i>	<i>Factor Loading</i>	<i>t-Value</i>
MODEL 1		
Organizational Support		
1. The [business name] organization is very concerned about the welfare of its employees	.874 ^a	—
2. Senior management at [business name] (i.e., head/state office) is willing to listen to work-related problems.	.406	3.64
3. I can rely on the [business name] organization when things get difficult at work.	.758	6.62
Supervisory Support		
1. My supervisor is very concerned about the welfare of those under him or her.	.851 ^a	—

2. My supervisor is willing to listen to work-related problems.	.913	13.21
3. My supervisor can be relied on when things get difficult at work.	.934	13.19

Job Motivation

1. The major satisfaction in my life comes from my job.	.741 ^a	—
2. Most of my interests are centered on my job.	.703	6.81
3. I am very much involved personally in my work.	.871	7.67

Commitment to Customer Service

1. In our store, we are always working to improve the quality of service we give to customers.	.716	6.52
2. We have specific ideas about how to improve the service we give to customers.	.580	5.26
3. We often make suggestions about how to improve customer service in our store.	.698	6.52
4. We put a lot of effort into our jobs to try to satisfy customers.	.806	7.84
5. No matter how we feel, we always put ourselves out for every customer we serve.	.838	11.33
6. We often go out of our way to help customers.	.843 ^a	—

MODEL 2

Coworker Support

1. My coworkers can be relied on when things get difficult on my job.	b	
2. My coworkers are willing to listen to my job-related problems.	.863	8.79
3. My coworkers are helpful to me in getting the job done.	.805 ^a	—

Team Orientation

1. A team spirit exists in our ranks.	.899 ^a	—
2. Around here, cross-functional teamwork is the common way of working rather than the exception to the norm.	.728	9.18
3. There is a commonality of purpose in our store.	.823	11.13
4. There is total agreement on our store's vision across all levels and departments within our store.	b	
5. Our store is committed to sharing its vision for the organization with other [business name] stores.	b	

Job Routinization

1. My job has variety. (r)	.703 ^a	—
2. The duties in my job are repetitious (e.g., do the same thing over and over again).	b	
3. I have the opportunity to do a number of different things in my job. (r)	.906	6.49

Promotion Opportunity

1. Promotions are regular in my store.	.644 ^a	—
2. I am in a dead-end job. (r)	b	
3. There is a good chance to get ahead in my store.	.852	6.04
4. Promotions in my store are based on merit.	.607	5.26

Distributive Justice

1. I am rewarded fairly for the amount of effort I put in.	.947 ^a	—
2. I am rewarded fairly considering the responsibilities that I have.	.938	13.35
3. I am rewarded fairly considering my education and training.	b	

Role Ambiguity

1. I generally know what my responsibilities are. (r)	b	
2. I know exactly what is expected of me. (r)	.678 ^a	—
3. I typically receive a clear explanation of what is to be done. (r)	.939	5.91

Job Autonomy

1. I can use my own personal judgment in carrying out my job.	b	
2. I have the freedom to decide what I do on my job.	.766	8.42
3. I can make my own decisions in carrying out my job.	.977 ^a	—

Job Security

1. I am confident that I will be able to work for [business name] organization as long as I wish.	.987 ^a	—
2. My job is a secure one.	.797	8.42
3. If my present job was eliminated, I would be offered another one by [business name].	b	

Resource Adequacy

1. I have adequate equipment and systems to do my job well.	b	
2. I have enough support from my manager to do my job well.	.828	4.24
3. I have enough support from the [business name] organization to do my job well.	.443 ^a	—

NOTE: (r) denotes a reverse-coded item.

a. Item was fixed to 1 to set the scale.

b. Items deleted after the initial run of exploratory factor analysis or confirmatory factor analysis based on poor factor loadings, high cross-loadings, and/or high modification indices.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors thank P. Rajan Varadarjan, George Zinkhan, Kwaku Atuahene-Gima, and the three reviewers

for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article. They would also like to thank Jeff Wapling for supporting the collection of data.

NOTE

1. Cortina (1993) noted that "in a unidimensional scale an average item intercorrelation of .50 yields alphas that are acceptable by convention regardless of number of items" (p. 103). In our sample, intercorrelations for the respective scale items were well above .50. Consequently, given the limited number of items, the reliabilities of the two-item scales were high.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Simon J. Bell (s.bell@jims.cam.ac.uk) (Ph.D., University of Melbourne) is a university lecturer in marketing at the Judge

Institute of Management, Business School of the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom. His research has appeared in the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, the *Journal of Retailing*, the *Journal of Business Research*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, and *Marketing Theory*, among others. His areas of research interest include organizational learning, sales force management and internal marketing, services and relationship marketing, and corporate social responsibility.

Bülent Mengüç (Ph.D., Marmara University, Turkey) is currently an associate professor of marketing at Brock University, Canada. His research has appeared in the *Journal of Retailing*, the *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, the *Journal of Business Research*, the *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, the *Journal of Business Ethics*, and the *European Journal of Marketing*, among others. His areas of research interest include sales force management, relationship marketing, and cross-cultural research methodology.

Sara L. Stefani (B.Comm.(Hons), University of Melbourne) is a customer satisfaction analyst at Telstra Corporation Ltd., Australia.