

**Managing Role Stress in Service Occupations:
Addressing Gaps in Boundary Spanner Research**

Inauguraldissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades des
Fachbereichs Wirtschaftswissenschaften an der
Wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen Fakultät der
Universität Passau



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Eingereicht am: 04. August 2017

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Wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen Fakultät der
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Danksagung

Die Erstellung meiner Dissertation wäre ohne die Hilfe einiger Personen nicht möglich gewesen. Zuallererst möchte ich meinem Betreuer Prof. Dr. Jan H. Schumann danken, dessen stetige Hilfe, Unterstützung und Motivation meine Dissertation zu einer solchen gemacht haben und mir immer Anstoß zur Weiterentwicklung meiner Arbeiten waren. Danken möchte ich auch Prof. Dr. Andreas König für seine hilfreichen Hinweise zum wissenschaftlichen Schreiben. Mein Dank geht zudem an meine Koautoren Prof. Dr. Marion Büttgen, Prof. Dr. Zelal Ates, Dr. Marcin Komor und Dr. Julian Volz für die stets hilfreichen und unterstützenden Ratschläge und Gespräche. Natürlich danke ich auch meinen Kollegen, die mir jederzeit mit Rat und Tat zur Seite standen und die Zeit in Passau zu einer besonderen Zeit gemacht haben. Es war mir immer eine Freude mit euch allen zu arbeiten. Besonders danke ich Sabine Moser, die ich als wunderbare Schreibtischnachbarin kennengelernt habe und mit der ich viele hilfreiche und ausführliche Gespräche über unsere Projekte führen konnte. Auch meine Familie und meine Freunde verdienen einen außerordentlichen Dank für die großartige Unterstützung während der gesamten Zeit meiner Dissertation. Zuletzt, einen ganz besonderen Dank an Sebastian, der mich auf der ganzen Reise meiner Dissertation unterstützt und begleitet hat.

Abstract

Even though the negative outcomes of boundary spanners' role stress are well-known to service theory and practice, insights into how to manage frontline employees to lower experienced role stress are sparse. Moreover, extant research fails to include most up-to-date challenges of new service environments and their effects on frontline employees' role stress perceptions. This dissertation's studies focus on three different aspects of managing boundary spanners' role stress in service occupations affected by the challenges of new service environments: managing (a) enhanced individual role complexity by feedback (Study 1), (b) person-role conflicts by transformational leadership (Study 2), and (c) role ambiguity by problem-focused coping strategies (Study 3).

Study 1 introduces the new concept of individual role complexity as mediator between environmental complexity (from customers and the own organization) and role stress of frontline employees in service settings. Moreover, Study 1 details different aspects of individual role complexity and considers feedback from various sources as potential moderators that mitigate the stressing effect of high individual role complexity. The results of this study provide a deeper understanding of current boundary spanner roles, their complexity and potential approaches to handle individual role complexity. The study offers directions for further empirical research on boundary spanners' role complexity. Moreover, it helps managers to understand today's service environments and frontline employees' roles plus it suggests tools to manage imminent performance declines caused by individual role complexity.

The purpose of Study 2 is to identify effective leadership behavior that reduces frontline employees' person-role conflicts, a hitherto rather neglected sub-dimension of role conflicts that strongly differs from externally originated role conflict

dimensions which have been examined in existing research. Moreover, Study 2 aims at identifying individual cultural values as important contingency factors for the effects of transformational leadership respectively person-role conflicts on a frontline employee's job performance. Results reveal that charisma-related transformational leadership styles promote the job performance of frontline employees, even in the face of person-role conflicts, while intellectual stimulation has a negative effect on job performance. In addition, the individual cultural values collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance moderate the effects of transformational leadership on job performance. The findings imply that service firms should train managers in the use of charisma-related leadership styles and highlight the importance of employees' individual culture when leading frontline employees with distinct leadership styles.

Study 3 addresses which frontline employees' problem-focused coping strategies might effectively reduce perceived role ambiguity. The gathered evidence indicates that only action coping is effective, whereas instrumental support seeking does even enhance perceived role ambiguity. An examination of intrinsic and extrinsic coping resources as drivers of coping reveals that conscientiousness and supervisor support are helpful coping resources. Contrary, neuroticism drives insufficient coping and inhibits the use of effective coping resources. Managers of service firms should provide training to ensure effective supervisor support plus consider the personality traits of potential employees in recruitment procedures to reduce and prevent experienced role ambiguity among frontline employees. Altogether, the three studies contribute to existing service theory and practice by identifying management tools to counter role stress perceptions induced by the challenges of new service environments.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Frontline Employees in Today's Service Environments

The scandal on an United Airlines flight in April 2017 dramatically shows how frontline employees in service occupations can act misguided when customer demands and management instructions collide (Victor & Stevens, 2017). The situation on an overbooked flight from Chicago to Louisville escalated when a customer of United Airlines refused to leave the overbooked flight and, subsequently, was removed unwillingly from the plane (Victor & Stevens, 2017). In this scenario, United Airlines' employees followed management instructions that were definitely not matching customer expectations leading to exalted customer dissatisfaction. Even though, daily issues of frontline employees in service firms are mostly less severe, conflicts between customers and management demands or missing clarity often bother frontline employees (Eurofound and EU-OSHA, 2014) leading to decreased job satisfaction and job performance as well as higher turnover rates (e.g., Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Johnson & Sohi, 2014; Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014; Singh, 1998; Zablah, Franke, Brown, & Bartholomew, 2012). From a customer perspective, such conflicts also affect customers' satisfaction, positive word-of-mouth, and loyalty negatively (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Liao & Chuang, 2004; Mascio, 2010).

This phenomenon – labeled role stress (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970) – is highly recognized in research and practice. Several studies examine the profound outcomes of frontline employees' experienced role stress (e.g., Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Johnson & Sohi, 2014; Keaveney & Nelson, 1993; Singh, 1998, 2000; Zablah et al., 2012) and, partially, identify appropriate approaches to manage this specific type of

stress (e.g., Babin & Boles, 1996; Behrman & Perreault, 1984; Brown & Peterson, 1993; Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014; Singh, 2000; Zablah et al., 2012). However, role stress remains evident in service occupations (Eurofound and EU-OSHA, 2014), while role stress research lacks to include most up-to-date developments in service environments:

- Increasing internationalization of service firms (Jones, Chonko, Rangarajan, & Roberts, 2007)
- Diversification of customer demands (Rapp et al., 2017)
- Increasing autonomy in today's service occupations (Jong, Ruyter, & Wetzels, 2005)
- Growing importance of collaboration within service firms (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008)

In the subsequent chapter, I first explain these four dimensions of new service environments challenging practice as well as research. Thereafter, the section on research scope will refer to all discussed challenges by outlining their respective importance for each of this dissertation's studies successively. Finally, I provide an overview of the following chapters in the structure section.

1.1.1 Increasing internationalization of service firms

First, with increasing globalization (Brewer & Venaik, 2012) most service firms pursue exploration strategies to gain global market share and remain or become successful (Yu, Patterson, & Ruyter, 2013). Exploring, they often engage in internationalization attempts by entering new, foreign markets (Ingram, 2004; Jones,

Brown, Zoltners, & Weitz, 2005; Jones et al., 2007). Several scholars emphasize the importance to include this new development in service research (Chan, Yim, & Lam, 2010; Jones et al., 2007; Schumann et al., 2010). Service firms' internationalization attempts imply several challenges especially frontline employees have to deal with (Jones et al., 2005; Jones et al., 2007; Nakata & Sivakumar, 2001). For example, international expansion often entails organizational restructuring (Jones et al., 2005), increasing employee heterogeneity (Donthu & Yoo, 1998; Lenartowicz & Roth, 2001; Samiee & Jeong, 1994), and a need for flexibility (Yu et al., 2013) to adapt to varying settings in foreign countries or cultural areas (Chan et al., 2010). All these aspects affect frontline employees' roles, leading to the necessity for service research to consider internationalization tendencies of service firms.

1.1.2 Diversification of customer demands

Second, most up-to-date service literature accentuates the importance of customer demands' ascending diversity (Agnihotri, Rapp, Andzulis, & Gabler, 2014; Auh, Menguc, & Jung, 2014; Coelho, Augusto, & Lages, 2011; Rapp et al., 2017). For example, Schmitz and Ganesan (2014) emphasize that customers become increasingly individualized leading to high level customer demand heterogeneity. Such customer needs diversification also challenges frontline employees that are confronted with the altering requirements (Agnihotri et al., 2014; Auh et al., 2014; Coelho et al., 2011). With increasing individualization, frontline employees, e.g., face higher customer complexity (Coelho et al., 2011; Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014), a larger number of moral or ethical conflicts between their own service role understanding and customer expectations (Shamir, 1980), and less effectiveness of scripted routines to counter ambiguity arisen from customer heterogeneity (Singh,

2000). However, existing literature has hitherto not considered these consequences of customer demands diversification on the frontline employee side.

1.1.3 Increasing autonomy in today's service occupations

Third, today's service organizations align towards providing highly autonomous job roles (Jong et al., 2005) resulting from the frequent application of empowerment (Chebat & Kollias, 2000), decreasing levels of organizational support (Harris, Artis, Walters, & Licata, 2006), and little or absent supervision, respectively (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Rich, 2001). Albeit a positive development – as autonomy serves as a potent job resource which frontline employees can utilize to deal with challenging job demands (Auh, Menguc, Spyropoulou, & Wang, 2016; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005) – high levels of autonomy also entail negative aspects (Langfred, 2004). For example, frontline employees acting autonomously are harder to guide according to formal organizational rules or procedures which can lead to performance declines (Langfred, 2004). Thus, autonomy increases the importance of feedback from, e.g., colleagues (Jong et al., 2005; Kohli & Jaworski, 1994) or customers (Salanova, Agut, & Peiró, 2005), the likelihood of a diverging role understanding among frontline employees and their supervisors fostering inner conflicts (MacKenzie et al., 2001), or the necessity to act self-determined when facing stressors (Jong et al., 2005). Present studies on role stress have, nevertheless, not fully examined the consequences of increasing autonomy in today's service occupations.

1.1.4 Growing importance of collaboration within service firms

Fourth and last, several researchers highlight the growing importance of teamwork (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Jong et al., 2005) and collaboration among coworkers (Jong et al., 2005; MacKenzie et al., 2001) within today's service organizations. The frequent implementation of team-based work processes and a trend towards flat organizational structures enhance the importance of teamwork and collaboration among colleagues (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). Yu et al. (2013) add that frontline employees' performance heavily depends on information or resource sharing among coworkers. This importance of information and resource sharing is caused by the increasing number of products (Jones et al., 2005), the greater variety of processes within one organization (Singh, 2000), and the richness of frontline employees' work roles (Ambrose, Rutherford, Shepherd, & Tashchian, 2014). Jong et al. (2005) and Yu et al. (2013) argue that frontline employees depend on coworkers' help to deal with the broadening spectrum of duties and required knowledge to perform service tasks sufficiently. Such high levels of collaboration and collective tasks, e.g., accentuate the importance of coworkers' assistance in order to handle insecurity and complexity (Coelho et al., 2011), change the impact of supervisor's leadership (Liaw, Chi, & Chuang, 2010), and emphasize the importance of coworker feedback and support (Susskind, Kacmar, & Borchgrevink, 2003). However, extant research does not engage in examining the environmental transformation of service occupations caused by the growing importance of collaboration. Having discussed the challenges of new service environments, I, henceforward, illustrate the dissertation's studies' research scopes by referring to these challenges.

1.2 Research Scope

1.2.1 Study 1: Examining the new concept of individual role complexity

Study 1 of this dissertation introduces the new concept of individual role complexity evoked by customer complexity and organizational complexity.

Moreover, it examines potential negative outcomes of perceived individual role complexity as well as effective moderators that weaken these negative effects.

