



National College of Ireland

‘An Exploratory Study of Customer Service Workers Experience of Challenging Behaviour’

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A Thesis

**Submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Human
Resource Management**

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Abstract

The title of this dissertation is ‘An Exploratory Study of Customer Service Workers Experience of Challenging Behaviour’. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of challenging behaviour from customers on customer service workers. It explores how challenging behaviour presents, the impact it may have on employees, and its possible effect on their self-efficacy in relation to how they carry out the functions of their role. This study also looks at the concept of resources and discusses how they may be lost or gained, and what employees may do to protect their resources. It also considers the Emotional Intelligence of customer service workers, and whether this mediates how incidents of challenging behaviour play out, and how employees cope after the incidents themselves.

The Research Design for this study was qualitative and involved conducting six semi-structured interviews. The data was analysed thematically and generated eight themes and ten sub-themes. The overarching themes centred on Communication, Experience and Learning and the Support of Colleagues and Management. The findings of the study indicate that in incidents of low-level challenging behaviour, employees were upset in the immediate aftermath, but in the long-term learned from the experience. In incidents of a more intense or volatile nature, employees were upset for a longer time and questioned themselves and their abilities. The support of colleagues and management was extremely important during the incidents themselves and afterwards.

This study proposes that in the customer service context, the effect of challenging behaviour cannot be viewed simply in the context of maintaining or driving customer service standards. It is far more complex than ‘The Customer is Always Right’. This research recommends that the feelings of employees, particularly after an incident of challenging behaviour are important to an organization. It is hoped that the findings and recommendations of this study will help contribute to future best practice in the Customer Service Context.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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Research Students Declaration Form
(*Thesis/Author Declaration Form*)

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Material submitted for award

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- B. I declare that all verbatim extracts contained in the thesis have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged. Yes
- C. I agree to my thesis being deposited in the NCI Library online open access repository NORMA. Yes
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‘We must find time to stop and thank the people who make a difference in our lives’

John Fitzgerald Kennedy

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List of Abbreviations

COR Conservation of Resources

E.I. Emotional Intelligence

SCTSocial Cognitive Theory

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Research Idea

The title of this study is ‘An Exploratory Study of Customer Service Workers Experience of Challenging Behaviour’. Its origin can be found three years ago in 2018, when the researcher read an article that discussed the response of a well-known Dublin café to a negative online review. The response did not apologise to the customer or offer compensation for their negative experience. Instead, they challenged the customer on their own behaviour in the café. This prompted the researcher to think of this response almost as a provocation to the adage, ‘The Customer Is Always Right’. It also prompted the Researcher to think of times where she worked in various customer service contexts and witnessed and received abusive or challenging behaviour and the varying levels of support she received at the time. This inspired the researcher to look further into this area where she identified a gap in current literature on how challenging behaviour impacts employees. This led to the development of the research idea and subsequent study ‘An Exploratory Study of Customer Service Worker’s Experience of Challenging Behaviour’.

1.2 Research Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study is to explore the phenomenon of challenging behaviour from customers, and how it may impact on customer service workers. The objective of this research piece is to access and emphasise the experience of customer service workers in relation to this phenomenon. It will investigate how challenging behaviour presents and its possible effects on the employees who work most frequently and closely with customers. It will consider the effects of challenging behaviour in the context of employees’ self-efficacy relating to their role. It will also look at the concept of resources, how these can be lost and acquired and what employees may do to protect them. Furthermore, this study will explore the role the emotional intelligence of the employee plays in how incidents of challenging behaviour unfold, and how they manage them afterwards.

1.3 Rationale for Research

The researcher observed when reviewing books, articles and journals in preparation for this thesis, that many studies have been conducted in relation to challenging customer behaviour in customer service environments.

However the researcher noted, the majority of these studies were quantitative, and framed within the context of maintaining customer service standards within an organization. This

view was correlated by Garcia, Restubog, Lu, Amarnani, Wang and Capezio (2019), when they made the observation in their 2019 study, that surprisingly little work has been done in the realm of how employees process and make sense of challenging behaviour from customers. The researcher also felt there was an absence of qualitative study in this area in general.

The emphasis of this study is to access the experience of customer service workers of challenging behaviour by conducting six semi-structured interviews. The researcher sought to uncover their perspective on challenging behaviour, how it presented for them, if their self efficacy was lowered as a result of the experience and how it impacted upon them. This study hopes to increase awareness of how challenging behaviour may affect employees and hopes that this study and the recommendations outlined in Chapter 5, will assist in informing organisations on how best to support employees and develop resilience after such incidents take place.

1.4 Research Structure

- **Chapter 1-Introduction**

This chapter introduces the thesis ‘An Exploratory Study of Customer Service Workers Experience of Challenging Behaviour’ by firstly providing a background to the genesis of the study. It outlines the aims and objectives of the thesis and explains the rationale behind it. It will also lay out the structure of the study.

- **Chapter 2-The Literature Review**

This chapter seeks to discuss the literature reviewed by the researcher in relation to this study. It will present the different definitions of challenging behaviour. It will also consider the possible effect of challenging behaviour on employees through Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (1986), Hobfoll’s Conservation of Resources Theory (1989) and Albert Bandura’s Moral Disengagement Theory (1986). This chapter will also introduce Emotional Intelligence, using definitions from Salovey and Mayer (1990) and Daniel Goleman (1998). It will propose why the researcher perceives Emotional Intelligence to be a mediator in incidents of challenging behaviour and how employees are impacted and cope in the aftermath.

- **Chapter 3- Methodology**

This chapter sets out the research methodology pursued in this thesis. The study was qualitative in nature and informed by a constructivist, interpretivist approach. The mode of data collection was the semi-structured interview, and the sample selected

was small and purposive. The researcher also discussed the analysis of data in this chapter, along with methodological rigour, limitations and de-limitations and ethical considerations and concluded with a chapter summary.

- **Chapter 4- Findings**

This chapter presents the findings of the study and the eight themes and ten sub-themes that generated from the data. The eight themes are Communication, Experience/Learning, Education, Employee Experiences in different environments and contexts, Behaviour, Support of Colleagues and Management, Impact on Employee and Emotional Intelligence of the Employee.

- **Chapter 5- Conclusions and Recommendations**

The final chapter of this study provides a discussion and summary of the findings outlined in Chapter 4. It will then put forward a series of recommendations in the context of customer service workers. It will set forth a guide for organisations to implement these recommendations and conclude the study in line with its aims and objectives. This chapter closes with a personal learning statement from the researcher, reflecting on her learning journey while conducting this study.

- A full reference list containing all resources referred to throughout this study.
- Appendices Section

2. The Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The Literature Review can be defined as the part of a study where the connection is made between the literature the researcher draws upon, and its position in the mechanics of the study itself (Ridley, 2012). This chapter seeks to discuss the literature in relation to the study ‘An Exploratory Study of Customer Service Workers Experience of Challenging Behaviour’. The aim of this study is to explore the impact challenging behaviour from customers has on workers in the customer service context.

Customer Service workers can be defined as those who ‘provide face to face services to customers via face to face or voice interactions’ (Cheng, Dong, Guo and Peng, 2020, p.1). They are often the first person a customer meets, and are the face of the service provider. It can be said they ‘are the company to the customer’ (Bowers, Martin and Luker, 1990, p. 58). The attitudes and perspectives of both the employee and the customer, impact on the perceived value and quality of the service offered (Bowers et al., 1990). However, the maxim ‘The Customer is Always Right’, devised by Gordon Selfridge over one hundred years ago, contrasts sharply with this statement (Mosley, 2007). While this adage has been challenged in recent years, and construed as oversimplified (Arusy, 2019), it is still prevalent and much quoted in the context of customer service today (Mosley, 2007).

Customer service workers are particularly susceptible to challenging behaviour from customers as they interact most frequently with them, in roles that can be described as boundary spanning (Hann, Bonn and Cho, 2016). In an environment where the customer is always right, this can increase pressure and ignore the effect, both short and long term, that challenging behaviour has on employees (Cheng et al., 2020). It may also encourage customers to feel entitled to treat customer service workers in any manner they wish (Garcia, Restubog, Lu, Amarnani, Wang and Capezio, 2019).

The researcher chose this topic, as much of the literature in the area looks at the impact of challenging customer behaviour on employees, in the context of managing employee behaviour to maintain and drive customer service standards. Garcia et al. commented in their 2019 study that ‘surprisingly little research has unpacked how employees make sense of the ways customers treated them’ (Garcia et al., 2019 p. 204).

However, the relationship between challenging behaviour and the consequences it has for employees is one that is a complex phenomenon and is contingent upon several underlying factors. The service encounter itself is one that has many variables (Varca, 2004). This is because different employees respond to challenging situations in different ways. They may also differ on what type of behaviour they interpret as challenging. There are also differing levels of challenging behaviour.

This chapter considers the literature surrounding the effect challenging behaviour has on employees, with Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and Bandura's Moral Disengagement Theory (1986) serving as the principal theories discussed.

Social Cognitive Theory will look at the effect challenging behaviour has on the self-efficacy of employees and will countenance that challenging incidents can reduce self-efficacy but can also strengthen it. Hobfoll's COR theory will look at the initial effect challenging behaviour has and seeks to explain why employees may avoid the customer after a difficult incident. Albert Bandura's Moral Disengagement Theory goes one step further and explores the instance where an employee actively acts against customer interests.

Before concluding the chapter, the researcher will explain the concept of Emotional Intelligence, and how the emotional intelligence of employees can act as a determinant in the effect challenging behaviour has upon them. It will also look at ways organizations can help develop emotional intelligence. This review will first look at the concept of challenging behaviour itself, what it encompasses, and will then proceed to introduce its possible effects.

2.2 Challenging Behaviour

This literature review includes a survey of articles, books and studies, related to the area of Customer Service workers and challenging behaviour from customers. The researcher found there was no single definition of challenging behaviour itself in this context. There are several definitions used to describe challenging behaviour, and the different levels of challenging behaviour that exist.

These include 'Customer Incivility' a phrase that describes low level or uncivil behaviour, 'Customer Mistreatment' which describes behaviour that is more aggressive in nature, and the term 'Customer Deviance' which is used to describe incidents that are violent or threatening.

‘Customer Incivility’ can be defined as ‘low intensity deviant behaviour perpetrated by someone in a customer role with ambiguous intent to harm an employee and in violation of social norms of mutual respect and courtesy’ (Cheng et al., 2020 p. 2). It is subtle and involves rude behaviour such as insulting or insensitive comments. Customers who are uncivil, are not specifically motivated to harm an employee, however, their behaviour towards them is none-the-less, rude and disrespectful (Cheng et al., 2020).

‘Customer Mistreatment’ can be characterised as ‘the unfair and low quality treatment of employees by customers, where customers treat employees in an unreasonable, demeaning, aggressive or disrespectful manner’ (Garcia et al., 2019, p. 203). It is more intense than customer incivility and can involve misuse of power or acts of aggression (Cheng et al., 2020).

‘Customer Deviance’ describes incidents of challenging behaviour where a threat is made to the safety of an employee and they are targeted specifically by the customer. It can be described as ‘any act by a customer, in an online or offline environment that deprives the firm, its employees or other customers, of resources, safety, image or an otherwise successful experience’ (Fombelle, Voorhees, Jenkins, Sidaoui, Benoit, Gruber, Gustafsson and Abosag, 2020, p. 387). Customer Deviance can involve verbal or physical harassment of an employee and threatens both physical and psychological sense of security. It can occur without provocation. In recent years this also encompasses online trolling (Fombelle et al., 2020).

For this purpose of this study, the researcher will not be primarily concerned with customer deviance and will concentrate on lower levels of challenging behaviour, such as rudeness, not listening, shouting and swearing. However, the effect challenging behaviour has, whether it is low level or high level, a one-off incident, or repeated behaviour, is one that is potentially quite negative. Service workers, who experience abusive behaviour from customers, may feel exhausted from existing in a state of emotional regulation throughout the experience, and suffer from a loss of resources afterwards (Goussinky, 2011). The employee may feel stressed and burned out (Garcia et al., 2019).

They may avoid challenging customers or tasks or actively work against the customers’ interests. This has negative consequences for the organization they work for.

However, it can be argued some elements of the experience can have a positive effect in the long term. Alternatively, they may also learn from the experience and gain knowledge and skills that assist them going forward in their role and in life.