Service firms' internationalization attempts provoke complex organizational environments to which frontline employees have to adapt to (Jones et al., 2005; Jones et al., 2007). By trans-national expansion, frontline employees often face, e.g., a higher number of role partners they have to collaborate with (MacKenzie et al., 2001), frequent corporate restructuring (Moncrief, Babakus, Cravens, & Johnston, 1997), or a greater process variety within the organization (Singh, 1998). Therefore, internationalization is a major reason for growing organizational complexity within service organizations (Jones et al., 2005).

Customer heterogeneity and individualism entail customer complexity faced by frontline employees (Ye, Marinova, & Singh, 2012). Frontline employees' perceived customer complexity rises due to a larger array of customer demands, an increasing need for customized services, and customers' desire to be treated uniquely (Coelho et al., 2011; Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014). Due to missing research in this area, Study 1 includes both increasing organizational complexity (caused by internationalization attempts) and customer complexity (caused by greater diversity of customer demands) as antecedents of the newly introduced concept of individual role complexity. The resulting aspects of increasing individual role complexity have hitherto been neglected by role stress and service research.

Both growing autonomy and collaboration highlight the importance to examine other sources of assistance in a service firm than just the supervisor (Coelho et al., 2011; Jong et al., 2005; Kohli & Jaworski, 1994; Salanova et al., 2005). Study 1 includes feedback from supervisors as well as coworkers and customers as potential moderators of the link between individual role complexity and role ambiguity respectively role conflict. Rising autonomy accentuates the importance of examining customer feedback effects, insofar as with increasing autonomy, customers sometimes remain the only source of valuable information (i.e., service performance feedback) for frontline employees (Ye et al., 2012). Additionally, with growing importance of teamwork, coworker feedback effects should no longer be neglected by research (Jong et al., 2005; Kohli & Jaworski, 1994). Nonetheless, prior research has not paid full attention to both feedback types and their effects on frontline employees' role perceptions. Summarizing, Study 1 engages in answering the following two research questions:

- a. How does environmental complexity from both the customer and the organization affect frontline employees' role structures and role perceptions?
- b. Which kind of feedback works best to mitigate the stressing effect of individual role complexity on role ambiguity and role conflict?

1.2.2 Study 2: How to manage person-role conflicts: Differential effects of transformational leadership styles and the moderating role of individual culture

Study 2 of this dissertation aims at identifying effective transformational leadership styles that reduce frontline employees' internally generated person-role conflicts. Additionally, it determines individual cultural values as important contingency factors for the effects of transformational leadership over person-role conflicts on frontline employees' job performance.

Both the diversification of customer demands (Shamir, 1980) and increasing autonomy challenge frontline employees' inner beliefs and understanding of their role in the service organization (MacKenzie et al., 2001). Person-role conflicts arise when frontline employees' self-understanding of their roles collides with external demands (Rizzo et al., 1970). Widely varying customer expectations promote the frequency of experienced person-role conflicts between customer expectations and own beliefs (Shamir, 1980). In addition, missing guidance of supervisors leads to a greater divergence between own standards and supervisor instructions (MacKenzie et al., 2001). Both aspects foster higher levels of person-role conflicts. Study 2 examines this specific and under-researched phenomenon in role stress literature.

Moreover, due to internationalization service personnel tends to be rather heterogeneous, including different cultural backgrounds and, hence, frontline employees with diverse individual cultural values (Donthu & Yoo, 1998; Lenartowicz & Roth, 2001; Samiee & Jeong, 1994). Managing increasingly diverse teams is rather complex as presumably effective leadership styles may vary in their effectiveness depending on the cultural values of the leadership style's recipient (House, Javidan, Hanges, & Dorfman, 2002). Study 2 includes individual cultural

values as potential moderators of the effects of transformational leadership styles over person-role conflicts on frontline employees' job performance. Consequently, Study 2 examines how internationalization may affect so far commonly accepted leadership approaches.

Additionally, considering the growing importance of teamwork and coworkers' influence (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Jong et al., 2005), reconsidering effects of supervisors' leadership styles on frontline employees' role perceptions in today's service environments is important (Liao & Chuang, 2007). As the organizational structures change with a shift from individual work to teamwork (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008), effects of supervisor behavior on individual frontline employees may change accordingly as they can be affected by team's overall leadership perceptions (Liao & Chuang, 2007). Hence, Study 2 engages in revealing the effects of supervisors' transformational leadership styles on person-role conflicts in the face of today's service environments' growing collaboration. Altogether, that leads to the following two research questions:

- c. Which transformational leadership styles effectively reduce person-role conflicts derived from moral conflicts in service settings?
- d. How do individual cultural values moderate the effects of transformational leadership over person-role conflicts on job performance?

1.2.3 Study 3: Effective coping strategies for stressed frontline employees in service occupations: Outcomes and drivers

Study 3 of this dissertation addresses which problem-focused coping strategies reduce frontline employees' perceived role ambiguity. In addition, it identifies coping resources determining the choice of effective coping strategies.

Increasing diversification of customer demands and growing autonomy trigger frontline employees' need to handle faced role ambiguity fast, flexible (Singh, 2000), and self-determined (Jong et al., 2005). Varying customer demands (Agnihotri et al., 2014) combined with high level autonomy (MacKenzie et al., 2001) narrow the spectrum of sufficient frontline employee behavior in customer contact. Effective self-applied stress reduction strategies (i.e., coping strategies) should, thus, be determined by these two new challenges in service environments. An evaluation of supposedly effective problem-focused coping strategies is necessary to gain knowledge on the mechanisms of problem-focused coping in new service environments. Study 3 aims at identifying effective and counterproductive problem-focused coping strategies in service occupations.

Moreover, to goad frontline employees to engage in effective coping, the use of distinct coping resources is crucial (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). With growing importance of teamwork and collaboration (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Jong et al., 2005), coworkers gain more importance as potential frontline employees' coping resources (Susskind et al., 2003). Nonetheless, research on frontline employees' coping has rather neglected coworkers as supporters in existing literature. Thus, Study 3 examines team support as an important coping resource in new service environments.

Finally, by internationalizing service firms are obliged to consider the new cultural areas they operate in (Chan et al., 2010). Hence, when examining the effectiveness of coping strategies, international operating service firms always have to take the cultural background of their employees into account. Study 3 includes data from three different countries including varying cultural values to examine whether frontline employees' coping effectiveness is consistent across these different cultures. Prior research on coping in service settings has not looked at potential cultural differences. In summary, Study 3 pursues the following two research questions:

- e. Which problem-focused coping strategies are effective in reducing perceived role ambiguity?
- f. Which internal and external coping resources help frontline employees to engage in effective coping?

1.3 Structure of the Dissertation

The remainder of this dissertation is structured as follows: Study 1 (Chapter 2) presents a conceptual framework of antecedents and outcomes of the newly introduced concept 'individual role complexity'. Moreover, it details different aspects of individual role complexity and includes feedback from various sources as potential moderators of the individual role complexity – role stress link. Study 2 (Chapter 3) engages in identifying differential effects of transformational leadership styles on person-role conflicts. Moreover, it includes individual culture as a moderator of transformational leadership effects on job performance over person-

role conflicts. Study 3 (Chapter 4) offers an examination of problem-focused coping strategies' effectiveness in service settings to reduce perceived role ambiguity. In addition, it reveals intrinsic and extrinsic coping resources that trigger the application of effective coping. The dissertation ends with a general discussion on all three studies in Chapter 5 including theoretical and managerial implications as well as limitations and suggestions for further research in the area of frontline employees' role stress.

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2 Examining the New Concept of Individual Role Complexity¹

Complexity created by heterogeneous customer demands and changing organizational structures is most determining for today's origin of frontline employees' role stress. This study introduces the new concept of individual role complexity as mediator between environmental complexity (from customers and the own organization) and role stress of frontline employees in service settings. Moreover, the study details different aspects of individual role complexity and considers feedback from various sources as potential moderators that mitigate the stressing effect of high individual role complexity. The results of this study provide a deeper understanding of current boundary spanner roles, their complexity and potential approaches to handle individual role complexity. The study offers directions for further empirical research on boundary spanners' role complexity. Moreover, it helps managers to understand today's service environments and frontline employees' roles plus it suggests tools to manage imminent performance declines caused by individual role complexity.

Keywords: Customer complexity, organizational complexity, individual role complexity, role stress, feedback

¹ This study is currently under review at the Service Industries Journal.

2.1 Introduction

Recent research on frontline employees' roles and behavior in service settings commonly argues with the increasing complexity of both customer demands and organizational settings when examining specific phenomenon emerging from the special role of boundary spanners like role stress (Agnihotri, Rapp, Andzulis, & Gabler, 2014; Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014; Yu, Patterson, & Ruyter, 2013). Extant literature on role stress often uses customer complexity and organizational complexity as a motivation to underline the emergence of frontline employees' role ambiguity (Ambrose, Rutherford, Shepherd, & Tashchian, 2014), role conflict (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970), role overload (Jones, Chonko, Rangarajan, & Roberts, 2007), and even job performance declines (Jones, Brown, Zoltners, & Weitz, 2005; Liao & Chuang, 2007). However, studies examining complexity dimensions as drivers of frontline employees' perceptions or behavior remain rather scarce. De facto, Schmitz and Ganesan (2014) are one of the few examining customer complexity and organizational complexity as frontline employees' job demands and drivers of role ambiguity and role conflict. Nonetheless, they show that both complexity types are relevant obstacles for high level sales performance (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014). In fact, more than half of the service employees in the European Union perceive their job as being complex (Eurofound, 2012) which causes stress, health problems, and absenteeism (Eurofound and EU-OSHA, 2014).

Despite this first step toward a deeper understanding of complexities' consequences in service settings (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014), the underlying mechanism of how increasing customer complexity and organizational complexity affect a frontline employees' role conflict and role ambiguity has hitherto not been examined. Based on organizational structure theory (James & Jones, 1976) and job

demands-resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), my study focuses on the proposed concept of individual role complexity as mediator between environmental complexity and frontline employees' role stress. To provide an accurate understanding of how individual role complexity is affected by environmental complexity, I examine diverse aspects of frontline employees' individual roles that get more complex with increasing environmental complexity. In addition, I consider various types of feedback (from supervisors, coworkers, and customers) as potential job resources that can attenuate the positive effect of individual role complexity on role ambiguity and role conflict.

The study concludes that complexity within frontline employees' roles has rather been neglected in models dealing with frontline employees' role perceptions. However, previous research on boundary spanners' roles commonly touches on aspects that imply greater individual role complexity without explicitly examining it (Ambrose et al., 2014; Rizzo et al., 1970). Based on extensive literature research, I, therefore, resume different aspects that indicate the existence of frontline employees' individual role complexity. Moreover, I suggest individual role complexity as mediator between environmental complexity and role stress perceptions. Extending research of Schmitz and Ganesan (2014), the study's model highlights the importance of examining frontline employees' internal complexity perceptions rather than only considering external influences. Second, the model includes feedback from different sources as important job resources and moderators for the stressing effect of individual role complexity. Based on existing empirical results by Kohli and Jaworski (1994), I reason that feedback from coworkers should be most effective in lessening both effects of individual role complexity on role ambiguity and role conflict, while feedback from supervisors or customers should only milden the effect

on role ambiguity. These conclusions reveal the necessity to distinguish feedback sources in service settings and accentuate the importance of feedback as an effective job resource for boundary spanners' learning.

In the following, I first illustrate frontline employees' outstanding roles in service organizations, the complexities they face by external sources, the newly developed concept of individual role complexity, and its consequences. The subsequently discussed aspects of individual role complexity offer a more detailed understanding of the new concept. The section on feedback as important job resource to cope with individual role complexity concludes the conceptual framework. The study ends with a discussion on the theoretical and managerial implications of the study, its limitations, and an outlook on further research on this topic. Figure 1 shows the conceptual model of the study.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

2.2.1 Frontline employees' roles in service settings

Being a service firm's representative to the customers and main source of service firms' reputations, while simultaneously serving as an ambassador for the service firm's management goals (Zablah, Franke, Brown, & Bartholomew, 2012), often heavily stresses frontline employees (Singh, 1998, 2000). Research labels this phenomenon role stress which includes two dimensions: role ambiguity and role conflict (Rizzo et al., 1970; Singh, 1998, 2000). Role ambiguity refers to missing clarity of role requirements or the unpredictability of other persons' responses to one's own behavior. Role conflict describes the mismatch of expectations between customer, the management, and oneself (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014; Singh, 2000; Zablah et al., 2012). Theory and practice highly acknowledge these two sources of

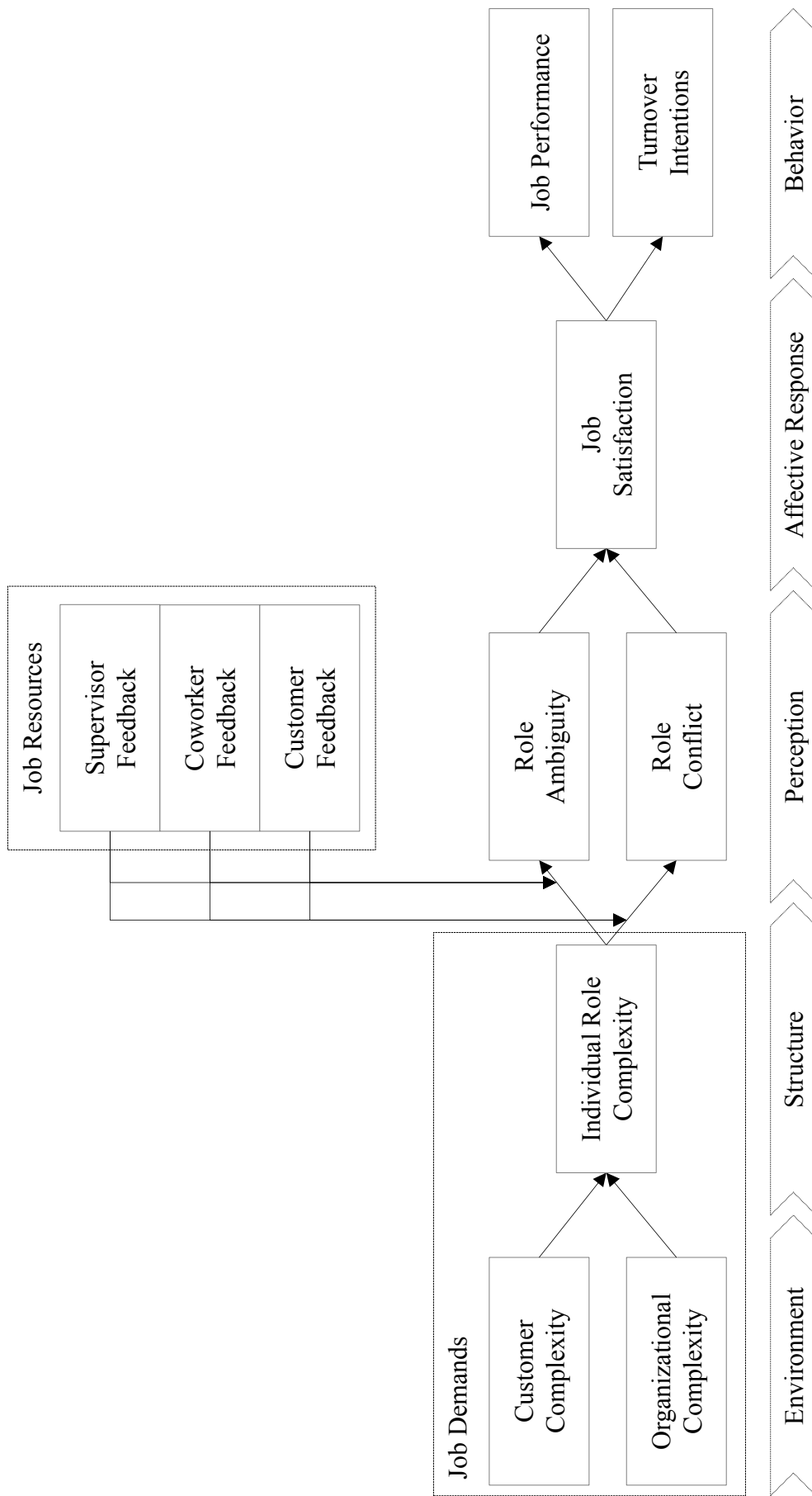


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

burnout, dissatisfaction, performance declines, and turnover intentions (Singh, 1998, 2000). Nonetheless, research on role stress has not examined sufficiently how role ambiguity and role conflict originate as it predominantly focuses on either the negative effects of role stress or management tools that reduce experienced role stress (Singh, 1998, 2000; Zablah et al., 2012).

2.2.2 Complexity in service occupations

Schmitz and Ganesan (2014) provide a first model on role stress' antecedents by considering two types of environmental complexity as crucial sources of role stress: customer complexity and organizational complexity. Customer complexity "refers to the degree to which salespeople must respond to a diverse array of customer needs and personnel involved with various buying processes in carrying out their jobs" (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014, p. 61). According to extant research, customer complexity is one of the most important issues for today's boundary spanners due to globalization (Ingram, 2004; Jones et al., 2007), diversification of customer demands (Coelho, Augusto, & Lages, 2011; Jones et al., 2005; Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014), increasing customer expectations (Jones et al., 2007; Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014), and growing coproduction in service firms (Chung & Schneider, 2002; Jones et al., 2005).

Contrary, organizational complexity reflects "the degree to which salespeople must respond to a diverse array of people and policies within their own organizations in carrying out their jobs" (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014, p. 61). Rapidly changing internal processes (Coelho et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2005; Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014), mergers, accelerating product life cycles, or entries into new markets (Jones et al., 2005) foster organizational complexity. Frontline employees, thus, carry the

burden to simultaneously master both types of complexity in their boundary-spanning role between customers and their organization (Agnihotri et al., 2014; Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014; Yu et al., 2013). Schmitz and Ganesan (2014) show that customer complexity and organizational complexity enhance frontline employees' role stress perceptions. However, it remains rather unexplored, why environmental complexity may affect frontline employees' internal roles and, subsequently, their role stress perceptions.

2.2.3 Individual role complexity

Organizational theory states that organizational structures are affected by environmental factors and, successively, influence perceptions, affection, and behavior of organization's members (Child, 1972; James & Jones, 1976) (see Figure 1). Such organizational structures can be large like whole organizations but also subsystems like individual roles within one organization (James & Jones, 1974, 1976). Based on this theory, environmental complexity as an environmental factor should, thus, affect a frontline employee's individual role being an organizations' subsystem. When frontline employees have to adapt to a more complex environment due to customer complexity and organizational complexity, this adaption should lead to a change in structure, hence, in their individual role. For example, when customer demands diversify, the role of a frontline employee will imply more complex structuring. With increasing customer heterogeneity, the role will require a larger variety of interactions with customers leading to higher individual role complexity. Similarly, when processes within an organization tend to change, frontline employees have to adapt their role to the new circumstances, generating higher individual role complexity, too. Thus, role adaptations to rather

complex environments provoke a change in frontline employees' individual role structures towards higher individual role complexity. Individual role complexity is, hence, the extent to which an individual's role structure within an organization contains a large number of heterogeneous aspects that can only be handled properly with extensive mental effort.

Proposition 1: Experiencing customer complexity and organizational complexity enhances frontline employees' perceptions of individual role complexity.

In addition, organizational structures have an effect on members' perceptions, affections, and behavior (Child, 1972; James & Jones, 1976). Role theorists Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964) confirm that organizational structures are a major source of role stress perceptions. Moreover, different facets of organizational structures (like supervision, division of labor, or formalization) generate frontline employees' role stress when being highly complex (Organ & Greene, 1974; Rizzo et al., 1970). Therefore, individual role complexity is suggested fostering frontline employees' role stress perceptions. On the one hand, when frontline employees perceive high individual role complexity, their feeling of missing clarity will increase leading to higher role ambiguity. On the other hand, a highly complex role includes a larger array of role partners and greater variety within role requirements. This will foster the number and/or severity of role conflicts between own expectations and demands from customers and management.

Proposition 2: Experiencing increasing individual role complexity enhances frontline employees' perceptions of role ambiguity and role conflict.

Theory on organizational structure illustrates a process of how environmental factors affect internal role structures and employees' perceptions, affections, and behavioral responses (James & Jones, 1974, 1976). Accordingly, high customer complexity and organizational complexity should, ultimately, lead to lower job performance and higher turnover intentions of frontline employees mediated by increasing individual role complexity, enhanced role stress perceptions, and decreasing job satisfaction (see Figure 1). The effects of role stress on job satisfaction, job performance, and turnover intentions have already been shown in literature (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014; Singh, 1998, 2000; Zablah et al., 2012).

Proposition 3: Experiencing customer complexity and organizational complexity leads to lower job performance and higher turnover intentions of frontline employees mediated by individual role complexity, role ambiguity and role conflict, and job satisfaction.

2.2.4 Aspects of individual role complexity

Theory on organizational structure also focuses on which dimensions can describe the structural composition of an organization and its subsystems like individual roles (James & Jones, 1976; Pugh, Hickson, Hinings, & Turner, 1968). Six main dimensions describe the composition of an organizational structure, thus, an individual role: (a) centralization, (b) configuration, (c) formalization, (d) interdependence, (e) specialization, and (f) standardization (James & Jones, 1976;

Pugh et al., 1968). I extensively reviewed existing boundary spanner literature and applied the dimensions as a framework, to examine the aspects of individual role complexity in service settings. I found that research emphasizes six aspects of frontline employees' individual role complexity matching the dimensions of organizational structure: (a) unspecific supervision, (b) increasing responsibilities, (c) blurring responsibilities, (d) collective tasks, (e) task diversity, and (f) divergent work processes (see Table 1).

First, a rather unclear locus of authority (unspecific supervision for one individual role) may lead to the perception of individual role complexity. Second, individual role complexity may be generated by a frontline employee's increasing span of control (increasing responsibilities). Third, when service procedures are not well defined (low level of formalization), responsibilities for certain tasks are not clear to the frontline employee (blurring responsibilities) generating individual role complexity. Fourth, high levels of interdependence with others in the organization causing more collective tasks may foster individual role complexity. Fifth, when the division of tasks according to functional specialization is at a relatively low level, task diversity can become rather complex for individual roles. Sixth, individual role complexity should be caused by the escalating number of divergent work processes when procedures are less standardized.

Proposition 4: The degree of individual role complexity is characterized by the level of unspecific supervision, increasing responsibilities, blurring responsibilities, collective tasks, task diversity, and divergent work processes.

Table 1

Results of Literature Research – Aspects of Individual Role Complexity

Dimension of Organizational Structure	Definition	Aspect of Individual Role Complexity	Examples from the Review of Existing Boundary Spanner Literature
Centralization	Locus of authority	Unspecific supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decreasing levels of organizational support (Harris, Artis, Walters, & Licata, 2006) - Lack of effective leadership (Auh, Menguc, Spyropoulou, & Wang, 2016) - Missing or little supervision (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Rich, 2001) - Multiple authority (Rizzo et al., 1970) - Multiple managers with different, diverging goals (Rhoads, Singh, & Goodell, 1994)
Configuration	Span of control	Increasing responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frequent use of empowerment in service organizations (Chebat & Kollias, 2000) - Frontline employees as problem solvers have to leverage their expertise (Agnihotri et al., 2014) - Frontline employees have to cope with an increasing number of products (Jones et al., 2005) - Need to go beyond scripted routines (Singh, 2000)

Table 1

Results of Literature Research – Aspects of Individual Role Complexity (continued)

Dimension of Organizational Structure	Definition	Aspect of Individual Role Complexity	Examples from the Review of Existing Boundary Spanner Literature
Formalization	Extent to which procedures are defined	Blurring responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ambiguous internal responsibilities (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014) - Frequent corporate restructuring (Moncrief, Babakus, Cravens, & Johnston, 1997) - Inclusion of technology in the service process (Gwinner, Bitner, Brown, & Kumar, 2005; Jones et al., 2005) - Increasing importance of coproduction (Chung & Schneider, 2002; Jones et al., 2005)
Interdependence	Degree of task interdependence	Degree to which procedures are standardized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaboration with a higher number of role partners is more important than in other jobs (MacKenzie et al., 2001) - Increasing importance of teamwork in service firms (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008)

Table 1

Results of Literature Research – Aspects of Individual Role Complexity (continued)

Dimension of Organizational Structure	Definition	Aspect of Individual Role Complexity	Examples from the Review of Existing Boundary Spanner Literature
Specialization	Division of labor according to functional specialization	Task diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development towards a customer-based specialization structure (Johnson & Sohi, 2014) - Greater variety of processes (Singh, 1998) - Need for behavioral adaptability of contact employees (Chebat & Kollias, 2000) - Richness of service employees' work roles - Variety of service delivery, increasing spectrum of tasks (Yu et al., 2013)
Standardization	Degree to which procedures are standardized	Divergent work processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuous adaption to individual and dynamic customer needs (Ye, Marinova, & Singh, 2012) - Importance to meet changing customer expectations (Ingram, 2004) - Need for ideas for improved service routines (Scheepers, Nijssen, & Heijden, Gielis A. H., 2016) - Unscripted and challenging interactions (Zablah et al., 2012)

Notes. The dimensions of organizational structure and their definitions are from James and Jones (1976) and Pugh et al. (1968).