When looking at the effect of this behaviour, the researcher will first look at Social Cognitive Theory and the possible consequences of challenging behaviour on self-efficacy.

2.3 Social Cognitive Theory (SCT).

The concept of Self-efficacy is central to Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986). Self- efficacy is similar conceptually to self-esteem, but different, in that self-esteem pertains to self-worth across a variety of levels, both personal and professional. Self-efficacy relates specifically to an individual's belief in their ability to carry out a specific task, in a specific context (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998). It has two principal dimensions, in that self-efficacy beliefs hinge upon the personal efficacy of an individual and their outcome expectancy i.e. the individual's belief that their actions will achieve a positive result (Bandura, 1977).

An employee whose self-efficacy has been lowered by an aggressive customer, or a negative review, may doubt they have the ability to succeed in a task or role. Conversely, an employee who deals successfully with a challenging customer, or observes a colleague successfully handling an incident of challenging behaviour, may experience increased levels of self-efficacy. As they have been through the experience themselves and succeeded, or witnessed a co-worker prevail in a similar situation, their belief that they too can succeed is heightened (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998). These actions can be referred to as Enactive Mastery and Vicarious Learning. These are two of the four experiences or pillars that determine, self-efficacy beliefs, along with Verbal Persuasion and Psychological Arousal.

Enactive Mastery describes the process where one succeeds at a demanding task or successfully manages a difficult situation. It is the most salient of the four determinants of self-efficacy (Capa- Aydin,Uzuntiryaki-Kondakci, Ceylandag, 2018). Enactive Mastery is not simply the performance of a difficult task (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998) but rather how the individual interprets the results of the experience. If the outcome is positive, self-efficacy is enhanced.

If the outcome is perceived as unsuccessful, self-efficacy is lowered (Capa-Aydi et al., 2018). Self-Efficacy beliefs are also formed through Vicarious Learning. The self-efficacy of an employee can be fortified by watching a colleague accomplish a difficult assignment. The greater the perceived likeness between the employee, and the colleague being observed, in terms of age, gender and experience, the greater the self-efficacy becomes (Capa-Aydi et al., 2018).

The third and fourth determinants of self-efficacy beliefs are Verbal Persuasion and Psychological Arousal. Verbal Persuasion is where a colleague or peer praises or reinforces an employee. This is particularly potent when the employee believes their peer to be competent or is someone they look up to. Positive feedback supports the employee's belief they have the ability to succeed (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998). This can be particularly powerful when an employee is experiencing difficulties in work or questions their performance after a negative interaction with a customer.

The state of Psychological Arousal pertains to how an employee interprets low mood, anxiety and particularly stress, in relation to their efficacy beliefs. A stressful work environment is more likely to affect work performance negatively. An employee will feel more certain regarding their ability to achieve, when they are not pre-occupied by stress (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998).

Enactive Mastery plays a central role in the effect challenging behaviour has on customer service workers. Where an employee succeeds in dealing with an abusive customer, their self-efficacy is bolstered, and they are more likely to persevere in challenging situations when they present again. They have gained skills and resources (Cheng et al., 2020). Conversely, where an employee experiences diminished self-efficacy as a result of abusive behaviour or negative feedback, the effect may be seen in their approach to their role. They are less likely to persevere in challenging tasks and may leave exercises incomplete. They may also internalize negative outcomes and attribute these to their perceived lack of ability (Chen, 2018). In order to protect their remaining self-efficacy, they may avoid complex undertakings or demanding clients, reducing the opportunity to learn from these scenarios. They have lost resources (Cheng et al., 2020).

This concept, however, is not without challenge. Stone (1994) proposed that individuals with heightened self-efficacy become over-confident. As a result, they pay less attention to carrying out the functions of their role, and contribute less of their knowledge and resources when compared to their equivalents with lower self-efficacy.

Vancouver, Thompson and Williams, in their 2001 study, put forth the argument that performance influences an individual's self-efficacy, but self-efficacy itself, does not influence one's performance. This study posited that there are instances where self-efficacy has no effect, or even a nullifying effect on how one executes a task (Vancouver, Thompson and Williams, 2001).

When one is performing tasks effectively, they are less likely to give time and effort as they are succeeding and become complacent. In a separate study in 2002, Vancouver, Thompson, Tischner and Putka clarified this further, by putting forward the argument that high self-efficacy can inspire individuals to aim for higher goals but can also decrease motivation within a particular goal level (Vancouver, Thompson, Tischner and Putka, 2002).

This was countered by Bandura and Locke (2003), who re-iterated that in the face of difficult tasks and challenges, individuals must believe that they have what it takes to succeed. While over-confidence may lead to complacency, under-confidence may have more widespread incapacitating effects. Using various sources of Enactive Mastery and Vicarious Learning, self-efficacy can be enhanced (Bautista, 2011). It is also noteworthy that Stajkovic and Luthans 1998 Meta-analysis found a strong correspondence between self-efficacy and work-related performance recording a 28% rise in workplace performance (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998).

The next section of this literature review will look at the concept of resources, their protection preservation and attainment, through Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory (1989).

2.4 Conservation of Resources Theory

Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources theory can be defined as a model of stress and motivation that strives to explain people's behaviour after a stressful incident (Hobfoll, 1989). This theory posits, that after a stressful event, such as in this context, challenging behaviour from a customer, individuals become exposed and lose resources. Resources can be defined as Object Resources, Personal Characteristics, Conditions and Energy Resources. Object Resources refer to actual possessions such as wealth. Personal Characteristics are the personal skills and traits of an individual (Garcia et al., 2019). Individuals inherently wish to stay in control of their actions and exchanges. When presented with challenging behaviour and a breakdown in service provision, this sense of control is lost (Beh, Saftos and Cao, 2020). Conditions can refer to a work environment or work relationships. They are valued personal resources that can help replenish after a loss takes place. Energy resources pertain to energy, time and mood. This resource is important as it can facilitate regaining resources that have been lost or obtaining new resources (Beh et al., 2020).

Where an employee is the recipient of abusive behaviour from a customer, they may experience resource loss. Throughout the experience they may have to draw on their resources to regulate their emotions and work on remaining calm (Cheng et al., 2020).

They become more attuned to the resources they have left and in order to compensate for resource loss, they feel compelled to protect them (Beh et al., 2020). Protection of resources can involve employing defensive or avoidance strategies. Employees may withdraw from organizational citizenship behaviours, where workers go over and above the remit of their role in order to support customers (Garcia et al., 2019). These strategies also can reduce the employee's participation in work and their commitment to their role (Cheng at al., 2020).

An individual or employee may lose resources and conserve resources. However, they can also acquire resources (Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl and Westman, 2014). This refers to the process of learning, and gaining suitable resources, to meet workplace challenges and avoid future stress. In periods where the environment is not stressful, employees can obtain resources from two crucial sources, their colleagues and their management team (Zhou, Ma and Dong, 2017). After incidents of challenging behaviour, it may help an employee to talk about the incident with a team-mate or supervisor and discuss ways and strategies to manage difficult situations. The sharing of emotions and feelings with colleagues after a challenging incident can help alleviate the stress and negativity caused by challenging customers (Garcia et al., 2019). This in turn helps prepare an employee for incidents of a similar nature in the future, therefore, they have gained resources (Zhou et al., 2017).

Halbesleben et al., (2014) argued, however, that the concept of resources in Hobfoll's theory is one that is unclear and the resources themselves are not explicit in how they defined. Halbesleben et. al., (2014), proposed that resources fluctuate, and the value of the resource depends on the individual. The willingness to acquire a new resource, depends on the value an employee puts upon it.

Alternatively, when resources are lost, the motivation to protect remaining resources is conditional on their perceived worth to the employee. Resource loss, particularly to valued resources, is considered more pronounced, than similarly valued gains. This can initiate employees to adopt a 'prevention focus' (Halbesleben et al., 2014, p. 1351) which concentrates on minimizing resource loss. They may become strategic in the way they invest the resources they have left. In extreme situations they may also engage in aggressively defensive strategies to protect themselves. The next section of this literature review will look at defensive and avoidance mechanisms through specific tenets of Albert Bandura's Moral Disengagement Theory.

2.5 Moral Disengagement Theory

The Theory of Moral Disengagement was first introduced as an extension of Social Cognitive Theory by Albert Bandura in the mid 1980's (Bandura, 1986). This theory seeks to explain why people engage in behaviour and actions society deems immoral or wrong (Huang, Greenbaum, Bonner and Wang, 2018). The process of Moral Disengagement on a more extreme level can also be used to explain why individuals behave the way they do in atrocities, such as military or political brutality, without any apparent remorse or ethical consideration (Moore, Detert, Trevino, Baker and Mayer, 2012). It describes a cognitive state where an individual departs from moral and social norms (Seriki, Nath, Inegene and Evans, 2020).

Moral Disengagement Theory is based on eight separate cognitive elements. These elements are outlined in the table below:

Moral Justification	Unethical acts are excused, they considered to be part of the greater good
Euphemistic Labelling	Barbaric acts are re-titled, using sanitized terminology and language.
Advantageous Comparison	Unethical behaviour is compared to behaviour that is more morally reprehensible to make it appear better.
Displacement of Responsibility	Responsibility for actions are attributed to authority and leadership figures
Diffusion of Responsibility	Responsibility for one's actions are diffused to others to decrease personal responsibility
Distortion of Consequences	The seriousness of one's actions are minimized or distorted
Dehumanisation	The victim of the unethical act is not seen as human and they are not worthy of respect or moral regard
Attribution of Blame	Blame for the unethical behaviour is attributed the victim. They are seen as deserving whatever happens to them.

Moore et al., (2012) stated that specific elements of the Moral Disengagement Theory are triggered by specific environmental and contextual factors. In the context of Customer Service employees, elements of this theory can come into play after an incident of challenging or abusive behaviour from a customer. In incidents of extreme behaviour or abuse, an employee may not only avoid the customer by refusing to serve them. They also may actively work against them, by deliberately ignoring requests or giving out incorrect information. In the case of food service employees, they may even engage in forms of food contamination (Huang et al., 2018). In order to justify their actions, employees may dehumanize the customer and blame them for being in the situation they are in. This process helps the employee rationalize these acts and severs the tie between moral standards and the unethical behaviour (Moore et al., 2012). It also demonstrates the Dehumanisation and Attribution of Blame tenets in action.

Similarly in the same context of Customer Service Workers, Moral Disengagement mechanisms, such as Dehumanisation and Attribution of Blame can be viewed as a protective measure, as employees are aware that difficult customers can potentially damage their wellbeing (Huang et al., 2018). They are protecting their resources.

Employees exhibiting morally disengaged behaviour, even in acts of defence or protection have negative consequences for themselves and for the organization they work for. However, morally disengaging behaviour can be mediated to a certain extent by actions in the workplace such as appropriate training for staff and management. In the work environment, ethical language can be encouraged, and managers, by delegating responsibility to individual staff, can help curb Displacement and Diffusion of responsibility.

Training to help staff recognize morally disengaging thoughts and see customers, even the abusive type, as human beings also assist here (Moore et al., 2020).

There are also other mediating factors at play for employees during and after a challenging incident. Challenging behaviour can ignite ‘intuitive moral reactions’ (Huang et al., 2018, p. 13) in employees when faced with difficult situations. However, not every employee will have the same reaction to negative and stressful events. The next section will look at Emotional Intelligence, and how this is a mediating factor in the impact challenging behaviour has on customer service workers.

2.6 Emotional Intelligence

The theory of Emotional Intelligence is one that is relatively new in the world of work and organizational psychology and development. Salovey and Mayer first looked at this concept in 1990, and defined it as a construct with three parts, the ability to deal with one's emotions, the ability to deal with the emotions of others and the ability to channel emotions, to assist in problem solving and decision making (Salovey and Mayer, 1990).

This was further developed by Daniel Goleman in the mid 1990's, who proposed that Emotional Intelligence is made up of five components, Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Motivation, Empathy and Social Skills. The first three components are self-management skills. Empathy and Social Skills refer to one's ability to manage relationships with others (Goleman, 1998).

Self-Awareness pertains to how aware an individual is of their emotions and how in tune they are to their own needs, strengths and weaknesses. Self- Aware people are cognizant of how they appear to others and how their behaviour may affect them. Self -Regulation concerns, how one manages their emotions and feelings. People who manage their emotions are less impulsive and have a higher propensity for contemplation and reflection. Motivation relates to the desire to achieve. Motivated people search for challenges and better ways to do things. They have clear aims and set the bar high. Empathy is the most visible component of Emotional Intelligence. It is the ability to take into account the feelings of others. Empathetic people are able see things from different perspectives and are attuned to subtleties like tone of voice or body language.

Social Skills, the final component refers to the ability to manage relationships. Socially skilled people are friendly and can find common ground with diverse groups. They are good at networking and putting social structures in place. They have strong powers of persuasion. (Goleman,1998).

Emotional Intelligence is not as straightforward as other forms of intelligence to measure and quantify. However, it can be surmised, that those who control their emotions, are aware of how they appear to others, and show empathy, have high levels of Emotional Intelligence. In the context of challenging behaviour from customers, employees with high E.I. can better manage a difficult situation (Gabbot, Tsarenko and Mok, 2011). They can see themselves in the place of customer, stay calm, and avoid mirroring the customer's behaviour, which may involve shouting or swearing.

They are more likely to deal with the stress of such an incident after it occurs (Gabbott et al., 2011). This in turn, links in with an employee's resilience, which refers to their ability to bounce back after a negative event (Naswall, Mallinen, Kuntz and Hodliffe, 2019).

Emotional Intelligence to an extent depends on the person. However, it can be learned and developed in organizations (Goleman, 1998). This can be done through E.I. specific training, which teaches employees to identify their emotions and the emotions of others, and to understand the impact their own thoughts and behaviour have on customers and colleagues. On an individual level, practices such as 360 degree feedback, coaching programmes and mentoring can help increase self-awareness. Journaling techniques, where an employee writes down their thoughts and feelings as they experience them can help make them more cognizant of their emotions. Where an employee is experiencing extreme difficulty or anger after an incident, anger management training can help with self-regulation (Kastberg, Buchko and Buchko, 2020).

Group training initiatives can also assist with the emotional intelligence of teams. Discussion forums can allow employees to discuss the different issues they face and possible solutions. Participatory decision-making sessions with staff and management can help put together company strategies and approaches to problems employees face. Sharing stressful experiences with colleagues, and challenging the emotions felt during and after the incident may reduce stress and conserve balance (Gillar-Corbi, Pozo-Rico, Sanchez and Castejon, 2019).

The development of E.I. within organizations has been positively linked to workplace performance in challenging environments (Gillar-Corbi et al., 2019).

2.7 Summary

This chapter discussed the literature available to the researcher in the context of the study 'An Exploratory Study of Customer Service Workers Experience of Challenging Behaviour'. The aim of this study is to explore the impact difficult behaviour from customers has on service employees.

It first introduced customer service workers, and how important they are in the service industry. The introduction then briefly looked at the adage 'The customer is always right', in order to frame a common perception in the service context. It went on to introduce challenging behaviour, and explain what it can entail, before looking at the possible effects it has, using Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources

Theory (1989) and Bandura's Moral Disengagement Theory (1986). The introduction also posited that customer service interactions are complex, as they are contingent on several variables, including the employee themselves, and how different people react, to challenging behaviour in different ways. This initiated the idea that the Emotional Intelligence of an employee, can have a mediating effect in how challenging behaviour impacts them.

The Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), centres on the concept of self-efficacy, an individual's belief in themselves to succeed, performing a specific task or achieving a specific goal. Challenging behaviour from customers may damage an employee's self-efficacy regarding how they carry out their job. They may avoid difficult customers and see challenging situations as threatening rather than a learning opportunity.

Alternatively, it may also increase their self-efficacy through the process of Enactive Mastery. Vicarious Learning and Verbal Persuasion are also important, as they encompass the role an employee's colleagues or manager play in strengthening self-efficacy.

Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory (1989) explains 'resources' and how they may be lost, protected and acquired. Resources may be lost after a challenging incident. Employees may avoid customers and situations to protect the resources they have left. Resources can also be acquired. The role of the employee's manager and colleagues also play a significant part here, as they can be a source of learning and skills. However, the desire to learn new skills, and gain resources depends on the value the employee puts on the resource, and how much they want it. They may become selective where they invest their resources. They may also choose to invest their resources in defensive and aggressive strategies.

Moral Disengagement, (Bandura, 1986), seeks to explain the circumstances where an employee goes further than avoiding a customer, and actively works against them by using the De-humanisation and Attribution of Blame tenets of this theory. It can be argued that it is an extreme way for employees to protect themselves from the potential damage an abusive customer can do. Morally Disengaged behaviour, from employees can have a serious negative effect on an organization's reputation. However, this can be mediated by actions such as delegating duties and relevant training to help employees recognize morally disengaged thinking. Every employee reacts differently to challenging behaviour and customers, and not every employee will go so far as to become morally disengaged from a client. This leads to the final section of the literature review which looked emotional intelligence.

The Researcher introduced the concept by first referring to Salovey and Mayer's (1990) definition of Emotional Intelligence, before looking at Daniel Goleman's (1998) five components of Emotional Intelligence. This section speculated that those with higher levels of E.I. can better manage stressful incidents during and after the event. Emotional Intelligence depends on the person to certain degree, but it can be learned and developed. Organisations can implement individual and group initiatives to nurture emotionally intelligent thinking.

2.8 Conclusion

The Literature Review above presents, the possible effects, challenging behaviour from customers may have on employees and the mediating effect Emotional Intelligence may have. Different issues have arisen throughout this review and will be further explored in the Methodology and Findings chapter of this study. Through further exploration of these issues, this study seeks to contribute to the literature surrounding Customer Service workers and their treatment from challenging customers.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to provide ‘An Exploratory Study of Customer Service Workers Experience of Challenging Behaviour’. Its aim is to explore challenging behaviour in the customer service context, how it presents, what the possible effects are, and whether the Emotional Intelligence of the employee is a determinant in how challenging incidents play out and how they view the incident afterwards .Following from the Literature Review, this chapter will consider the methodology used in this study and will justify the philosophy and approach taken to this research piece. It will discuss the sample, method of data collection, analysis of the data and the factors that impacted upon it. This chapter will also explore methodological rigour and will outline limitations and delimitations. It will conclude with a reflection on ethical considerations and a summary.

3.2 Methodology

The methodology of a study can be described as a process that is embarked upon, where there is a question to answer, a need to attain knowledge, and a need to increase our understanding of the social world, which is the setting, or cultural environment where the research takes place (Mathews and Ross, 2010).Social Phenomena can be described as entities that influence or are influenced by human beings in the social world, who act and react to each other (Mathews and Ross, 2010).

The methodology of this study seeks to explain and substantiate the method and process used by the researcher, in order to explore the experience of the phenomenon of challenging behaviour amongst customer service workers. Once the objective of the study has been identified and defined, the next step in the methodological process is to examine and understand the philosophy behind the study. Cresswell describes philosophy as “the use of abstract ideas and beliefs that inform our research” (Cresswell, 2013, p.16). Cresswell (2013) posits that to a certain extent, the researcher will always bring his or her own beliefs and philosophical assumptions to their research. This means the researcher’s own personal view is aligned to a philosophical assumption that underpins the study. Cresswell (2013) identified four main philosophical assumptions in the context of qualitative research, the Ontological Assumption, The Epistemological Assumption, The Axiological Assumption and the Methodological Assumption.

The Ontological Assumption or Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality, the social entities that make it up and how it is seen. It can be described as the science of ‘what is’ (Mathews and Ross, 2010, p. 17). The Epistemological Assumption or Epistemology centres on the theory of knowledge and how we know things. The Axiological Assumption looks at the role values play in a study. All researchers bring their own values and beliefs to their research. However in the context of a qualitative study, the researcher positions him or herself in the study, making their values known and also acknowledging the data itself is value laden (Cresswell, 2013). The Methodological Assumption considers the process itself of collecting and analyzing data. In the context of a qualitative study, the process can be inductive rather than deductive and is based upon the experiences of the participants. It is not necessarily derived from a theory or driven by the researcher (Cresswell, 2013).

These philosophical assumptions, particularly those relating to ontology and epistemology are ingrained in different interpretative frameworks and positions. Three principle ontological positions are objectivism, constructivism and realism. These are the viewpoints a researcher can take, on what there is to study. Three principle epistemological positions are positivism, interpretivism and the realist approach. These positions relate to the knowledge around a social phenomenon and effects how the researcher gathers that knowledge (Mathews and Ross, 2010). Epistemology also presents a rationale as to what can be regarded as knowledge and what differentiates knowledge from beliefs (Mathews and Ross, 2010).

The ontological position of objectivism affirms that the social phenomena that make up our social world have an existence of their own. They are independent from the participants or actors involved (Mathews and Ross, 2010). They are external facts (Bryman, 2012). The researcher’s relationship to the social world and social phenomena she or he is observing is objective. The ontological position of constructivism can be viewed as the opposite to objectivism. Constructivism poses the view that social phenomena are real only in the sense that they are constructed ideas. Their meanings are produced through social interactions and are in a constant state of revision and flux (Bryman, 2012). There is no social reality other than the meaning the participant puts upon it. It is this meaning that is being studied (Mathews and Ross, 2010). The researcher in this instance is part of the social world and is cognizant of multiple and different meanings and realities.

This is particularly pertinent when carrying out phenomenological research (Cresswell, 2013). The ontological position of realism puts forth another perspective.

Similar to Objectivism, realism proposes the social world has a reality that is separate from the participants involved. However, there are hidden dimensions, that are not explicitly visible, that impact on the social world. These hidden dimensions have an effect on the social world. It is the impact of these that the researcher is observing.

The epistemological positions of Positivism, Interpretivism and Realism can be linked to the three ontological positions of Objectivism, Constructivism and Realism. The positivist approach defines knowledge as what can be observed and confirmed by the senses. Acquiring knowledge involves gathering facts. The study must be carried out in a manner that is free from subjectivity. A positivist epistemology is associated with objectivism, studies involving the natural sciences and quantitative research (Bryman, 2012). The Interpretivist approach can be said to be antithetical to the positivist approach. It is linked to the ontological position of constructivism. Acquiring knowledge in this context, involves gathering participants interpretation and understanding of the social world and social phenomena. The focal point here is how participants interpret these, allowing for different possibilities and outlooks to be explored. The researcher in turn is interpreting the understanding of participants and exposing subjective perceptions and emphases (Mathews and Ross, 2010). It is linked to studies associated with constructivism, social sciences and qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). The Realist approach is similar on one level to positivism; however it differs in relation to its definition of knowledge. Knowledge here is real, but not apparent, however the effects of this knowledge are. The objective is to identify hidden dimensions and their effects. Data can be acquired qualitatively or quantitatively (Mathews and Ross, 2010). Bryman (2012) argues that this is the one approach that can apply to both the natural and the social sciences.

The aim of this study is to explore the experience of challenging customer behaviour on customer service workers. The researcher adopted a constructivist, interpretivist approach to this study. This allowed the researcher to position herself closely to the participants, their words, their views and experiences, and bring together evidence based on their individual experiences (Cresswell, 2013). It also enabled the researcher to examine the different experiences and perspectives of each participant.

3.3 Research Approach and Design

Traditionally there are two approaches to research, Qualitative and Quantitative. The approach applied to this study is Qualitative.

Bryman (2012) describes qualitative research as a strategy that "usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data" (Bryman, 2012, p. 381). This is in contrast to quantitative research which; 'can be construed as a research strategy that emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data' (Bryman, 2012, p. 35). When choosing this approach, the researcher considered the research question, the collection of data, and how the data would be analysed. The researcher also noted when conducting the literature review, many of the previous studies in this area adopted a quantitative methodology.

The study 'An Exploratory Study of Customer Service Workers Experience of Challenging Behaviour' is a phenomenological inquiry. It describes "the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experience of a concept or phenomenon" (Creswell 2013 p.76). In this instance, the study focuses on the experiences of the participants when faced with the phenomenon of challenging behaviour from customers. Phenomenological investigation often involves conducting interviews or focus groups. This allows the researcher to position themselves close to participants and balance the power dynamic that can exist in researcher/participant relationships (Creswell, 2013). For the purpose of this study semi structured interviews were deemed an appropriate method of data collection.