Table 1 shows the six dimensions of organizational structure, their definitions, the matching aspects of individual role complexity and examples from existing boundary spanner literature that suggest the existence of each particular aspect.

2.2.5 Job demands-resources model

Theory on job demands and resources asserts that job resources can moderate enhancing effects of job demands on people's stress perceptions (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005). Continuative studies show that environmental complexity and internal job complexity represent major and crucial job demands for boundary spanners (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014). As individual role complexity triggers role stress perceptions as a form of job demand, it is important to identify effective job resources that mitigate this effect. However, Schmitz and Ganesan (2014) remain one of the few that examine leadership and self-efficacy as two job resources that lessen stressing effects of environmental complexity. Effective job resources that attenuate individual role complexity's influence on role stress have hitherto not been examined. In this study, I will focus on feedback as a potential job resource. Existing research reveals that feedback moderates, e.g., positive effects of other job demands on burnout (Auh et al., 2016), exhaustion, and cynicism (Bakker et al., 2005). Moreover, feedback as driver of job-related learning and work engagement (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Salanova, Agut, & Peiró, 2005) may be an effective buffer to mitigate stressing and confounding effects of individual role complexity on role stress.

2.2.6 Feedback

Feedback in service settings can be defined as others' guidance for frontline employees on how to serve customers effectively (Auh et al., 2016; Jaworski & Kohli, 1991). Jaworski and Kohli (1991) and Kohli and Jaworski (1994) add that feedback in service settings is either positive or negative reaction to a boundary spanner's output or behavior. Feedback in service settings has various sources as it can be provided by either a frontline employee's customers (Salanova et al., 2005), supervisors (Auh et al., 2016; Jaworski & Kohli, 1991) or coworkers (Kohli & Jaworski, 1994). Depending on the source, the moderating effect of feedback on the individual role complexity – role stress relationship may differ considerably.

Kohli and Jaworski (1994) highlight the difference between frontline employees' perceptions of supervisor and coworker feedback. While supervisor feedback is experienced as stressful and threatening due to supervisors' hierarchical authority, coworkers' feedback is more informal (Kohli & Jaworski, 1994). However, supervisors' authority and competence should help frontline employees to use supervisors' feedback as a tool to reduce uncertainties implied in high individual role complexity which should mitigate the positive effect on role ambiguity. Contrary, due to the rather severe nature of supervisor feedback and remaining conflicts of customer and managements demands, supervisor feedback should not be effective in reducing the stressing effect of individual role complexity on role conflict.

Proposition 5: Supervisor feedback weakens the positive effect of individual role complexity on role ambiguity, but not on role conflict.

Coworker feedback may have a different effect on the relation of individual role complexity and role stress. As supervisors in service firms commonly do not work in customer contact, coworkers represent the most valuable source to deal with occurring problems in customer interactions (Susskind, Kacmar, & Borchgrevink, 2003). Hence, coworker feedback considers how conflicting demands of customers and managers can be handled sufficiently. Such feedback may, thus, lessen the positive effect of individual role complexity on role conflict. Moreover, as coworkers share their own experience of their individual role uncertainties that can be analog to the frontline employees' ones, coworker feedback may also be effective in attenuating the positive relation of individual role complexity and role ambiguity.

Proposition 6: Coworker feedback weakens the positive effect of individual role complexity on role ambiguity and role conflict.

Similar to supervisor feedback, customer feedback may help frontline employees to handle individual role complexity more effectively in order to gain or maintain role clarity. Customers' feedback should be helpful for frontline employees to predict their customers' responses to their own role performance despite the highly complex role they have to fulfill. Hence, customer feedback should reduce role ambiguity's enhancing effects of individual role complexity. However, with remaining divergence of customer and management expectations, customer feedback will not affect the relation of individual role complexity and role conflict.

Proposition 7: Customer feedback weakens the positive effect of individual role complexity on role ambiguity, but not on role conflict.

2.3 Conclusion, Limitations, and Further Research Directions

This study aims at extending research on role stress origination by introducing the concept of individual role complexity. Extending Schmitz and Ganesan's (2014) model, it serves as mediator between environmental complexity and role stress perceptions. Elaborate literature search served to identify six aspects of individual role complexity. These results extend existing literature on complexity that has so far not considered individual role complexity but environmental complexity (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014) or general job complexity (Coelho et al., 2011). Moreover, it addresses and expands service literature that implicitly included individual role complexity when motivating the importance of either examining role stress' outcomes or potential tools to manage it (Ambrose et al., 2014; Rizzo et al., 1970). Second, adding to findings from Demerouti et al. (2001) and Salanova et al. (2005), the study concludes that feedback as job resource that mitigates the positive effect of individual role complexity on role stress, may provide an important learning aid to frontline employees such that they can handle their individual role complexity in a less stressing way. The differing proposed effects between diverse feedback sources extend conceptual considerations by Kohli and Jaworski (1994) and expand the comparison to differences in supervisor, coworker, and customer feedback.

Results offer frontline employees' managers a better understanding of how role stress originates and which aspects of boundary spanners' roles may strengthen the perceptions of role stress leading to lower job performance and higher turnover intentions. Thus, the detected aspects offer a starting point for less complex role configuration that could be implemented by a service firm's management to guarantee high level job performance. For example, managers should take care of properly and clearly defined supervision in a service firm. In addition, managers

should provide appropriate feedback to frontline employees that clarifies their role requirements and offers an evaluation of their behavior. Motivating frontline employees to give feedback to their teammates and requesting feedback from customers are additional important approaches to manage individual role complexity.

Albeit this study introduces a new concept and gives a first glance at individual role complexity, its antecedents, outcomes, and potential management tools, there are some limitations, I would like to address. First, I only considered feedback as potential job resource and moderator for the effect of individual role complexity on role stress. There are other job resources in the job demands-resources model that are commonly examined, such as autonomy or social support. However, Bakker and Demerouti (2007) argue that all job resources serve to fulfill one of the three basic human needs – autonomy, competence, or relatedness. As the perception of individual role complexity mostly relates to missing competence, I consider feedback – a job resource that fosters learning and addresses the specific need for competence (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) – as most important to manage the undesirable effects of individual role complexity. However, future research should integrate and examine other job resources in the model. Second, I based my conceptual considerations for this model on extensive literature research and strong empirical findings. Nonetheless, an empirical evaluation of the conceptual model is essential to verify the newly developed concept and its composition by the mentioned aspects as well as the effectivity of feedback as moderator in the conceptualized model. I, hence, recommend further research to test the established model and develop an appropriate scale to measure the new concept of individual role complexity.

2.4 References

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3 How to Manage Person-Role Conflicts: Differential Effects of Transformational Leadership Styles and the Moderating Role of Individual Culture²

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to identify effective leadership behavior that reduces frontline employees' person-role conflicts, a hitherto rather neglected sub-dimension of role conflicts that strongly differs from externally originated role conflict dimensions which have been examined in existing research. Moreover, the study aims at identifying individual cultural values as important contingency factors for the effects of transformational leadership respectively person-role conflicts on a frontline employee's job performance.

Design/methodology/approach – Paper-pencil questionnaires with 373 retail bank employees of six banks in France, Germany, and Poland who were engaged in retail banking focusing on financial consulting.

Findings – Findings reveal that charisma-related transformational leadership styles promote the job performance of frontline employees, even in the face of person-role conflicts, while intellectual stimulation has a negative effect on job performance. In

² This study is currently under review at the European Journal of Marketing.

addition, the individual cultural values collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance moderate the effects of transformational leadership on job performance.

Practical implications – The findings imply that service firms should train managers in the use of charisma-related leadership styles and highlight the importance of employees' individual culture when leading frontline employees with distinct leadership styles.

Originality/value – The study offers a first understanding of person-role conflicts, their effect on frontline employees' job performance, and appropriate leadership behavior. Moreover, it introduces individual culture as an important contingency factor for how severe person-role conflicts, ultimately, affect a frontline employee's job performance.

Keywords: Person-role conflicts, transformational leadership, collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance

3.1 Introduction

Frontline employees in service occupations are key for firms to retain successful customer ties (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Mascio, 2010; Schneider, Ehrhart, Mayer, Saltz, & Niles-Jolly, 2005). They represent the organization to its customers and therefore must perform at a high level to guarantee customer satisfaction and the firm's success in the long run (Mascio, 2010). However, due to their boundary-spanning role in the triad of themselves, the organization, and customers (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003), frontline employees likely perceive greater role conflicts and as a result deliver lower performance than other employees (Liao & Chuang, 2004; Singh, 2000).

Particularly in services in which customers can freely choose their provider, frontline employees often experience person-role conflicts (Shamir, 1980). Competitive pressure to win new customers and satisfy and retain existing customers often pushes frontline employees to suppress their own needs to meet customer needs (Shamir, 1980). Thus, person-role conflicts arise when a frontline employee's internal understanding of his or her role and external expectations are incompatible (Miles & Perreault, 1976; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). For example, frontline employees may feel needless or compelled to perform tasks that contradict their values (Rizzo et al., 1970). Furthermore, frontline employees are often urged to conceal their feelings of inequality or experienced person-role conflicts to customers which, ultimately, intensifies perceived person-role conflicts (Shamir, 1980). For example, the Eurofound reports that 46% to 52% of employees in the service sector perceive that their work involves monotonous tasks and 30% to 36% indicate that they always have to hide their own feelings during work (Eurofound, 2012).

Despite the high relevance of person-role conflicts though, prior (service) researchers have neglected the topic, instead mostly focusing on the intersender or intrasender conflicts created by incompatible external expectations and requirements from management or customers (Babin & Boles, 1996; Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Singh, 1998, 2000; Zablah, Franke, Brown, & Bartholomew, 2012). We maintain that internal role conflicts instead may have similarly powerful demotivating effects on frontline employees' job performance.

The strong likely negative effect on job performance leads us to posit that research should identify appropriate leadership behavior to address person-role conflicts. A promising approach for reducing person-role conflicts is transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Prior research has already shown its partly positive effects on externally originated stress (Diebig, Bormann, & Rowold, 2016; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Rich, 2001; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bommer, 1996). However, the effectiveness of the different transformational leadership styles in lessening perceived stress varies strongly between the studies. For example, one study shows a stress increasing effect of idealized influence and inspirational motivation on overall stress (Diebig et al., 2016), another study shows a decrease of role ambiguity by idealized influence and no effect of inspirational motivation (MacKenzie et al., 2001). Contrary, Podsakoff et al. (1996) show that only idealized influence and individualized consideration are helpful to reduce perceived overall role conflicts, while inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation enhance this stress dimension. Overall, a closer examination of transformational leadership on person-role conflicts seems highly recommendable as existing results are not helpful to draw any conclusions for the context of person-role conflicts.