3.4 Sample

The researcher worked with a small sample of six participants. This sample was a non-probability, purposive sample as they were selected by the researcher based on their experiences working in customer service. The researcher felt that using a non-purposive sample could initiate difficulty when trying to find a common understanding at the data analysis stage (Creswell, 2013).

The sample itself was mixed gender and consisted of four females and two males, aged between 35 years and 65 years.

The inclusion criteria was broad, however participants with less than five years' experience working in customer service were excluded. Participants were required to return signed consent forms (see appendix) prior to conducting the interview. To protect their identity and ensure the confidentiality of the participants, they are referred to as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 and P6 throughout this study.

The researcher made the decision to keep the sample small and carry out six interviews only, in an attempt to first of all, carry out an in-depth and manageable study and also to avoid data saturation (Creswell, 2013).

3.5 Interview

In the realm of qualitative research, there are mainly two types of interview, unstructured and semi-structured (Holloway and Wheeler, 2002). Unstructured interviews may not use any questions at all, the interviewer may rely on a series of prompts, or ask one question, allowing the interviewee to take control (Bryman, 2012). The researcher in this instance decided against this approach and chose instead the semi-structured interview format. This is where, there exists a list of questions to be covered during the interview, however the interviewee has more freedom to answer the question in their own way (Please see list of interview questions in Appendix B). This is in contrast to quantitative studies where surveys and questionnaires are more rigid and involve asking the same questions to large numbers of people (Mathews & Ross, 2010). Unstructured interviews also allow more freedom for the interviewer, as questions that are not on the list may be asked, if the interviewer picks up on an issue in the interview.

One of the characteristics of data collection in a qualitative study is that it takes place in a natural setting (Creswell, 2013) with a consciousness and awareness of the participants involved. Five out of six of these interviews took place in the interviewees own home via Zoom, due to the intensification of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. The effect this had on access to the sample will be looked at later in limitations.

3.6 Data Analysis

Once the interview process was complete and sufficient data gathered, a thematic analysis of the data was carried out. Qualitative studies in themselves can be complex and varied, with thematic analysis often being viewed as the most rudimentary method of analyzing Qualitative data ((Holloway and Todres, 2003). Bryman describes Thematic Analysis as creating an “index of central themes and subthemes” with repeat patterns emerging from the data and repetition playing a key role (Bryman, 2012, p. 578).

The data gathered in this study involved detail of each individual participant’s experience of challenging behaviour, how they felt about the experience at the time and afterwards.

The Researcher initially considered the use of the NVivo software programme, in order to reduce the clerical tasks associated with Thematic Analysis, such as writing codes (Bryman,

2012). However, the researcher felt her sample was too small, and this option would not be beneficial or time efficient in this instance.

The researcher also had an interest in the Colaizzi Method (Colaizzi, 1973). The Colaizzi method can be described as an approach to data analysis that involves a mixture of personal reflection and the use of a variety of subjects (Suryani, Welch and Cox, 2016). This method is a seven stage process, which involves 1) reading interview transcripts, 2) extracting statements or phrases that stand out and link directly to the phenomenon, 3) categorising these statements and phrases and formulating meanings from them, 4) gather these meanings into different groups, 5) write a detailed description of the phenomenon, 6) identify the fundamental structure of the phenomenon and 7) validate the detailed description with each participant (Suryani et al., 2016). The researcher felt that while The Colaizzi method of data analysis is very thorough, it is a very backward and forward process, and may suit a more experienced researcher or a different genre of study.

The researcher in this instance conducted a thematic analysis using the Braun and Clarke (2006) approach which involves six phases. She chose this as she felt this approach was a simpler, linear while remaining flexible and more suited to her analytic needs.

This process required the researcher to firstly immerse herself in the data and then generate data codes and search for themes. This was followed by revising and identifying the themes that emerged, before finally producing written findings.

Braun and Clarke define a theme as ‘‘something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning’’(Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.10)’ and sub-themes as“‘themes-within-a-theme’’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 22). In this study eight principal themes were indentified, with eleven sub-themes emanating from these (see table below).

Themes
1) Communication: How a customer communicates to the employee in incidents of challenging behaviour.
Subthemes
Timing of communication
Language Barrier, customers not able to express their complaint.
The use of strong language i.e. swearing.
2) Experience/Learning: Learning from the experiences themselves.
Sub themes
Learning vicariously by watching managers/ fellow employees deal with similar situations.
The experience of the employee when dealing with a challenging situation as a determinant.
Personal Growth
3) Education: Education of the employee on the service they are offering and the issue they are dealing with/Education of customer on the service they have purchased.
4) Employee experiences in different contexts and environments: Challenging customer behaviours can be different or more prevalent in certain environments and contexts.
Sub themes : Gender, Hierarchy of staff
5) Behaviour: The type of behaviour that participants found most challenging.
Sub themes: Levels of complaint.Threat of Violence
6) Support of Colleagues and Management
7) Impact on Employee: Negative and Positive, long term and short term.
8) Emotional Intelligence of the Employee: The E.I. of the employee as a determinant.

The analysis of the data was inductive in nature, as the themes were generated from the data itself and the answers the researcher received from participants. There was no pre-existing

coding format for the answers to slot into, or specific theory to align them with (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

When identifying and managing the themes and particularly the sub-themes, the researcher found the Braun and Clarke approach flexible, but also helpful, as adhering to a systematic method of data analysis helped keep the data organized, meaningful and accurate. (Rossman and Rallis, 2012).

3.7 Methodological Rigour

In order to ensure the quality of this research, the researcher looked to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria of credibility, dependability, transferability, confirmability and goodness as a guide.

The researcher ensured that all interviews were transcribed accurately and clearly. Participants were given the option of reading the transcripts of their interview if they so wished, in order to strengthen the credibility of the data. In this instance they did not wish to do so and were comfortable that the content of the interview was represented faithfully by the researcher.

The researcher kept transcripts, transcript remarks and notes relating to data in order to satisfy the dependability tenet and to provide an 'audit trail' if necessary (Murphy and Yielder, 2010, p. 65). Voice recordings were stored on a password protected I Phone XR, assisted by the transcription application, Otter A.I. Final typed transcripts were stored on the researcher's password protected laptop. However, these records will be removed upon completion of the masters' accreditation process. No hard copies of the data exist.

In relation specifically to the Transferability facet of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria, a study can be deemed to satisfy this, provided the findings 'fit' into other contexts and are meaningful to the reader of the study and individuals uninvolved in the research (Ryan, Coughlan and Cronin 2007). The researcher recognizes that this project is a small scale research piece. It encompasses the individual experiences of the participants and subjective meanings. As result, to a certain level, generalization to a wider audience is not possible. However, the Researcher deems elements of the study can be applied to different sectors of customer service workers across a variety of industries.

Confirmability is demonstrated when dependability, credibility and transferability have been attained. It refers to how a researcher reaches their conclusion (Ryan et al., 2007). Goodness

can be viewed as an integral part of methodological rigour in the context of qualitative research projects.

It must be present from a philosophical standpoint and throughout the study itself, in relation to data collection and management, right through to the findings and conclusion stage.

3.8 Limitations

The primary limitation to this study was one outside the control of the researcher. This was the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, and its intensification in April and May. Due to Level 5 restrictions being in place, it was not possible to conduct face to face interviews with participants, having an impact on data collection and a concern around data loss.

This was overcome through the use of Zoom, which was used to conduct five out of the six interviews. A limitation of Zoom is that it is dependent on the internet quality of both the researcher and the participants. It can also be argued that rapport or energy may be lost when the interviewee and the interviewer are not physically sharing the same space. As Zoom mainly shows the head and shoulders of the participant, the full range of body gestures are not always visible to the interviewer and the interviewer does not have control over the environment where the interview is taking place (Lo Lacono, Symonds and Brown, 2016).

However, a positive aspect and huge advantage of using Zoom, is that it allows interviews to take place in the participant's home or in an environment they choose themselves. A central element of data collection in a qualitative study is that it takes place in a natural setting (Creswell, 2013). It is important that the interview takes place in secure and comfortable surroundings as it offers the potential to gather strong data (Lo Lacono et.al 2016). An advantage of Zoom over phone or e-mail interview is that you can make eye contact, note facial expressions, as well hearing tone of voice (Lo Lacono et.al 2016).

3.9 Delimitations

Delimitations can be described as the boundaries the researcher has chosen to set and adhere to in relation to the methodology of the study (Patton, 1987). In this instance the researcher chose to conduct six semi-structured interviews with both males and females with over five years' experience in customer service. It would have been interesting to compare the experiences of challenging behaviours in different industries and contexts or look at the effect of threatening or violent behaviour on staff in the long term.

It would also have been interesting to compare the incidents of challenging behaviour, their frequency, the level of abuse etc, between males and females.

However, the time frame, possible ethical issues that may arise from these and the expertise of the researcher at this time did not allow for this.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations play a central role in research, particularly in qualitative studies where focus groups and interviews are used frequently to collect data (Ryan et al.,2007).

This was particularly pertinent to the Researcher who had two significant ethical considerations when conducting this study. The first related to the interviews themselves as they had to be facilitated via technology, and a third party, Zoom. The second related to the phenomenon being studied and the possible issues that may arise in the interview. Though the study itself is low risk, the researcher was cognizant of the possibility that discussing incidents of challenging behaviour may upset participants.

Plummer (2001), outlined seven principle ethical concerns to reflect upon when conducting research, including intellectual property, informed consent, the right to withdraw, unintended deceptions, accuracy of portrayal, confidentiality and financial gain. The first step the researcher took was to read the National College of Ireland's ethical guidelines and procedures for research involving human participants and submitting an Ethical Review Application form in January 2019. No ethical risks were detected at this time.

Prior to gathering data, the study, its purpose and intended use of research was explained to the participants. An informed consent form was e-mailed to each interviewee preceding the interview to allow for time to read and address any concerns with the researcher (Please see Appendix A). The participants were informed at the start of the interview, if they felt the need to withdraw at any point, they were free to do so. The researcher made the decision not to record the interview on Zoom and notified the participants of same. The audio of the interview was recorded via the application Otter A.I. and stored on the researcher's password protected laptop and I Phone XR. They were notified when recording commenced, paused and stopped. The author was also conscious of bias and excluded leading questions or offensive wording in her interview questions (Please see Appendix B). The participants were also given the opportunity to read the transcripts after the interview if they wished to do so. They were made aware of the fact that no hard copies of the interview transcripts exist, and those stored on the author's devices would be destroyed after the masters' accreditation

process. To ensure confidentiality participants are referred to as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 and P6 throughout the study.

Participants did not receive any financial incentive to take part in the study and the researcher did not receive any funding or bursary from any organization or institute.

The researcher was concerned that discussing a challenging incident may upset the participants.

In the event of this happening the researcher had details of a counselling service if necessary, to refer participants to, if issues arose for them (please see Appendix C for details). In the context of academic writing, the author was mindful to reference the work of others clearly.

3.11 Summary

This chapter puts forth the rationale behind the researcher's methodological approach to the study 'An Exploratory Study of Customer Service Workers Experience of Challenging Behaviour'. The objective of this research piece, to explore the experience among customer service workers of challenging customer behaviour, was firstly clarified. The ontological and epistemological positions were presented, and it was asserted that this study adopted a constructivist, interpretivist approach. The research design was qualitative. While conducting the literature review, the author felt that most studies in this area were quantitative and there existed a dearth of qualitative studies related to this topic. The sample, method of data collection, data analysis, methodological rigour, limitations and de-limitations were also outlined. Ethical considerations were explained, and an adherence to ethical research practice was demonstrated. Chapter four will present the findings of this research piece and will link the findings with the methodology and research approach referred to here.

4. Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this study. These findings are the result of six, semi-structured interviews with six participants. The names of these participants have been coded to protect their identity and confidentiality and they are referred to as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 and P6 throughout this chapter.

Utilising Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phased model of thematic analysis eight themes were identified, with two dominant themes, Communication and the Experience/ Learning theme.

Several sub themes emerged from these. These themes and sub themes are presented in the table below and are also supported by relevant quotes from each participant. Each quote is identified as follows, for example, P1 L56. This means the quote has come from Participant 1, Line 56.

Themes
<p>1) Communication: How a customer communicates to the employee in incidents of challenging behaviour.</p> <p>Subthemes</p> <p>Timing of communication</p> <p>Language Barrier, customers not able to express their complaint.</p> <p>The use of strong language i.e. swearing.</p>
<p>2) Experience/Learning: Learning from the experiences themselves.</p> <p>Sub themes</p> <p>Learning vicariously by watching managers/ fellow employees deal with similar situations.</p> <p>The experience of the employee when dealing with a challenging situation as a determinant.</p> <p>Personal Growth</p>
<p>3) Education: Education of the employee on the service they are offering and the issue they are dealing with/Education of customer on the service they have purchased.</p>

4) Employee experiences in different contexts and environments: Challenging customer behaviours can be different or more prevalent in certain environments and contexts.

Sub themes: Gender, Hierarchy of staff

5) Behaviour: The type of behaviour that participants found most challenging.

Sub themes: Levels of complaint, Threat of Violence

6) Support of Colleagues and Management

7) Impact on Employee: Negative and Positive, long term and short term.

8) Emotional Intelligence of the Employee: The E.I. of the employee as a determinant.

4.2 Theme 1: Communication

The theme of Communication is the most prevalent of all themes that emerged in this study and relates to how customers communicate to employees in incidents of challenging behaviour. It is difficult to communicate with a customer who is delivering their issue or complaint in an erratic or aggressive way. This was articulated by P1, who described customers communicating in the following manner as difficult:

'upset, erratic, or a little bit aggressive, because it's kind of harder to talk about it and talk about the resolution, and how you can fix the problem' P1 L11.

This was echoed by P5 '*Well the first type of behaviour, the most important one is, if, if people are aggressive when they come, come to you, and it takes a while to, to understand why they're aggressive'* P5 L4. Customers communicating to employees in a condescending manner was highlighted by P6 '*the most difficult to deal with is when people are sort of really haughty, or arrogant, or superior, they know better. I find those sort of people quite difficult to deal with'* P6 L5. P6 also reiterated this a little later '*engaging with you in a way that's like they're looking down on you and not really cooperating fixing the problem, if that makes sense?*' P6 L8.

From the perspective of the employee, it was often felt that the customer was not willing to look at the issue from a viewpoint, other than their own:

'So they were very clear about what they wanted and I think it was kind of difficult to make sure that we were able to kind of come to a general consensus and you know, work something out' P1 L29.

P2 also described this '*And you can't.... like.... there's no way of getting them to see it maybe, they're just seeing it, from how they see it and they can't see bigger picture*' P2 L7, and referred to this again when describing an incident '*So I got on the phone and found it very difficult to get off the phone, they were just the whole time, me,me,me*' P2 L25. The customer not listening to the employee appears to be a factor here. P3 explicitly referred to this, '*the types of behaviour that I find challenging are probably shouting, rudeness, impatience and not listening*' P3L3, and not accepting what the employee is trying to say '*But that person wouldn't accept what we were saying*' P4 L55.

A customer may also have their own interpretation of what an employee is saying '*at times students can have their own preconceptions of how the conversation has to turn out*' P3L5. They may also be unwilling to compromise '*I suppose we weren't able to find that middle meeting ground*' P2 L75.

This is in contrast to employees when responding to customers. P3 stated that '*It's important for us to have listening skills, It's important that they can have their say and get listened to*' P3 L17. This view point was supported by P1 '*While you might not particularly agree with somebody's way of putting a complaint forward, you have to see their, their side of it as well*' P1 L95.

This contrast was also recognized by P5, who acknowledged that it is important for organizations to interact properly with their customers, however customers do not always treat employees in the same manner '*because they are customers, and they have a right to be dealt with properly but how they interact on the other side, then I have found over the years is certainly very different*' P5 L66.

The timing of communication was a sub theme that also emerged. P1 disclosed of an incident involving challenging behaviour, where a complaint was made after the service had been delivered:

'it's very difficult to resolve a situation when somebody comes back afterwards and you know has already eaten the meal and then says they didn't like it.... as I said it's difficult when somebody doesn't come up to you straight away so that you can fix the problem sooner' P1L18. P4 commented on complaints being made outside of business hours, or at anti-social hours '*You could get an e-mail at ten o clock at night, an e-mail at 6 o clock in the morning*' P4L56.

P3 felt, that If English is not the first language of the customer, it may be difficult for them to express themselves and also for employees to understand what they are communicating '*Also the inability to comprehend English can be difficult at times*' P3L5. Customers may also not be able to articulate an issue they are having with a service if they are not in possession of the right terminology, this was highlighted by P6 '*she was trying to explain the problem but she, she was quite demanding and a bit abrupt. She didn't have, I guess, in retrospect, the vocabulary to describe the problem*' P6 L24. It was felt that they may also not be clear in what they are complaining about '*...their complaint was, an alluding complaint, do you know, they kept alluding to things*' P4 L53.P5 also indicated this as a difficulty '*if somebody is very unclear about what they either want to discuss or what they want to tell you or what the problem is*' P5 L6

The use of strong language or swear words by customers when conveying a complaint was also disclosed by P6 when describing an incident of challenging behaviour '*And at that point she kind of just exploded at me...I'm not a f***king idiot, I don't need you to repeat yourself like I'm a child*' P6L34.

4.3 Theme 2: Experience/Learning.

The second largest theme to emerge from the data centres on Experience and Learning. The participants felt that they learned from their experiences with challenging behaviour when dealing with customers. Sub themes that developed here include vicarious learning from watching colleagues and managers deal with similar issues and the level of experience an employee has, as a determinant in how they deal with challenging behaviour. Personal growth was also an emerging theme here, and the ability to not personalize challenging or discourteous behaviour from customers.

P1 stated '*I think anytime you're faced with something like that you know with the customer client issue, there's always learning from it, you'll always learn. For the next time you deal with somebody*' P 1 L60. This was also expressed by P2 '*I've learned from every experience and dealt with it better every time*' P2 L12. This view was also supported by P3 '*I suppose all learning is positive so whatever I takes in these situations it would allow me to use them in the future situations or similar situations*' P3 L74.

P4 referred to a specific incident where an experience with a challenging client prompted the company to strengthen their policies '*We didn't have any policy in place.... we didn't have a policy in place for dealing with something like that., we have now, we didn't then*' P4

L48.This incident also made them review and strengthen their terms and conditions '*First of all you should seen our terms and conditions before this encounter and our terms and conditions after this. We now have an iron clad set of terms and conditions*' P4 L102.

Participants also felt that they learned, from watching their peers and managers deal with incidents of challenging behaviour:

'You know having watched my peers and colleagues and managers I think that always helps too' P1 L50.

The level of experience employees had also had an impact on how they viewed and resolved issues of challenging behaviour. P1 disclosed that she had '*worked within customer care and customer service relations over the years,*' P1 L15, and '*the more I've dealt with, the more confident I think I am next time round*' P1 L74. This was echoed by P2 '*I have found it challenging in the past, but I've learned from every experience and dealt with it better every time*' P2 L12. P3 also felt previous experience is a support '*Obviously previous learning experience*' P3 L65.

Participants also spoke of personal growth from these incidents that have assisted both on a personal and professional level. They have been able to take this experience and apply it to everyday life '*I think I've learned a lot from having dealt with complaints in the past and I think it's kind of helped me grow as a person, as well, to be able to deal with these issues*' P1 L93. This was also pointed out by P3 '*But on resolution I can look back on them, and realize that I learned something too, that is extremely valuable in dealing with customers, students or anybody else in life*' P3 L36

It has also helped them professionally '*it probably helps and prepares you a bit more for all the future confrontation..I do think it helped me a bit more to progress in the job as well*' P1 L83. Participants also recognized the importance of not personalizing challenging behaviour from customers '*it actually I suppose, helped me, in dealing with awkward people in the future and I suppose, to learn not to personalize these things*' P2 L73. This was also supported by P6 '*....sometimes they just rant and rave at you, and it's more about them, than it is about you or anything you've done*' P6 L87.

Experience and learning help employees to avoid internalizing challenging or abusive behaviour. P6 made the interesting point of being afraid of complaints when first starting out in the world of work

'if she did make a formal complaint about me I would potentially be in trouble or lose my job or something, which in hindsight is quite an overreaction to it, but at the time I guess because I was young, and it was my first proper job, it really scared me at the time' P6 L70.

P4 posited the argument that sometimes, you just cannot resolve an issue with a client and it is best to terminate communication or the service itself, with them:

'even if that means to a point, where we have to say to the student, this isn't working out for us, or we get to a point where we stop dealing with the complaint because we are only feeding it' P4 L87 .

P4 also highlighted the importance of recognizing when this is the case:

'We swore we would never again take a customer like this. When it happened on two other occasions, we just gave the clients back their money' P4L120.

4.4 Theme 3: Education

This theme looks at education, education of the customer of the service they are buying or entering into, and also education of the role they play in the effective roll out of the service.

This theme also encompasses the education of the employees themselves, around the service they are providing and the issue they are dealing with, when presented with challenging behaviour.

Participants agreed that customers need to know what they are buying or entering into and receive a service in this context '*good customer service is simple; a person gets a thing in the context they want to buy it*' P4 L136. Customers also need to know their rights and entitlements:

'So I think it's about.... making sure that your points have been communicated effectively, that the person is fully aware of their own rights and their own entitlements and all of the supports that we have to offer' P3 L81.

When a customer does not fully understand what the service they are purchasing is, or what it entails, this can lead to conflict and the placing of responsibility on the service provider/employees, when the service goes wrong:

'They have an idea of what they think the product is, but we, we don't know what they're thinking, and it's over a period of time, It doesn't meet their expectations, and instead of fixing the problem they fix the blame' P4 L8.

P4 mentioned the importance of customer education of the product/service again later in the interview '*if they're not sure what they are buying into, especially in education., they tend to come back and say you didn't tell me this, you never told me that*' P4 L 14. P4

When dealing with challenging behaviour, it's vital the employee knows exactly what the issue actually is. P3 stressed that '*I have to make sure that I know and understand the full facts before I can deal with certain queries*' P3 L41. However, customers also need to be cognizant of the fact that they too play a role in the transaction, this was stressed by P3 '*I understand that if I want to be consumer, I make sure I have the resources in place to allow for this experience*' P3 L45. Once they are aware of the service, and aware of the supports and entitlements they have, it is up to them to utilize them. P3 commented that:

'It's more frustrating with students who won't or can't deal with problems and withdraw from all the supports we have for them, than the actual problem in the first place' P3 L47.

The onus is not just on the service provider to resolve an issue. P6 described how difficult it is when a customer does not work with you to resolve the issue or realize the extent of their role in the transaction '*also engaging with you in a way that's like they're looking down on you and not really cooperating in fixing the problem, if that makes sense?*' P6 L8.

P3 made the point that customers and employees alike must be equally aware of the etiquette when communicating issues to each other and need to know what is acceptable and what is unacceptable:

'There is a code of ethics around a lot of things you know about how people behave the way that they should treat colleagues and clients and different things. So it's about making them aware that there is, that is there, as well' P3 L99.

4.5 Theme 4: Employee Experiences in different Environments and Contexts

Employee experience with challenging behaviour differs not just in physically different environments but also in different contexts. Some industries are more prone to challenging behaviour from customers than others. P1 first drew attention to this:

'For me, I suppose. I've kind of worked within customer care and customer service relations over the years, and some industries I think are a little bit harder you know, more difficult than others' P1 L15.

Two interesting sub themes emerged with one participant stating that women are treated differently to men by customers in challenging situations and also where a staff hierarchy

exists, front line staff or junior staff members are more likely to experience aggression, than one in a managerial role.

All participants felt that some industries are more prone to challenging behaviour than others. P4 felt that these industries are equipped accordingly to deal with it and took the example of the travel industry:

'So for example in one end, you have people going on a foreign holiday and going ballistic at the airport because they are late' P 4 L124 and '*that industry is primed for that*' P4 L124.

P3 stated that challenging behaviour was a regular occurrence in the area of finance where she works '*Yes, challenging behaviour, you would find that a lot*' P3L 104 and '*Some things cause more upset than others. This may be relevant to their response*' P3 L23.