Person-role conflicts involve personal attitude; thus, individual characteristic differences (like differing individual culture) between frontline employees also should determine the extent to which person-role conflicts affect a frontline employee's job performance in the end. Chan, Yim, and Lam (2010) argue that the individual culture of frontline employees is important in determining their expectations about their job. These expectations imply inner beliefs about the contact with customers or colleagues. Such expectations are represented by the collectivistic-individualistic orientation, the extent of power distance, and the level of uncertainty avoidance a frontline employee internalizes. As research still does not show either homogeneous results on the effects of overall role conflicts on frontline employees' job performance or on the relations of transformational leadership on stress and job-related outcomes, we examine individual culture as an important contingency factor that affects the strength of these relations.

In summary, this study pursues four research goals: (1) showing the negative impact of experienced frontline employees' person-role conflicts on job performance while controlling for the effects of intrasender and intersender conflicts, (2) establishing transformational leadership as an effective behavior to mitigate frontline employees' internal person-role conflicts, (3) clarifying the differential effects of the various transformational leadership styles by exploring their effects on internal person-role conflicts, and (4) investigating collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance as important contingency factors for the effects of transformational leadership styles respectively person-role conflicts on frontline employees' job performance.

To achieve our research objectives, we conducted a study with 373 retail bank employees in France, Germany, and Poland who were engaged in retail banking

focusing on consulting services. Our results contribute to service research, research on role conflicts, and transformational leadership research. First, our study extends research on the severe effects of person-role conflicts (Latack, 1981) in that person-role conflicts are at least as important as other role conflict dimensions in reducing frontline employees' job performance. Second, by extending transformational leadership research (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006), we empirically reveal that frontline employees actually adapt their internal and personal values when led with transformational leadership. Third, by showing the positive effects of charisma-related transformational leadership styles and the negative effect of intellectual stimulation on job performance, this study contributes to prior research showing varying differential effects of transformational leadership on other stress dimensions (Diebig et al., 2016; MacKenzie et al., 2001; Podsakoff et al., 1996). Fourth, findings on the moderating effects of collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance show that individual culture is an important contingency factor for frontline employees' ability to handle experienced person-role conflicts to sustain their job performance. These findings extend both research on the effects of individual culture on service-related factors that hitherto majorly focused on the customer side (Zhang, Beatty, & Walsh, 2008) and contributes to a better understanding of the ambiguous effects of role conflicts on frontline employees' job performance (Babin & Boles, 1996; Gilboa, Shirom, Fried, & Cooper, 2008; Singh, 1998, 2000; Zablah et al., 2012).

In the following sections, we first develop our hypotheses and research model by outlining the specific conditions of service occupations that promote person-role conflicts. The next section explains the differential impact of transformational leadership styles, followed by a section detailing the moderating effects of

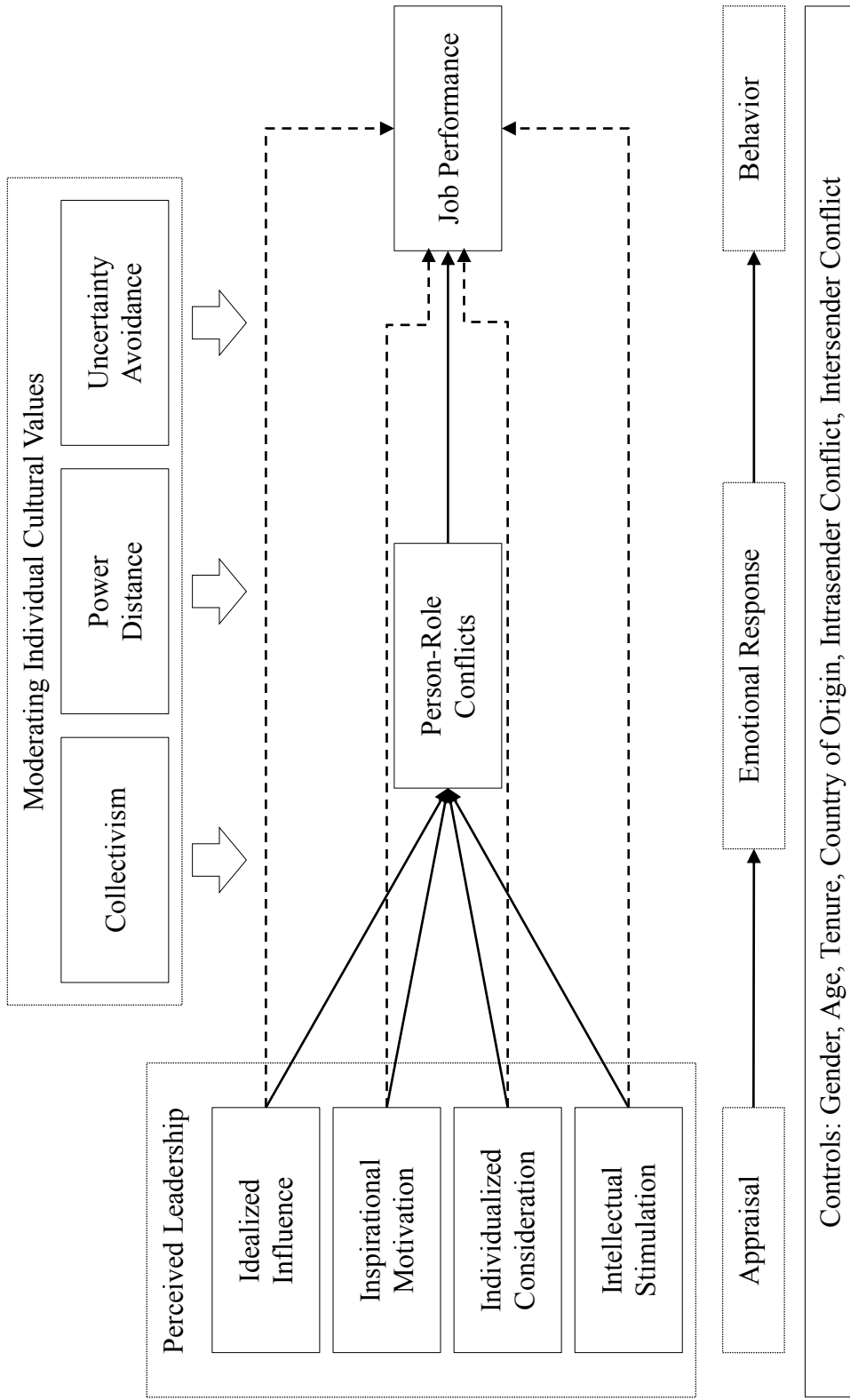
collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance. Next, we explain the study's context, sample, and measures. We then describe the results of the reliability tests and analyses of direct, mediating, and moderating effects. Finally, we highlight both research and managerial implications and identify directions for further research. Figure 2 contains the research model for our study.

3.2 Hypotheses Development

3.2.1 Person-role conflicts in service occupations

Singh (1998, 2000) conceptualizes frontline employees in service occupations as being trapped in a position in which they must meet conflicting expectations of their customers (who request friendly, courteous, high-quality service), their own organization (which demands high performance and productivity), and themselves (including their own understanding of sufficient performance). Thus, it is not unusual that frontline employees experience role conflicts derived from their unique position in an organization (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014; Ye, Marinova, & Singh, 2012).

The concept of role conflict refers to the incompatibility of an actual role with the requirements of the corresponding predefined role; discrepancies between reality and this predefined role thus foster role conflicts (Miles & Perreault, 1976; Rizzo et al., 1970). According to extant literature, such incompatibility can result in a conflict when the predefined role diverges from (1) an employee's internal standards (person-role or intrarole conflicts), (2) the available resources (intrasender conflicts), (3) other roles the employee must occupy (interrole conflicts or role overload), or (4) expectations of or demands from others (intersender conflicts; Miles & Perreault, 1976; Rizzo et al., 1970).



Notes. Dashed-lines represent indirect relationships.

Figure 2. Research Model

In boundary-spanning positions in service settings, these factors mean that frontline employees' predefined roles may conflict; for example, a required number of sales or customer contacts per day may cause role conflict for frontline employees when they perceive this number as too high according to their own understanding of how to perform at work (person-role or intrarole conflicts). In addition, frontline employees may not be able to hold to this standard due to a lack of time or adequate equipment (e.g., technical devices, intrasender conflicts). They may also have other requirements to fulfill in other roles (e.g., family member) and may not be able to meet all the conflicting expectations, such as being home early every day (interrole conflicts or role overload). Finally, frontline employees may feel stressed if customers expect more time or effort from them than their position permits (intersender conflicts).

Previous research on role conflicts examining the antecedents or consequences of role conflicts mostly focuses on intrasender or intersender conflicts (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014; Singh, 1998, 2000; Zablah et al., 2012). Some studies even equate intersender conflicts and overall role conflict (Zablah et al., 2012), though other research argues that the sources of role conflict types must be explicitly separated (Latack, 1981; Miles & Perreault, 1976; Rizzo et al., 1970). Whereas person-role conflicts originate from frontline employees' internal values that conflict with external demands, the other three role conflict types are created by conflicting external requirements (e.g., management demands conflicting with customer demands drives intersender conflicts).

Latack (1981) emphasizes the importance of person-role conflicts and its effects on job outcomes, noting that a person-environment mismatch is relatively difficult to change compared with external expectations. As a more fundamental

form of role conflict, person-role conflicts lead to a more stable and chronic form of job stress that can have severe long-term consequences such as depression (Latack, 1981). In addition, Shamir (1980) argues that especially in service occupations in which customers are not bound to a service provider but are free to choose and frontline employees must compete to win new and retain existing customers, person-role conflicts become more evident. Shamir (1980) states that the inequality of frontline employees' and customers' needs urges frontline employees to act in opposition to their own values or understanding of their role to fulfil external expectations, which stresses them. Person-role conflicts further intensify with the frequent admonishments that frontline employees avoid revealing the inequality or resulting person-role conflicts to customers (Shamir, 1980).

3.2.2 Person-role conflicts and the effect on job performance

Despite the high theoretical relevance of examining person-role conflicts, they remain rather unexplored in empirical research (Latack, 1981). In fact, since Shamir's (1980) and Latack's (1981) studies and notwithstanding they emphasize the importance of this topic, research has not continued to explore the phenomenon of person-role conflicts in detail. For example, decreasing job performance maybe an important negative outcome of person-role conflicts, in that job performance can affect employee job satisfaction (Babin & Boles, 1996; Johnson & Sohi, 2014), organizational commitment (Brown & Peterson, 1993), turnover intentions (Singh, 2000), and even customer satisfaction (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Liao & Chuang, 2004) and customer loyalty (Liao & Chuang, 2004, 2007). Nonetheless, research has not examined whether person-role conflicts indeed lead to lower levels of job performance yet, and, hence, have to be addressed by a service firm's management.

Moreover, the available research on overall role conflict shows ambiguous results: Some studies point to a negative effect on job performance (Gilboa et al., 2008; Singh, 1998, 2000), while others indicate a positive effect (Babin & Boles, 1996; Zablah et al., 2012). We surmise that frontline employees experiencing beliefs and internal values that diverge from their duties may be less motivated to perform or satisfy management and customers, so they perform at a lower level. Following the argumentation of Latack (1981), we argue that the effect of person-role conflicts on job performance should be at least as strong as the impact of intrasender and intersender conflicts.

H₁: Person-role conflicts negatively affect a frontline employee's job performance.

3.2.3 Transformational leadership effects on person-role conflicts

Prior research on stress shows that transformational leadership is partially effective in lessening experienced stress caused by outside demands (Diebig et al., 2016; MacKenzie et al., 2001; Podsakoff et al., 1996). However, results of existing studies differ in which styles are effective in lessening stress and which styles even increase perceived stress. While Diebig et al. (2016) find that idealized influence and inspirational motivation increase stress and individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation decrease stress, MacKenzie et al. (2001) reveal an enhancing effect of intellectual stimulation and a lessening effect of idealized influence on role ambiguity. Another study by Podsakoff et al. (1996) shows that idealized influence and individualized consideration significantly reduce overall role conflict, while inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation have a positive effect on role

conflict. Summarizing, the relations of specific transformational leadership styles on stress vary strongly between different settings and seem to depend on the stress dimension that is measured. Thus, examining the impact of the single transformational leadership styles on person-role conflicts seems to be inevitable to identify the effects of transformational leadership on this specific dimension of role stress.