P5 indicated that there is a difference in challenging behaviour, where a service is free and where you have to pay for it:

'School in a lot of people's heads is meant to be, to be, a place where they're not really paying for the service, and they have a lot of rights in their heads. And if for example if they were getting a car fixed by the local mechanic that they were dependent upon to fix it the next time..... they would have a very different manner because the mechanic would not be dependent on their business and would be in a position to say to them, Listen, don't come here, the next time... ' P5 L73.

P6 felt that challenging behaviour can also depend on how much a customer needs a service:

'So that sort of context, you know where, maybe someone's need is greater. You know the person's need for the service or the products to function is greater, then maybe they're more likely to kick off' P6L131.

P5 felt that challenging behaviour presents itself differently to men and women '*I felt they dealt with men in a better way than they did certainly with myself*' P5 L72. Participants also felt that frontline or junior staff were more likely to experience aggression and be treated differently to senior staff. P5 referenced her experience working as a school secretary:

'My particular job was school secretary, and this was at the lower end of the hierarchy. So they definitely dealt with a lot of people...dealt with people, higher up, in a totally different manner than they dealt with me' P5 L70.

This was echoed by P6, who suggested that the reason for this, may be that a junior or front line staff member, is the first person a customer may meet '*you know, if you're a receptionist in an organization, maybe you're more likely to hear that sort of stuff because you're like, the first point of contact*' P6 L125.

4.6 Theme 5: Behaviour

The type of behaviour that participants found challenging includes shouting, aggression and not listening. P1 found the hardest type of behaviour '*a non-understanding, aggressive type behaviour*' P1 L8. This was mirrored by P3 '*the types of behaviour that I find challenging are probably shouting, rudeness, impatience and not listening*' P3 L3. Outbursts of anger and dissatisfaction at the service are hard for employees when trying to resolve a problem '*And at that point she kind of just exploded at me..... she was, she was quite irate*' P6 L 34.

The inability to view things from another angle was highlighted again here (this was referred to earlier in Theme 1) '*All she was thinking about was from her end*' P5 L27. Contemptuous or superior behaviour from customers can be arduous for employees '*the most difficult to deal with is when people are sort of, really haughty, or arrogant, or superior, they know better*' P6 L5.

Participants found customers personalizing the issue, to the person they are dealing with, quite difficult:

'She made out, I suppose, that I was rude and how I was treating her, well that was like a projection of how she was treating me and I just, I suppose felt that that was uncalled for and unfair' P2 L43. P3 posed that challenging behaviour can be a subjective thing, what one person may find difficult, another person may not '*what I might consider is challenging behaviour, may not be considered by others as challenging behaviour*' P3L93.

There are different levels to challenging behaviour '*....some very serious levels, and some not so serious levels*' P4L33. Participants felt the upper level of this type of behaviour including the threat of violence is the most difficult: '*the sheer aggression of the person, and she absolutely just lost it and really, I felt that she really, if she could have physically hit me she would have done that*' P5 L 22. P4 describes an incident with a customer that '*went out of control*' P4L22 and culminated in '*....people were wondering was this guy going to come in with a gun, right?*' P4 L33.

4.7 Theme 6: Support of Colleagues Management

All participants spoke of the important role the support of their colleagues and managers played, when dealing with challenging behaviour from customers. P1 found talking about the incident with her colleagues helpful:

'So I think I found that helpful, and as well as that just like talking about it as well with, kind of, my colleagues. I remember I spoke about it to someone else in work, at the time' P6 L81.

P2 found it important to have colleagues present while the incident was happening '*I suppose the fact there were staff around me , because they were actually there when I took the phone call and they were able to say to me that I didn't treat her badly*' P2 L52. It's also helpful to have a colleague or manager step in and assist with dealing with the problem '*just a support and backing from your team, you know, luckily, if you have your colleagues and your manager and they are able to address the situation*'P1 L60.

After the incidents take place, participants found it helpful to talk through what had happened with a colleague '*You know, speaking to some colleagues at the time....you know, that just sort of helped me realize that look, these sorts of things just happen sometimes*'P6 L84.

P4 felt it was extremely important for management to support and protect staff '*protect the people in your organization as well as your product, you have to protect the people in your organization*' P4 L63.

Having the support of managers, as well as your colleagues is important to participants '*You want your manager, and your management team and your colleagues and your peers to be happy*' P1 L81.

4.8 Theme 7: Impact on Employee

The 7th theme to emerge from the data collected concerns the impact that challenging behaviour has on employees. In the short-term the impact is negative and upsetting with P2 referring to a specific incident,*'I suppose it just annoyed me for the rest of the day. I wouldn't say it annoyed me, it more upset me'* P2 L49. However, where threat of a further complaint remained, participants felt fearful '*I felt threatened and at risk when she threatened to complain about me*' P6 L66.

In the short term employees did question their ability to do their job '*I think momentarily it can have a slight effect, where you might think, you know, am I doing this right?*'P1 L78.However in the long term, participants were not negatively impacted and felt they could

distance themselves from incidents of challenging behaviour with P1 describing the impact as '*difficult not to be a little bit upset or a little bit shocked at times but I think in general, it's easy to let go*' P1 L46. This was reinforced by P2 '*I got over it very, very quickly*' P2 L73.

In the long term their belief in themselves to carry out their role was not effected '*I suppose I haven't had an experience where I can recall that I haven't been able to carry out my job. So it hasn't really affected my self-efficacy*' P3 L84. The experiences themselves actually helped increase confidence in dealing with problematic behaviour from customers '*But I think overall once the situation got resolved, It actually gives you a little bit more self belief in your ability to do your job*' P1 L79.

However where the behaviour is threatening or violent the effects may be longer lasting. P5 described how upset she was after an aggressive episode with a customer, '*I just wasn't able, I was upset and really it only took me all night until I calmed and was able to rationalize it*' P5 L37. P4 described an incident where staff were afraid to deal with a customer '*Many staff were even afraid to contact him because they were going to be complained, they didn't want to deal with this guy*' P4 L42. This links back to a point P6 made, regarding the fear of further complaint. In this instance P4 did question his ability to carry out his role and resolve the issue:

'And the most difficult part of it was you were afraid for how you dealt with it, afraid of what you said and you were watching constantly' P4 L39.

P3 also noted that where a customer is repeatedly difficult it can affect your motivation to help them '*When a customer is never happy, it's easy to lose patience and motivation for dealing with this person*' P3 L16.

When processing challenging behaviour P6 felt it cathartic to write the incident down:

'When I got off the second call I wrote down, absolutely everything.... you know I detailed absolutely every element of the call, had it all there in writing. And that was just sort of; it was a way for me of working through it as well' P6 L74.

P5 felt that after dealing with challenging behaviour, space and time can help '*what helped me really was time just to run through my head and, you know, and take the elements of it apart, and deal with them*' P5L46.

4.9 Theme 8: Emotional Intelligence of the Employee

At various times throughout the interview process, participants displayed self-awareness, self-management and empathy for the customer, even when the situation was hard.

The Emotional Intelligence of the employee can be a determinant in how a situation may play out. P1 emphasised that:

'You always have to try and see where the customer is coming from. And if I was in their shoes, how would I feel, I think that is kind of what makes me a bit more cognizant of where they're coming from and trying to deal with this on a better type of a basis' P1 L55.

Participants felt it was important to see things from the customers point of view, which will be different to their own, and crucially, to understand this. P2 articulated this when discussing a customer who presented with challenging behaviour. *'That woman was obviously overwhelmed, in what was going on for her. And even though I didn't really see it as being an overwhelming thing it was something that could be looked at, she did' P2 L75.*

To try and understand where the customer was coming from, participants recognized that patience and a calm approach can help the situation '*takes a little bit of patience to try and tease it out and identify what the problem is*' P5 L7, and also, that the experience can be hard for the customer

'It's important to remain calm, patient, flexible and mindful at times when dealing with students as it can be a stressful experience for them too' P3 L32. This was supported by P2:

'I want to try and take their experience into consideration you know, you don't know what's going on in their lives, that we all have bad days' P2 L77.

Participants felt it was important not to dehumanize the customer '*I'm conscious people are only human and they have needs and demands*' P3 L77. P1 felt it was important not to lose your temper or personalize the experience, even when it is hard:

'Sometimes it can be hard not to maybe feel a little bit frustrated or annoyed..... I do know that clients or customers sometimes that have an issue, it's not you personally that they're, you know, kind of trying to make a complaint about' P1 L36.

4.10 Summary of Findings

In this chapter the researcher presented the findings of her qualitative work. Each of the six participants made their own unique contribution to the topic. The results of this work attempts to encapsulate their experiences and has been categorized into eight themes with two dominant themes, Communication and the Experience/Learning theme generating the most data. These themes, along with the ten subthemes that also emerged are closely aligned to the aim and objective of this study. They are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The final chapter of this Dissertation ‘An Exploratory Study of Customer Service Workers Experience of Challenging Behaviour’, will provide a summation of the research conducted, including a discussion and summary of findings. This chapter will then present a series of recommendations in the context of the customer service environment. It will also present a plan that provides guidance on how these recommendations can be implemented in an organisation. The chapter will conclude by drawing conclusions in line with the aims and objectives of the study which are:

- To examine how challenging behaviour presents, and the impact, long and short term, it may have on customer service employees. The consequence of challenging behaviour is looked at in the context of the effect it can have on an employee’s self efficacy to carry out the functions of their role.
- This study also explores the possibility of employees losing resources and how resources can be regained or added to, and what service employees may do to protect these resources.
- To determine that the Emotional Intelligence of an employee is a factor in how challenging interactions play out and afterwards, when processing the challenging behaviour itself.

It will finally close with a personal learning statement from the researcher.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

The data gathered in this study generated eight themes and ten subthemes. The overarching themes were Communication and the Experience and Learning theme. In incidents where challenging behaviour presented, participants felt that communication played a crucial part. Customers conveying their dissatisfaction in an aggressive or condescending manner, shouting and using swear words proved difficult for participants. Customers not listening, not willing to see the situation from another viewpoint and not willing to compromise to reach a solution were also examples of communication breakdown.

Another issue that presented revolved around customers not being clear when making the complaint itself, creating difficulty for the employee to understand and ultimately help them. This was mirrored in the fifth theme, Behaviour, where aggression, shouting, not listening

and arrogant or superior behaviour were the actions that participants found hardest to deal with. This was common to all participants. Personalising the service failure to the employee also arose here.

The Experience and Learning theme centred on the participants experience in dealing with challenging incidents, and how they learned from them. All participants felt that they learned from these experiences, and were able to apply this learning when such an incident occurred again. One participant made the point that when starting his working career, he worried more about complaints and challenging behaviour from customers then he does now, after several years work experience.

This correlates with Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), discussed in Chapter Two. The first pillar or experience that determines our Self Efficacy beliefs is Enactive Mastery. As participants have come through a demanding experience, they are able to use the skills they learned from it in future difficult situations. Participants also spoke of witnessing colleagues or managers successfully deal with a difficult or aggressive customer and learning from this. This illustrates the second pillar or determinant of Self-Efficacy beliefs, Vicarious Learning. Participants discussed gaining an understanding around customers personalising issues to them and also from their perspective, not personalizing the complaint to the customer. It also helped participants recognise that some situations are not always resolvable at that time. In incidents of extreme behaviour, it may be best to walk away when personal safety is threatened.

The third and fourth theme looked at Education and how challenging behaviour can differ in different contexts and environments. Participants felt it was important that customers know exactly what they are entering into when engaging in a service. It is important that employees communicate clearly to customers what they are providing them with and make them aware of their rights and entitlements. Employees must be educated on the service they are offering. Customers must be educated on exactly what they are getting in terms of price, timeframes and service quality. It can also be argued that the more knowledgeable a customer is, on exactly what they are getting, the higher their awareness of the effort to provide a good service (Arusy, 2019).

However, participants felt it equally important that customers are aware they too play a role in the service and understand the relationship is collaborative. This is crucial when a problem arises in service provision and the customer is not assisting in the resolution of the issue.

Participants also felt that challenging behaviour can present differently in different contexts and environments. Some industries such as the hospitality or travel industry, and finance departments of organizations deal with challenging behaviour more frequently than others. Two interesting sub themes also arose here in the context of front-line or junior staff receiving more abuse than more senior staff and also that women are more likely to be subjected to challenging behaviour than men. An interesting variable put forth by one participant posited that how urgently one requires a service, dictates how challenging their behaviour may be. Another suggested variable was that customers have more value for services they must pay for, rather than services they are getting for free.

The sixth theme was significant, as all participants felt the support of their colleagues and manager was important when helping them deal with a challenging incident. They felt it was helpful to share the experience and talk about it after it happened. This corresponds with literature on the subject which indicates that sharing experiences, helps employees learn from each other and gain resources. This links in with both Bandura's Vicarious Learning pillar (Bandura, 1986) and also Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory (1989), where resources can be shared and acquired. It also helped if a manager or colleague stepped in to assist them while the incident was taking place. It was important to participants to have the support of their manager.

This led to the seventh theme, the impact of challenging behaviour on participants. In the short-term participants were upset by the behaviour of their customers and questioned their ability to carry out the functions of their role. However, in the long term, none of the participants felt their self-efficacy was damaged and all participants felt they learned from the experience. The Researcher, however, must highlight here, that the challenging behaviour in this study was not of an extreme nature. However, two participants did experience more intense levels of challenging behaviour and this did have an effect on them. They were upset for a longer timeframe and questioned how they were performing in their role. One participant felt that repeat customers who are consistently rude or difficult are draining.

The issue of avoidance of these customers emerged. This links in with Hobfoll's theory of Conservation of Resources (1989) from the view that employees will protect the resources they have, from customers they believe may threaten them. However, none of the participants discussed experiencing morally disengaged thinking or actions, or actively working against the customer. When recovering from challenging behaviour one participant felt it was

cathartic to write about the experience. Another felt space and time from the incident helped greatly.

The final theme looked at the emergence of Emotional Intelligence as a mediating factor in how challenging incidents played out. All participants in this study demonstrated high levels of emotional intelligence, in particular empathy, self-awareness and self-regulation. It can be reasonably inferred that individuals who are empathetic, aware of how they appear to others and able to command their emotions, are better able to manage difficult situations (Gabbot, Tsarenko and Mok, 2011). Emotional Intelligence also comes into play when dealing with the aftermath of an incident. The Researcher is cognizant however, that a larger sample may have yielded different results by possibly demonstrating lower levels of Emotional Intelligence or higher propensity to engage in morally disengaged behaviour.

5.3 Summary of Findings

- Participants found, shouting, swearing, arrogant and uncompromising behaviour the most difficult to deal with.
- Participants felt communication was a key component in incidents of challenging behaviour. How customers communicate a problem they are experiencing can be difficult for service employees if the customer is shouting, swearing or behaving aggressively.
- Customers not being clear in expressing their complaint can result in employees being unable to understand them and ultimately help them. Customers not listening also presented as a major communication difficulty.
- All participants felt that they largely learned from incidents of challenging behaviour, from experiencing the behaviour themselves and how they dealt with it at the time, to watching colleagues and managers deal with similar issues.
- Less experienced workers may find incidents of challenging behaviour more stressful than their more experienced colleagues.
- Participants agreed that customers must be fully educated regarding the service they are receiving, including their rights and entitlements.
- Participants also felt that customers equally must be educated on their part in service rollout and must understand that both parties, not just the service provider are responsible for its success.
- When a service breakdown occurs customers must be aware that they need to facilitate the resolution of the issue by working with the service employee.

- Some Industries and contexts are more prone to incidents of challenging behaviour.
- Participants felt front-line workers are more likely to be subject to difficult behaviour than managers or back-office workers.
- It was suggested that women are more likely to be subject to challenging behaviour than men.
- It was suggested that the need for a particular service may dictate how challenging the behaviour of the customer may be.
- It was suggested that customers value services they pay for more than free services.
- All participants felt the support of their colleagues and managers was important when dealing with challenging customers before and after the incidents.
- Talking about the incident helped. Writing down or journaling the incident also helped one participant.
- In the short term, participants disclosed being shocked and upset, and questioning their actions and ability when carrying out their role.
- In the long term, they learned from the experience and it did not damage their self-efficacy.
- However, in incidents of a more intense or volatile nature, the impact was longer lasting. Participants did question themselves and were upset for a longer time.
- Distance from the incident in the context of space time helped in their recovery.
- When dealing with recurring negative behaviour from the same customer, avoidance strategies may be employed.
- None of the participants discussed experiencing morally disengaged thinking or engaging morally disengaging behaviour.
- All participants displayed self-awareness, self-regulation and empathy, three of the cornerstones of Emotional Intelligence.
- The findings of this study deduce this mediates the impact the challenging behaviour had on the participants.

5.4 Recommendations

Recommendations are proposed in terms of supporting staff in customer service environments through training and professional development, particularly training that develops E.I. and promotes resilience, on an individual and team basis. The Researcher will then outline a plan as to how an organisation may practically implement these

recommendations. The researcher will also recommend areas of further study, touching on spheres of interest discussed in 3.9.

Recommendations

- At recruitment and selection stage, recruitment techniques should look to incorporate role-plays, situational judgment tests and self reports (Van Rooy and Viswesveran, 2007). These can help determine from the outset how a candidate may approach a challenging situation. It can act as an indicator of Emotional Intelligence.
- The On boarding process needs to be clear on the role of the new recruit from the very beginning of their journey with the company. New staff must be educated extensively on the service the organization is providing. This will enable them to communicate exactly to customers what they can do for them.
- Training at the introductory stage must also aim to guide new recruits in possible scenarios they may face, including challenging behaviour from customers.
- The introduction of coaching programmes that focus on skillsets specific to dealing with people in customer service environments.
- The introduction of mentoring schemes, where a less experienced employee is paired with an experienced co-worker to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and expertise across different roles and stages of career (CIPD, 2020).
- Where an employee has experienced more intense levels of challenging behaviour, the option of engaging in an Employee Assistance Programme.
- In the absence of an Employee Assistance Programme, the option of referring employees struggling after difficult incidents to counselling sessions or anger management classes.
- In the context of Customer Service teams, in-team structures can be put in place, such as a discussion forum, where employees can express emotion and listen to the perspectives and solutions their team-mates have applied in similar situations (Urch Druskat and Wolff, 2001)
- Put in place a monitoring system that looks to see if some issues discussed are common to all staff and experienced by employees more than others.
- Use this information to formulate a prevention strategy. If complaints are being made from different customers on the same issue, create a plan to resolve the issue or

identify possible gaps in training, with a view to decreasing incidences of challenging behaviour in the future.

- Group Activities that involve empathy building techniques, such as role plays where team members adopt the views and communication styles of others (Urch Druskat and Wolff, 2001).
- Run regular workshops that concentrate on communication and negotiation.
- A Code of Ethics regarding acceptable behaviour from both employees and customers, visible to both parties, either physically present in premises or online.
- Derive a process from the Code of Ethics that defines the point in a difficult incident where an employee can terminate the interaction.
- A concerted effort by all staff to use and promote ethical language when discussing challenging behaviour from customers.

5.5 Implementation of Recommendations

The first three of the twelve recommendations above centre on the recruitment, selection and on boarding of staff. Regardless of organization size, selecting a candidate generally involves two principal steps short-listing and assessment (CIPD, 2020). In customer service environments, it may be prudent to have an idea of how a candidate approaches or reacts to different situations at this stage.

Larger organizations and Human Resource departments may have access to in-house Psychometric testing or E.I. specific testing. In the context of the latter, E.I. is not always easy to measure and quantify. Assessment of E.I. can be divided into two separate models, mixed models and ability models. Mixed models can be designed to measure cognitive intellect as well as emotional intelligence and elements of personality. The Ability model is more performance based, where the candidate is presented with a scenario and asked choose from a set of options, the path they would take to resolve the issue. An example of an ability based EI Test would be the MSCEIT or Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test. Another option would be Reuven Bar-On's Emotional Quotient Inventory (Van Rooy and Viswesveran, 2007).

The Assessment Centre Method is also useful when assessing how well a candidate works with others. This method can be applied to individuals but can work well with groups. The assessment can involve a reproduction of the company's business activities, tasks and role plays. It can also involve a topic for discussion to be presented to the group or a problem that

the group must come together to solve (CIPD, 2020). It is extremely important that staff overseeing these processes are adequately trained to do so. If this is not the case the organization may outsource this function. It is also important that candidates be notified of assessment requirements and be given adequate time to raise concerns they may have or request reasonable accommodations (CIPD, 2020).

The researcher is cognisant that not all organisations have access to these resources, from a monetary, Human Resource or time perspective. Smaller companies may need to look at how they approach the interview process. Questions must be carefully planned and be specific to the role in both function and behaviour. A second interview may be necessary, a third, possibly informal interview, may assist, in choosing the right person.

When designing induction training, while daily tasks and processes in the company are incredibly important, it is also imperative that new staff know exactly the service they are providing and how to communicate this to customers. They must know what they are expected to do. Induction Training should also cover the company policy on challenging behaviour and what to do when it presents.

For more experienced staff members Coaching and Mentoring programmes are valuable tools in developing staff and sharing resources. The findings of this study indicate that the support of team-mates and managers play a significant role in how customer service workers approach and deal with challenging behaviour. Coaching and Mentoring are terms often used together or interchangeably. However, they are very separate entities. Coaching is non-directive and involves developing skills not just on a personal level, but professionally. It is designed to allow employees to identify their strengths and work on their weaknesses. Ultimately, coaching promotes performance at work but can have personal benefits. It is important that only those qualified in the area of coaching partake in this activity (CIPD, 2020).

Depending on the size of the organization, Line Managers may be trained in the area of coaching. The main drawback to managers delivering coaching is that employees reporting to them may not feel comfortable discussing their weaknesses or goals with them. An organisation may also choose to outsource this function to external coaches. While the employee may feel more at ease interacting with someone they do not report to, this also has its drawbacks. An outsider may not have insider knowledge of how the company works. It may also prove a more expensive option in the long-term (CIPD, 2020).

Smaller Organisations could look at simple coaching models, tailored to E.I. skills, particularly for those who deal with challenging behaviour. An example would be the following four step process, that involves firstly identifying a situation and assessing the feelings of the people involved, secondly decide what feelings best suit the situation, thirdly, understand and consider that feelings may need to change and finally, decide what to do to make the change (Wolfe, 2007). Regardless of organization size, those involved in coaching activities must be fully trained and supported by regular supervision, this is also a cost and time resource that Human Resources and Learning and Development need to factor in. At the time of writing this dissertation, a professional diploma in Executive Coaching costs approx. between €9,990 (IMI, 2020) and €13,315 (UCD Michael, Smurfit Business School, 2020). However, over time this may be a cheaper option than hiring a consultant in to deliver coaching.

Mentoring is different in that it involves pairing a less experienced employee with a more experienced colleague. There can be a directive element in mentoring, in that the more experienced colleague may initially instruct the mentee on how to carry out elements of the role. However, mentoring works best when both mentor and mentee share information, encourage and learn from each other (CIPD, 2020). This ties in with the Literature discussed in Chapter 2, and the Vicarious Learning and Verbal Persuasion pillars of Albert Bandura's SCT (1986) and the acquisition of resources tenet of Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory (1989).

Coaching programmes generally run for a specified period. Mentoring relationships span a longer timeframe (CIPD, 2020). Mentoring may work better for smaller companies as there is less of a cost outlay involved. However time is a crucial resource here.

For organizations that do not have an Employee Assistance Programme, a process must be put in place for customer service employees who are struggling after a more intense or volatile incidents of challenging behaviour. The researcher recommends referral to a Counsellor or Anger Management practitioner in this instance. This is to assist in avoiding the possibility of morally disengaged thinking or actions.

For Customer Service teams regular training days or the setting up of a discussion group, can promote information and resource sharing. One-off workshops in communication, negotiation and empathy building held regularly, can equip employees with the skills they need to

communicate a service or handle a difficult situation. Regular short-term interventions can sometimes be more effective than a long-term one off training programme. Many organisations report a phenomenon called “The Honeymoon Effect” (Boyatzis, 2007, p. 155), where there is an improvement in performance immediately after a learning intervention, and then a sharp drop in the following months. Regular, short term sessions can keep information fresh and real for employees. For smaller companies who may not be able to provide this level of regular intervention, an online discussion forum may help, or alternatively managers allow for time to be put aside, for example on a monthly basis, for employees to discuss with each other issues that affect them. It is also recommended that a process to monitor these issues be put in place. If several employees are experiencing complaints on the same issue, this may indicate a gap in the provision of the service or a gap in training. By collaborating with employees on filling these gaps and creating a prevention strategy, incidents of challenging can be decreased at source.