In addition, existing results cannot be transferred easily to internal stress, because the underlying mechanisms of internal and external role conflicts should differ considerably (Latack, 1981). To reduce role conflict caused by a manager's behavior toward a frontline employee, managers can change their behavior and use another form of leading the frontline employee to directly reduce the source of the experienced stress. Stress arising from a frontline employee's internal values cannot be changed so easily, because moral concepts and role expectations are stable and difficult to change from the outside (Latack, 1981). Nevertheless, transformational leadership may influence and change a frontline employee's internal values (Bass, 1985, 1997; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Bass (1985) bases the construct of transformational leadership on the assumption that it is possible to lead employees to perform beyond their leader's initial expectations, by means of (1) idealized influence, (2) inspirational motivation, (3) individualized consideration, and (4) intellectual stimulation (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Idealized influence provides an ideal role model for the employee, accompanied by admiration, respect, and trust for the leader (Bass & Riggio, 2006). To achieve this influence, leaders often show high levels of consequent behavior and ethical or moral standards that can transfer to their employees (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In service occupations, managers can serve as role models by behaving

properly during customer contacts, to show employees how to handle daily difficulties. Frontline employees led by idealized influential leaders receive guidance about how to behave at work, giving them more security and belief in the correctness of their supervisors' assignments. When they see that their supervisor is confident and successful with following the predefined role instructions, they might adapt their own expectations and shift their values closer to the predefined role. Therefore, they should perceive that the predefined role matches their own understanding of the role, leading to less person-role conflicts.

H₂: Leadership by idealized influence results in lower person-role conflicts perceived by a frontline employee.

Leadership through inspirational motivation provides a vision and shows appreciation for the employee's work, resulting in more team spirit and shared goals (Bass, 1985; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). In addition, optimism and enthusiasm spread in the team (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In service settings, the shared vision of the leader may be aimed at achieving high-quality customer contacts and customer satisfaction (Bass, 1997). When a service manager communicates this shared goal and is enthusiastic about reaching it, this positive mood itself should result in lower stress levels. Moreover, the shared goal of frontline employees and their manager should lead to a common understanding of the employee's role. Converging the frontline employee's internal values with the predefined role by emphasizing a shared vision should decrease person-role conflicts.

H₃: Leadership by inspirational motivation results in lower person-role conflicts perceived by a frontline employee.

Individualized consideration means that the leader focuses on every employee's individual needs and problems (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006). By coaching employees, the leader aims to develop their individual skills at their own speed (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). This coaching is accompanied by two-way communication, personal contact, and increased attention (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). In service occupations, frontline employees can be coached to handle stressful situations more effectively. In addition, employees can talk to their managers individually when they are in conflict with the expectations set by the management. This individual contact should decrease person-role conflicts. On the one hand, the personal contact with one frontline employee might lead to a shift of the supervisor's demands in direction of the frontline employee's communicated expectations. On the other hand, the individual coaching might help frontline employee better adapt to the predefined role.

H₄: Leadership by individualized consideration results in lower person-role conflicts perceived by a frontline employee.

Finally, intellectual stimulation describes the degree to which managers lead employees by focusing on creativity and innovativeness (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Leaders address unsolved problems by focusing on finding new solutions and questioning general beliefs (Bass & Riggio, 2006). According to Bass (1985), intellectual stimulation is often accompanied by high performance expectations. In

contrast with the other transformational leadership styles, intellectual stimulation may be less effective in enhancing frontline employees' job performance, because managers give no clear direction and offer no distinct specification of the predefined role; rather, they push their employees to be creative and think of new solutions in many different ways. This behavior will motivate frontline employees even more to develop their own understanding of the role and, thus, lead to an even larger divergence of the predefined role and a frontline employee's expectations. More precisely, without a clear role definition or leadership direction, person-role conflicts should increase.

H₅: Leadership by intellectual stimulation results in higher person-role conflicts perceived by a frontline employee.

According to the preceding arguments, person-role conflicts represent a mediating factor in the relationship between transformational leadership styles and job performance. Based on Bagozzi's (1992) model of emotional self-regulation of the attitude-intention link, we propose that there is an indirect effect of the transformational leadership styles (appraisal of leadership) mediated by person-role conflicts (emotional response) on the job performance (behavioral outcome) of frontline employees (see also Figure 2).

H₆: Leadership by (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, and (c) individualized consideration results in higher job performance of a frontline employee mediated by person-role conflicts, whereas leadership by

(d) intellectual stimulation results in lower job performance of a frontline employee mediated by person-role conflicts.

3.2.4 The moderating role of individual culture

Marketing and especially service research recognizes the importance of culture in service settings and its influence on service outcomes such as job performance (Chan et al., 2010; Nakata & Sivakumar, 2001; Soares, Farhangmehr, & Shoham, 2007). In line with the theory of individual cultural values, Chan et al. (2010) reason that frontline employees' individual culture is an important aspect determining their beliefs and expectations about their job duties and their interactions with others. Nonetheless, as research focuses more on the effects of culture on the customer side of the service encounter (Zhang et al., 2008), studies examining effects of culture on the employee side are still sparse. Moreover, cultural effects on the relation of person-role conflicts on job performance have hitherto not been examined. We suppose that individual culture as a form of a frontline employee's stable personal characteristic will play an important role when it comes to how severe person-role conflicts, ultimately, affect frontline employees' job performance. We expect that especially collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance will influence the degree of how severe person-role conflicts affect job performance. Chan et al. (2010) argue that collectivism and power distance mainly refer to the own perception of role perspectives. Moreover, uncertainty avoidance is strongly related to rules and the need to stick to regulations set by the outside, i.e., a frontline employee's predefined role (Donthu & Yoo, 1998; Yoo, Donthu, & Lenartowicz, 2011).

Hofstede (1980) defines collectivism as a form of "we" consciousness.

Collectivism is, hence, characterized by the extent of loyalty and self-abandonment

towards a group or an organization (Hofstede, 1980; Yoo et al., 2011). This implies a strong group orientation and, consequentially, a high emotional involvement of individuals in the group (Hofstede, 1980). Moreover, having diverging opinions and beliefs from their related group's opinions and beliefs is not tolerated by highly collectivistic individuals (Hofstede, 1983). We, hence, suppose that frontline employees, that perceive a mismatch between their own expectations and moral values and expectations from the organization they belong to (i.e., person-role conflicts) and, simultaneously, have a rather collectivistic orientation, will suffer more from this mismatch as individualistic-oriented individuals. The impression of not meeting expectations of their own organization will demotivate highly collectivistic frontline employees to a greater extent. Thus, the negative effect of person-role conflicts on job performance will be stronger for highly collectivistic frontline employees.

H₇: High collectivism strengthens the indirect effects of (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) individualized consideration, and (d) intellectual stimulation over person-role conflicts on job performance by strengthening the negative effect of frontline employees' perceptions of person-role conflicts on job performance.

Power distance reflects the acceptance of a general inequality in society (Chan et al., 2010; Donthu & Yoo, 1998; Hofstede, 1980). Hence, large power distance includes that subordinates consider superiors as different than themselves and vice versa (Chan et al., 2010; Donthu & Yoo, 1998; Hofstede, 1980). Moreover, large power distance individuals tend to tolerate hierarchies and control by superiors

(Donthu & Yoo, 1998). Large power distance individuals even favor to be dependent on people that are higher in the hierarchy (Hofstede, 1983). We propose that large power distance frontline employees will not suffer from person-role conflicts as much as small power distance ones because they rather tend to accept control and obligations from supervisors even if they are not conform with these preconditions. Thus, they can better postpone their own beliefs that lead to person-role conflicts which helps them to be still motivated to perform at work and impress their supervisor. The negative effect of person-role conflicts on job performance will be weaker for large power distance frontline employees.

H₈: Large power distance weakens the indirect effects of (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) individualized consideration, and (d) intellectual stimulation over person-role conflicts on job performance by weakening the negative effect of frontline employees' perceptions of person-role conflicts on job performance.

Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which people require regulation, rules, and predefined structure to avoid feeling threatened by uncertainty (Hofstede, 1980; Yoo et al., 2011). People who internalize high levels of uncertainty avoidance, thus, strive to act according to predefined behavioral codes (Hofstede, 1980; Steenkamp, Hofstede, & Wedel, 1999). In service settings, this behavioral code reflects the frontline employee's predefined role. Therefore, uncertainty avoidance should determine the extent on how strongly mismatches between internal values and the behavioral code affect job-related outcomes. Person-role conflicts mean that frontline employees disrelish the predefined rules or behavioral codes which conflicts with the

need of highly uncertainty-avoidant frontline employees to stick to these rules and, thus, causes higher discomfort for them. Hence, frontline employees high in uncertainty avoidance will additionally suffer from high person-role conflicts, because they perceive counteracting their need for rules and predefined structure as more severe. This discomfort drives demotivation and ultimately results in lower levels of job performance. Therefore, the negative effect of person-role conflicts on job performance will be stronger for highly uncertainty-avoidant frontline employees.

H₉: High uncertainty avoidance strengthens the indirect effects of (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) individualized consideration, and (d) intellectual stimulation over person-role conflicts on job performance by strengthening the negative effect of frontline employees' perceptions of person-role conflicts on job performance.

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Study context

To test the hypothesized model, we conducted a study in the banking sector in France, Germany, and Poland. This sector represents an adequate research setting, because banking services are international and standardized to a great extent, such that they are comparable across countries (Malhotra, Ulgado, Agarwal, Shainesh, & Wu, 2005; Schumann et al., 2010). Banking and financial products also imply high involvement for employees, management, and customers, such that they are representative of services that likely generate higher levels of person-role conflicts for frontline employees (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003). We focused on retail banking

counselors whose consulting services included account management and investment consulting, which further ensured high involvement. These responsibilities and duties were similar for all bank employees in all three countries.

3.3.2 Sample and sampling procedure

After pretesting the questionnaire, we collected data from 373 bank employees of retail banks in France (24%), Germany (31%), and Poland (45%). The managers at all branches contacted their employees about the study before introducing the research team, which instructed them to fill out a paper-and-pencil questionnaire anonymously in the bank. Participation was voluntary and without incentive. The final sample included 70% female and 30% male respondents. Participants were 20 to 63 years of age ($M = 37.23$, $SD = 9.73$). The majority had graduated from university (57%) or high school (42%). Furthermore, participants had worked an average of 13 years for their bank ($M = 152.91$ months, $SD = 121.77$ months). Almost all employees worked full-time (97%) in a nonmanagement position in their retail bank. They all worked in direct contact with customers, and each had a manager from whom they received job instructions. In total, employees included in the survey worked in six different banks, split into 91 branches ranging in size from 1 to 12 employees per branch. We additionally selected branches in rural and urban areas and in economically well-off and difficult neighborhoods to ensure that the sample included various organizational climates (different banks), regional areas within countries, and performance levels (different branches).

3.3.3 Measures

The questionnaire included an evaluation of managers' transformational leadership styles according to the validated German translation of the MLQ Form 5x Short by Bass and Avolio (1995) from Felfe (2006), with each style measured by two items. We selected all items in the study because of their high factor loadings in prior studies on similar topics. Thus, the scales were easy to adapt to the context of this study. Felfe (2006) previously used the German version of this questionnaire in the financial services sector.

Respondents rated their person-role conflicts (three items), intrasender conflicts (four items), and intersender conflicts (three items) with measures taken from the questionnaire developed by Rizzo et al. (1970). Previous research investigating role conflicts in the frontline employee context has often implemented these measures (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014).