Finally, the Researcher recommends that a code of conduct or ethical policy be circulated to all staff. It must be visible to customers when they enter premises, so they are aware, that they too have a responsibility to respect those providing them with a service. The Code of Ethics can also provide the basis of a process, where certain levels of behaviour during an interaction are identified and deemed unacceptable to an employee from the terms of health and safety. At this point the interaction must terminate.

Ethical language needs to be used and promoted by all and must be apparent in all communications. It must be used when discussing incidents of challenging behaviour and difficult customers, and also when reviewing how an employee deals with a situation.

In the current climate, it may also be an idea to have such a Code of Ethics visible on the website, or a link to the code placed on Facebook and Instagram pages or Twitter accounts.

5.6 Recommendations for Future Research

- During the course of carrying out this research piece, nearly all participants agreed that some industries were more prone to incidents of challenging behaviour than others. The Researcher feels there is an avenue for future research here, such as a comparative, exploratory study between different industries. An interesting variable emerged, in the context of how much one needs a service, and how this can determine the level of abusive behaviour. Another variable was related to costs and whether challenging behaviour is

more prevalent in services that are free or low cost. A tangible example suggested by a participant was the airline industry.

- The Theory of Moral Disengagement in the context of the work environment is another area the researcher recommends warrants further study. Studies have previously been carried out in relation to moral disengagement and white-collar crime such as fraud or embezzlement. It has also been carried out in relation to elements of the Hospitality sector. An example was given earlier in this study of food contamination. The researcher believes on the basis of the literature she reviewed, most studies in this context are quantitative and rely on questionnaires and surveys to gather data. A Qualitative study in this area is suggested. This would require an experienced researcher with great expertise and also carries ethical consideration.
- The Researcher recommends looking at more intense challenging behaviour and the possible long-term effect. This study would also carry significant ethical considerations.
- The principal recommendation for further research revolves around gender. Van Rooy and Viswesvaran (2007), stated, on the basis of two studies carried out in relation to E.I. testing, that women consistently outperformed men in relation to scores. However, the data in this study suggest that women are more likely to be subjected to challenging behaviour when a service fails. It was also suggested that front-line workers are more likely to experience rude or abusive behaviour than managers or back-office employees. Are women also more likely to be found in front-line roles in customer service industries and as a result also be more prone to this type of behaviour? This may be a possible mediating factor.

Or is there a social conditioning or societal issue that causes this phenomenon?

The researcher believes there is scope for future research in this area.

5.7 Conclusion

The objective of this study was to explore the experience of challenging behaviour amongst customer service workers. This study investigated the type of behaviour they found challenging, whether learning can be extracted from an experience, and how they felt afterwards. It looked at the E.I. of participants as a mediating factor in how

challenging scenarios played out and how they coped afterwards. The findings of this study related to these understandings.

The researcher concludes this study on the two main points that emerged as significant for her. The self-efficacy of employees did not appear to be damaged by lower-level incidents of challenging behaviour. All participants concurred, in that they learned from the experience and it helped them deal with challenging incidents as they occurred in future. However, two participants did experience incidents of a more intense level. These had a longer lasting effect on them and left them questioning their ability. The researcher mentioned in her recommendations that it is important there is a process in incidents of aggression or hostility, where the employee must terminate the interaction, for protection of their own wellbeing. It is important that the process is not simply there, as a formality. Employees must feel comfortable to do this in these situations, to admit the incident is too difficult to resolve and not feel judged or viewed as weak. This links in with the second significant point for the researcher, that every participant felt the support of their colleagues and managers was important to them. Regardless of organizational size, these points relate to the greater culture within an organization. Barsade and O'Neill (2016) put forward the proposition in their 2016 article in the Harvard Business Review that much is made of how employees behave or how they think, and not so much on how they feel. Emotional Culture is not managed or recognized in the same way as cognitive culture. While some interventions recommended in 5.4., such as in the recruitment process, or training staff in the area of Coaching, have a cost outlay, initially, in the long term this cost may outweigh that of prolonged sick leave or high attrition. Other interventions such as having an online discussion forum, or weekly/biweekly/monthly sessions with employees to discuss issues arising for them, have no cost outlay and can apply to all organisations, big or small.

The conclusions reached in this study, may not always apply to every employee working face to face with customers, however the researcher believes the findings may help improve practice in this area and illuminate the important role that colleagues and managers play in supporting each other. This may become more prevalent in the post pandemic world, where many employees will find themselves interacting with each other online or over the phone, as working from home becomes a norm for many, rather than the exception. This needs to be reflected in the culture of an organization and in the daily working life of employees, not just when challenging behaviour presents.

5.8 Personal Learning Statement

The origin of this study was briefly discussed in the Introduction Chapter in Section 1.1, where the researcher disclosed reading an article in 2018 that reported the response of a well-known Dublin café to a negative online review. The response did not apologise to the customer or offer them compensation for their negative experience. Instead, they challenged the customer on their own behaviour in the café. This prompted the researcher to think of this response as a challenge to the old adage, ‘The Customer Is Always Right’. It also prompted the Researcher to think of times where she worked in various customer service contexts and witnessed and received abusive or challenging behaviour.

The researcher thought about how it made her feel, at the time and after, as a recipient and as an onlooker. It also made her think of the variance in support she received, in some instances strong, in others weak. This was the genesis of the research piece ‘An Exploratory Study of Customer Service Workers Experience of Challenging Behaviour’.

There are three areas where the Researcher felt she could have been stronger on. The first relates to the size of the sample. A bigger sample may have led to a greater variance in findings and richer data.

The Researcher also felt that participants could have been probed more on morally disengaged thinking or behaviour. None of the participants discussed this as something they experienced after an incident of challenging behaviour. The researcher also felt that such a discussion carries ethical considerations. The content that may have arisen may have been beyond the expertise of the researcher.

The third area involves how participants might feel about interventions such as coaching and mentoring. Coaching and Mentoring work best when both parties involved are willing and interested in the process. This is something the researcher felt she could have looked at as part of the study, which would have strengthened the recommendations section.

Unfortunately, due to the personal circumstances of the researcher, including the cancer diagnosis of her mother, the move home to another county to take on a new role, caring for her parents during the Covid-19 pandemic, her own ruptured appendix and diagnosis of a form of Colitis soon after, the study itself did not commence fully until the summer of 2020. The researcher would have preferred to submit this dissertation when it was originally due in August 2019, and again August 2020. However, this was not to be.

On one level this project has been an odyssey from start to finish. The researcher is thankful to all participants, for agreeing to take part and thankful to her Academic Supervisor and staff of National College of Ireland. The researcher hopes this study will provoke thought and inspire a move away from ‘the Customer is Always Right’.

'Rest a little, but as soon as you can,

Get up and carry on,

Because ever since your goal found out,

That you were travelling toward it,

It has been running to meet you'

-Paolo Coelho-Excerpt from manuscript from in Accra, Ghana.

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Appendix A - Informed Consent Form



"An Exploratory Study of Customer Service Employees experiences of Challenging Behaviour"

Consent to take Part in Research

- I _____ voluntarily agree to take part in this Research Study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any questions without consequence of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case material will be deleted.
- I had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves a face to face interview.
- I understand I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts of my interview may be quoted in the Dissertation '*An Exploratory Study of Customer Service Employees experiences of Challenging Behaviour*'
- I understand that If I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities-they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained by the researcher securely on her password protected phone and laptop. This data will be accessed by the Researcher and her Academic Supervisor Dr. Danielle McCartan Quinn until December 2021 (post award of researcher's Masters).
- I understand that transcripts of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed, will be retained until December 2021 after the award of the researchers Masters.

- I understand that under Freedom of Information legislation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Researcher Information

Researcher : Marian Costello LLB (hons), Law and European Studies, Postgraduate Diploma in Human Resource Management, Postgraduate Certificate in Adult Guidance, Theory and Practice.

Contact E-mail: mariancostello2@gmail.com

Academic Supervisor: Dr. Danielle McCartan Quinn, Vice Dean of Undergraduate Studies, School Of Business, National College of Ireland.

Contact E-mail: Danielle.Mccartan-Quinn@ncirl.ie

Signature of Research participant Date

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

Marian Costello

Signature of Researcher Date

Appendix B - List of Interview Questions



- What type of behavior do you find challenging when interacting with customers/clients?
- Can you give me an example or can I ask you about a time when you had a challenging encounter with a customer?
- What was difficult for you to deal with during that encounter?
- How did the behaviour of the customer impact on you?
- What helped you deal with the experience? What did you find helpful?
- What effect did this encounter have on your future interactions with customers?
 - Did you learn anything from it?
 - Did it affect how you deal with customers?
 - Did it effect your belief in your ability to do your job or your self-efficacy?

Appendix C – Counsellor Details

Counsellor Details Ref: 3.10 Ethical Considerations

Dr. Mou Sultana, BA (Hons) in Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy, MSc in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy, MA in Sociology, MSc in Applied Psychology, PhD Perinatal Mental Health.

Location: 73 O'Connell Street, Limerick City.

E-mail: info.need2talk@gmail.com

Appendix D

Table 2.5

Moral Justification	Unethical acts are excused, they considered to be part of the greater good
Euphemistic Labelling	Barbaric acts are re-titled, using sanitized terminology and language.
Advantageous Comparison	Unethical behaviour is compared to behaviour that is more morally reprehensible to make it appear better.
Displacement of Responsibility	Responsibility for actions are attributed to authority and leadership figures
Diffusion of Responsibility	Responsibility for one's actions are diffused to others to decrease personal responsibility
Distortion of Consequences	The seriousness of one's actions are minimized or distorted
Dehumanisation	The victim of the unethical act is not seen as human and they are not worthy of respect or moral regard
Attribution of Blame	Blame for the unethical behaviour is attributed the victim. They are seen as deserving whatever happens to them.

Appendix E

Table 3.6 and 4.1

Themes
1) Communication: How a customer communicates to the employee in incidents of challenging behaviour.
Subthemes
Timing of communication
Language Barrier, customers not able to express their complaint.
The use of strong language i.e. swearing.
2) Experience/Learning: Learning from the experiences themselves.
Sub themes
Learning vicariously by watching managers/ fellow employees deal with similar situations.
The experience of the employee when dealing with a challenging situation as a determinant.
Personal Growth
3) Education: Education of the employee on the service they are offering and the issue they are dealing with/Education of customer on the service they have purchased.
4) Employee experiences in different contexts and environments: Challenging customer behaviours can be different or more prevalent in certain environments and contexts.
Sub themes : Gender, Hierarchy of staff
5) Behaviour: The type of behaviour that participants found most challenging.
Sub themes: Levels of complaint.Threat of Violence
6) Support of Colleagues and Management
7) Impact on Employee: Negative and Positive, long term and short term.
8) Emotional Intelligence of the Employee: The E.I. of the employee as a determinant.

Appendix F

Thesis Submission Form

All thesis submissions must be accompanied by a thesis submission form. The current guidelines for submission are available through the library at the following URL: <http://libguides.ncirl.ie/thesisguide>. The guidelines specific to the School of Business guidelines are listed here: <https://libguides.ncirl.ie/business>.

Submission of Thesis to Norma Smurfit Library, National College of Ireland

Student name :Marian Costello
Student number: 17141869
School: School Of Business
Course: Master of Arts in Human Resource Management
Degree to be awarded: Master of Arts
Title of Thesis; 'An Exploratory Study of Customer Service Workers Experience of Challenging Behaviour,

One hard bound copy of your thesis will be lodged in the Norma Smurfit Library and will be available for consultation. The electronic copy will be accessible in TRAP (<http://trap.ncirl.ie/>), the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository. In accordance with normal academic library practice all theses lodged in the National College of Ireland Institutional Repository (TRAP) are made available on open access.

I agree to a hard bound copy of my thesis being available for consultation in the library. I also agree to an electronic copy of my thesis being made publicly available on the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository TRAP.

<u>Marian Costello</u>
Signature of Candidate:
For completion by the School:
The aforementioned thesis was received by
Date:

This signed form must be appended to all hard bound and electronic copies of your thesis submitted to your school.