We measured collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance using three items (collectivism) or four items (power distance and uncertainty avoidance) from Yoo et al.'s (2011) CVSCALE. Yoo et al. (2011) define a person's individual culture as a form of self-awareness regarding his or her cultural values. Although Hofstede (1980) initially introduced the cultural values to determine the culture of a whole country, Yoo et al. (2011) argue that individuals' cultural values are not necessarily conform to a country's general culture. Due to the growing mixture of ethnicities within countries coming along with globalization and multicultural workplaces, country and culture cannot be set equal anymore as there rather are many subcultures within one country (Donthu & Yoo, 1998; Lenartowicz & Roth, 2001; Samiee & Jeong, 1994). Such subcultures contain cultural values from, e.g., both the homeland and the country people move into (Donthu & Yoo, 1998;

Lenartowicz & Roth, 2001). For example, people living in a country generally supposed to be high in uncertainty avoidance might nevertheless perceive themselves as less uncertainty-avoidant (Donthu & Yoo, 1998; Yoo et al., 2011). Yoo et al. (2011) also empirically show that people's own understanding of their individual culture varies strongly within one country. This is why the use of measuring cultural values at an individual level is more and more acknowledged in recent research (Furrer, Liu, & Sudharshan, 2000; Gao, Winterich, & Zhang, 2016; Schumann et al., 2010; Soares et al., 2007).

Finally, employees evaluated their own job performance with one item assessing their perceived goal attainment. This measurement approach should result in a reasonable employee evaluation, considering that a meta-analysis of self, manager, and objective performance measures indicates no significant differences in role stress studies (Gilboa et al., 2008).

Because our study was cross-national, the questionnaire and scales were translated from English into French, German, and Polish with a back-translation method (Brislin, 1970). The only exception was the validated German translation of the MLQ Form 5x Short from Felfe (2006), which was translated from German into English, French, and Polish using the back-translation method (Brislin, 1970). Respondents rated all items on 7-point scales ranging from "never" to "always" (transformational leadership styles, person-role conflicts, intrasender conflicts, and intersender conflicts) or "totally disagree" to "totally agree" (collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance), except for the performance measure, which participants assessed on a 10-point scale ranging from "totally unlikely" to "totally likely". Table 2 contains an overview of all items and factors used in the study.

Table 2

Measurement Items

Name (Abbr.) and Source	Items
Idealized influence (II) (Felfe, 2006)	My supervisor talks about his or her most important values and beliefs. My supervisor specifies the importance of having a strong sense of purpose.
Inspirational motivation (IM) (Felfe, 2006)	My supervisor talks optimistically about the future. My supervisor talks enthusiastically about what needs to be accomplished.
Individualized consideration (IC) (Felfe, 2006)	My supervisor helps me to develop my strengths. My supervisor considers me as having individual needs, abilities, and aspirations from others.
Intellectual stimulation (IS) (Felfe, 2006)	My supervisor suggests new ways of looking at how to complete assignments. My supervisor gets me to look at problems from many different angles.
Person-role conflicts (PRC) (Rizzo et al., 1970)	I have to do things that should be done differently. I work on unnecessary things.
Intrasender conflicts (ITC) (Rizzo et al., 1970)	I perform work that contradicts my values. I do not have enough time to complete my work. I receive assignments that are not within my training. I receive an assignment without the capability to complete it. I receive an assignment without adequate resources to execute it.
Intersender conflicts (ISC) (Rizzo et al., 1970)	I receive incompatible requests from two or more people (e.g., expectations about terms and conditions from customers vs. manager). I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person (e.g., manager) and not accepted by others (e.g., customers). I work under incompatible policies and guidelines (e.g. customers vs. manager).

Table 2

Measurement Items (continued)

Name (Abbr.) and Source	Items
Collectivism (CO) (Yoo et al., 2011)	Group welfare is more important individual rewards. Group success is more important than individual success. Group loyalty should be encouraged even if individual goals suffer.
Power distance (PD) (Yoo et al., 2011)	People in higher positions should make most decisions without consulting people in lower positions. People in higher positions should not ask the opinions of people in lower positions too frequently. People in higher positions should avoid social interaction with people in lower positions. People in lower positions should not disagree with decisions by people in higher positions.
Uncertainty avoidance (UA) (Yoo et al., 2011)	It is important to closely follow instructions and procedures. Rules and regulations are important because they inform me of what is expected of me. Standardized work procedures are helpful. Instructions for operations are important.
Job performance (JP) (self-developed according to the findings of Gilboa et al. (2008))	How likely do you think it is that you will achieve all set goals in the current planning horizon?

For the final model, all the items entered into direct reflective indices, except the role conflict scales, which form direct formative indices according to Edwards and Bagozzi's (2000) definitions. We argue for the use of direct formative indices for all role conflict scales to align with previous research that has used other stress scales, such as the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (Holmes & Rahe, 1967), to measure life stress in a direct formative model.

3.4 Analysis and Results

3.4.1 Reliability tests

We tested the reliability of the scales with a confirmatory factor analysis. Overall, the results provide support for the assumption of reliability, as well as convergent and discriminant validity. They show that the measurement model with factor structure indicates reasonable fit, with $\chi^2 = 396.57$, $df = 179$, $\chi^2/df = 2.22$, confirmatory fit index (CFI) = .95, normed fit index (NFI) = .91, and root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) = .06. In addition, all factors provide acceptable Cronbach's α values, above Nunnally's (1978) recommended level of .70. In line with Eisinga, Grotenhuis, and Pelzer's (2013) recommendation to calculate the Spearman-Brown coefficient to assess the reliability of a two-item scale, we calculated this coefficient for all four transformational leadership styles. Although Cronbach's α tends to underestimate the reliability of two-item scales, our results show that the Cronbach's α values and Spearman-Brown coefficient values are the same for our data. We thus proceed with our further analysis, assuming tau-equivalence in our data (Eisinga et al., 2013). The factor reliability values also are all above the suggested levels of .70 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Only for power distance the average variance extracted is slightly below the recommended level of .50 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). To include Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion, we tested whether the highest intercorrelation with another factor is smaller than the squared root of the average variance extracted of the respective factor. All scales fulfill this criterion. The results thus show acceptable intercorrelations and confirm discriminant validity for all scales (see Table 3).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics, Intercorrelations, Validity, and Reliabilities

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	a.	b.	c.	d.	e.	f.	g.	h.	i.	j.	k.
a. <i>II</i>	5.54	1.19	.80										
b. <i>IM</i>	5.45	1.35	.66 ^{***}	.87									
c. <i>IC</i>	5.24	1.44	.78 ^{***}	.79 ^{***}	.89								
d. <i>IS</i>	5.17	1.35	.74 ^{***}	.83 ^{***}	.83 ^{***}	.86							
e. <i>PRC</i>	9.31	3.52	-.36 ^{***}	-.42 ^{***}	-.35 ^{***}	-.29 ^{***}	-						
f. <i>ITC</i>	10.90	4.71	-.38 ^{***}	-.35 ^{***}	-.41 ^{***}	-.34 ^{***}	.47 ^{***}	-					
g. <i>ISC</i>	10.00	4.26	-.41 ^{***}	-.52 ^{***}	-.55 ^{***}	-.51 ^{***}	.59 ^{***}	.52 ^{***}	-				
h. <i>CO</i>	5.13	1.26	.10 [†]	.05	.07	.06	-.04	.05	-.06	.75			
i. <i>PD</i>	2.32	1.15	.03	.05	.00	.10	.07	-.02	-.07	-.02	.66		
j. <i>UA</i>	6.00	0.93	.21 ^{***}	.19 ^{**}	.15 ^{**}	.09	-.27 ^{***}	-.13 [*]	-.16 ^{**}	.13 [*]	-.07	.80	
k. <i>JP</i>	6.59	2.43	.17 ^{**}	.31 ^{***}	.24 ^{***}	.28 ^{***}	-.35 ^{***}	-.18 ^{***}	-.32 ^{***}	-.08	.04	.18 ^{***}	-
<i>AVE</i>			.63	.75	.79	.74	-	-	-	.57	.44	.63	-
<i>FR</i>			.78	.86	.89	.85	-	-	-	.79	.76	.87	-
<i>α</i>			.77	.85	.88	.85	-	-	-	.78	.75	.87	-
<i>SB</i>			.77	.85	.88	.85	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Notes. *II* = idealized influence, *IM* = inspirational motivation, *IC* = individualized consideration, *IS* = intellectual stimulation, *PRC* = person-role conflicts, *ITC* = intrasender conflicts, *ISC* = intersender conflicts, *CO* = collectivism, *PD* = power distance, *UA* = uncertainty avoidance, *JP* = job performance; *AVE* = average variance extracted, *FR* = factor reliability, α = Cronbach's α , *SB* = Spearman-Brown coefficient; numbers on the diagonal in italics show the squared root of the *AVE*; because we included person-role conflicts, intrasender conflicts, and intersender conflicts as direct formative factors (range: 3-21), we calculated no *AVE*-, *FR*- and α -values for these factors; because job performance was measured by one single item we calculated no *AVE*-, *FR*- and α -values for this factor.

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, [†] $p < .10$.

Because correlations between all transformational leadership styles and correlations between all role conflict dimensions are high, we tested for multicollinearity (O'Brien, 2007). We calculated the variance inflation factors (VIF) of all role conflict dimensions and transformational leadership styles by estimating two linear regression models in SPSS. The first model contained idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation as independent variables and job performance as the dependent variable. All the VIF values are below the critical level of 4.00 (idealized influence (II) 1.81; inspirational motivation (IM) 2.29; individualized consideration (IC) 2.66; intellectual stimulation (IS) 2.72; O'Brien (2007)). The second model included person-role conflicts, intrasender conflicts, and intersender conflicts as independent variables and, again, job performance as the dependent variable. Similar to the results of the first model, all VIF values are less than 4.00 (person-role conflicts 1.63; intrasender conflicts 1.46; intersender conflicts 1.73). Hence, multicollinearity is not an issue in our data.

3.4.2 Common method variance

Because participants rated themselves, and we measured the dependent and independent variables at the same time, the data might suffer from common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). To minimize the likelihood of this bias, we used items with different scales and different anchors when conceptualizing the study. In addition, the questionnaire directed all respondents to answer as spontaneously and honestly as possible and assured them that there were no wrong answers. Moreover, we guaranteed that all data would be treated anonymously and confidentially. To control for common method variance afterward, we extended the measurement model of the confirmatory factor analysis

by a common method factor (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). We included an additional factor in the model constrained to weight the impact on all observed variables equally, which resulted in a level of $\beta = .00$. Fit indices of the common variance model are worse than in the original model ($\chi^2 = 971.64$, $df = 212$, $\chi^2/df = 4.58$, CFI = .82, NFI = .78, RMSEA = .10). Therefore, we consider the influence of a common method factor negligible.

3.4.3 Test for measurement invariance

Because we conducted the study in three countries, we tested measurement invariance across the countries according to Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998). To test for configural invariance, we used the measurement model with factor structure from the reliability analysis. Following Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998), we split the original measurement model with the factor structure into three groups to estimate the model on the country level. This unrestricted model indicates good fit ($\chi^2 = 699.52$, $df = 393$, $\chi^2/df = 1.78$, CFI = .92, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .89, RMSEA = .05). In addition, all standardized factor loadings are significant across all three countries, and nearly all items exceed the level of .50 (cf. one collectivism item in France; Birgelen, Ruyter, Jong, & Wetzels (2002)). Next, we tested for metric invariance by constraining the factor loadings of each factor in the measurement model split into three groups to be equal across all three countries. The model fit indicated that the data did not support the condition of full metric invariance. We subsequently tested for partial metric invariance by comparing the complete constrained model with different models in which respectively one factor loading was not constrained to be equal across all countries (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). Comparing all these models with the complete constrained model showed that

four of the seven scales fulfilled the condition of full metric invariance (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and power distance), whereas three scales revealed at least partial metric invariance (individualized consideration, collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance). We then established one model with all constrainable paths constrained and the unconstrainable paths extracted estimated freely. This partial metric invariant model showed reasonable model fit ($\chi^2 = 718.45$, $df = 409$, $\chi^2/df = 1.76$, CFI = .91, TLI = .89, RMSEA = .05), in support of partial metric invariance. We did not test for scalar invariance, because we did not execute comparisons of mean values in our hypotheses tests.

3.4.4 Hypotheses tests

3.4.4.1 Test of direct effects

To test the direct effects of the hypothesized model, we used structural equation modeling including all direct effects and four controls (gender, age, tenure, and country of origin). Additionally, we added intrasender conflicts and intersender conflicts and the three individual cultural values collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance as covariates to the model. We estimated the results with the maximum likelihood procedure. In general, the model shows reasonable fit, with $\chi^2 = 532.77$, $df = 239$, $\chi^2/df = 2.23$, CFI = .94, NFI = .90 and RMSEA = .06.

The results support H₁, in that person-role conflicts have a significantly negative effect on job performance ($\beta = -.24$, $p < .001$), even after controlling for the effects of intrasender conflicts ($\beta = .02$, $p = .81$) and intersender conflicts ($\beta = -.08$, $p = .27$). We also controlled for a quadratic effect of person-role conflicts on job performance by adding a quadratic term of person-role conflicts to the structural

model after analyzing all direct effects, results point to a linear effect though ($\beta = .01, p = .79$).

Supporting H₂, H₃, and H₅, we found that leadership by idealized influence and inspirational motivation significantly reduces person-role conflicts (II: $\beta = -.26, p = .01$; IM: $\beta = -.40, p < .001$), while the results show a significant positive effect of intellectual stimulation on person-role conflicts (IS: $\beta = .38, p < .01$). The data do not support H₄ however; we found a non-significant effect of individualized consideration on person-role conflicts (IC: $\beta = .20, p = .16$).

3.4.4.2 Test of mediating effects

The model contains four mediated relationships (H_{6a-d}); therefore, we tested these mediations according to Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes's (2007) bootstrap method and classified them according to Zhao, Lynch, and Chen (2010). In support of H_{6a}, H_{6b}, and H_{6d} results show significant indirect effects of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation over person-role conflicts on job performance (II: $\beta = .06, p = .03$; IM: $\beta = .10, p = .01$; IS: $\beta = -.09, p = .04$). The findings indicate that only H_{6c} cannot be supported as there is no significant indirect effect of individualized consideration over person-role conflicts on job performance (IC: $\beta = -.05, p = .22$).

To classify the mediations according to Zhao et al. (2010), we also tested for the direct effects of all transformational leadership styles on job performance, but we did not find any significant effect (II: $\beta = -.18, p = .23$; IM: $\beta = .04, p = .84$; IC: $\beta = .04, p = .80$; IS: $\beta = .22, p = .37$). We, hence, can conclude that the indirect effects of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation through person-role conflicts on job performance are indirect-only mediations (Zhao

et al., 2010). The indirect effect of individualized consideration can be classified as no-effect nonmediation (Zhao et al., 2010).

3.4.4.3 *Test of moderating effects*

To test the moderating effect of the three individual cultural values collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance on the effect of person-role conflicts on job performance (H₇, H₈, and H₉), we used the moderated mediations procedure recommended by Preacher et al. (2007). With PROCESS in SPSS (model 14) we calculated twelve models with each including one transformational leadership style as independent variable and the other three transformational leadership styles as covariates plus gender, age, tenure, country of origin, intrasender conflicts, and intersender conflicts as control variables. Job performance was our dependent variable. In addition to using person-role conflicts as mediator, we either added collectivism or power distance or uncertainty avoidance as a moderating factor on the link from person-role conflicts to job performance. The other two individual cultural values remained as control variables in the respective models. With these models we can determine whether the individual cultural values moderate the indirect effect of all transformational leadership styles over person-role conflicts on job performance by affecting the relation of person-role conflicts on job performance.

Our findings do support H_{7a}, H_{7b}, and H_{7d} as we find significant moderated mediation indices for the indirect effects of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation over person-role conflicts on job performance moderated by collectivism (II: $ab = 0.02$, BCa CI [+0.00, +0.05]; IM: $ab = 0.03$, BCa CI [+0.00, +0.07]; IS: $ab = -0.02$, BCa CI [-0.06, -0.00]). Data

does not support H_{7c} ; the index of moderated mediation is not significant for the indirect effect of individualized consideration (IC: $ab = -0.01$, BCa CI [-0.05, +0.00]). The overall moderating effect of collectivism on the relation of person-role conflicts on job performance is significant too ($b = -0.05$, $p = .04$). Across the four types of leadership, the unstandardized simple slope of person-role conflicts for employees 1 *SD* below the mean of collectivism is 0.03 (II), 0.05 (IM), -0.02 (IC), and -0.04 (IS); the unstandardized simple slope of person-role conflicts for employees with a mean level of collectivism is 0.05 (II), 0.08 (IM), -0.04 (IC), and -0.06 (IS); and the unstandardized simple slope of person-role conflicts for employees 1 *SD* above the mean of collectivism is 0.07 (II), 0.12 (IM), -0.06 (IC), and -0.09 (IS). Thus, higher levels of collectivism strengthen the indirect effects of all transformational leadership styles over person-role conflicts on job performance.

In support of H_{8a} , H_{8b} , and H_{8d} the indices of moderated mediation are significant for the indirect effects of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation over person-role conflicts on job performance moderated by power distance (II: $ab = -0.02$, BCa CI [-0.06, -0.00]; IM: $ab = -0.03$, BCa CI [-0.09, -0.00]; IS: $ab = 0.03$, BCa CI [+0.00, +0.08]). Findings do not support H_{8c} as the index of moderated mediation is not significant for the indirect effect of individualized consideration (IC: $ab = 0.01$, BCa CI [-0.00, +0.06]). We found a significant moderating effect of power distance on the relation of person-role conflicts on job performance ($b = 0.06$, $p = .05$). Across the four types of leadership, the unstandardized simple slope of person-role conflicts for employees 1 *SD* below the mean of power distance is .07 (II), .11 (IM), -.05 (IC), and -.09 (IS); the unstandardized simple slope of person-role conflicts for employees with a mean level of power distance is .05 (II), .08 (IM), -.04 (IC), and -.06 (IS); and the

unstandardized simple slope of person-role conflicts for employees 1 *SD* above the mean of power distance is .03 (II), .04 (IM), -.02 (IC), and -.04 (IS). Thus, higher levels of power distance weaken the indirect effects of all transformational leadership styles over person-role conflicts on job performance.

Supporting H_{9a}, H_{9b}, and H_{9d} we found significant indices of moderated mediation for the indirect effects of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation over person-role conflicts on job performance moderated by uncertainty avoidance (II: $ab = 0.03$, BCa CI [+0.00, +0.09]; IM: $ab = 0.05$, BCa CI [+0.00, +0.13]; IS: $ab = -0.04$, BCa CI [-0.12, -0.00]). H_{9c} cannot be supported. The index of moderated mediation is not significant for the indirect effect of individualized consideration (IC: $ab = -0.02$, BCa CI [-0.07, +0.00]). Uncertainty avoidance moderates the relation of person-role conflicts on job performance significantly ($b = -0.08$, $p = .03$). Across the four types of leadership, the unstandardized simple slope of person-role conflicts for employees 1 *SD* below the mean of uncertainty avoidance is .02 (II), .04 (IM), -.02 (IC), and -.03 (IS); the unstandardized simple slope of person-role conflicts for employees with a mean level of uncertainty avoidance is .05 (II), .08 (IM), -.03 (IC), and -.07 (IS); and the unstandardized simple slope of person-role conflicts for employees 1 *SD* above the mean of uncertainty avoidance is .08 (II), .13 (IM), -.05 (IC), and -.11 (IS). Thus, higher levels of uncertainty avoidance strengthen the indirect effects of all transformational leadership styles over person-role conflicts on job performance.

3.4.4.4 Additional analyses of self-assessed job performance effects

As employees' job performance was self-assessed, additional analyses of the effects of self-assessed job performance on customers' satisfaction with and trust in

the bank employee as well as customers' positive word-of-mouth serve to show the validity of the performance self-assessment. For this purpose, we surveyed customers of the 373 bank employees using paper-and-pencil questionnaires to assess the satisfaction with and the trust in the respective employees with each one item (satisfaction: "How satisfied are you with your banking consultant on the following scale?" adapted from Oliver (1997) and trust: "Overall I trust my banking consultant..." adapted from Schumann et al. (2010)). Both items were measured with 10-point scales ranging from "not satisfied at all" to "completely satisfied" (satisfaction: $M = 8.41$, $SD = 1.84$) and from "not at all" to "completely" (trust: $M = 5.92$, $SD = 1.19$). We took the four items for customers' positive word-of-mouth (e.g., "I encourage friends and relatives to go to my bank.") from Bove, Pervan, Beatty, and Shiu (2009). The four items ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.48$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$) were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from "totally disagree" to "totally agree". We got answers from 1,287 customers of 330 of the 373 bank employees and matched them by anonymous codes pre-printed on the paper-and-pencil questionnaires administrated in a matching code table by a third party agency. To ensure that customers filled out questionnaires with pre-printed codes matching to the codes on the questionnaires of their belonging banking consultants, the questionnaires were initially distributed in complete packages to the bank managers and handed out as one package to each employee. In a second step, the employees received exact instructions from the research team how to fill out their own questionnaire and how to hand out the surveys to their customers. The results of three hierarchical linear models estimated with the restricted maximum likelihood procedure show that the employees' self-assessed job performance (level 2) has a significant positive cross-level effect on customer satisfaction with the employee

($b = 0.06, p = .02$), customer trust in the employee ($b = 0.07, p < .001$), and positive word-of-mouth ($b = 0.09, p < .001$ – all level 1) when controlling for employees' and customers' gender, age, and country of origin and employees' tenure. These findings support the assumption that job performance self-assessments can be used as reliable outcome variable in our structural model.

3.5 Discussion

3.5.1 Review of empirical findings and research implications

Our findings contribute to service research, research on role conflicts, and transformational leadership research in four main ways. First, adding to research on the effects of frontline employees' role conflicts (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014; Singh, 1998, 2000; Zablah et al., 2012), this study is the first to investigate job performance outcomes of internally generated person-role conflicts as a separate dimension of role conflict. Our results show that person-role conflicts are at least as important as other role conflict dimensions such as intrasender and intersender conflicts in lessening the job performance of frontline employees. Moreover, our data do not support an inverted U-shaped relation of person-role conflicts and job performance (as proposed by Singh (1998)), meaning that already low levels of experienced person-role conflicts lead to lower job performance. These findings support and expand existing theoretical research that identifies person-role conflicts as important in chronic and severe job stress (Latack, 1981).

Second, our results add to transformational leadership research (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006) by showing that transformational leadership can reduce perceived person-role conflicts. Our findings imply that transformational leadership can affect not only externally originated stress factors but also conflicts derived from

internal values and conflicting external expectations. Furthermore, the results support Bass's (1985) theory that transformational leadership changes employees from the inside and has a deep effect on an employee's personality. Bass's (1985) original development of the Full Range of Leadership Model determined that the effectiveness of transformational leadership can be attributed to, as the name suggests, the transformation of employees and their personal development. Our findings indicate the novel result that this assumption is valid for transformational leadership in service settings, by showing its impact on internally generated stress.

Third, the results clarify conflicting findings of existing research on the differential effects of transformational leadership in the specific context of service occupations (MacKenzie et al., 2001; Podsakoff et al., 1996). Not all transformational leadership styles are equally effective in lessening person-role conflicts and enhancing frontline employees' job performance. Whereas charisma-related leadership styles (idealized influence and inspirational motivation) reduce person-role conflicts effectively, intellectual stimulation actually increases perceived person-role conflicts. These findings extend prior studies showing varying differential effects of transformational leadership on different stress dimensions (Diebig et al., 2016; MacKenzie et al., 2001; Podsakoff et al., 1996) by expanding this knowledge to person-role conflicts.

Furthermore, our findings show that transformational leadership can lead to two different person-role conflict results. On the one hand, charisma-related styles seem to pull frontline employees toward their leader, meaning that the frontline employees adapt their values to those of their leader. This adaption in turn leads to decreased perceptions of person-role conflicts and higher levels of job performance. On the other hand, intellectual stimulation seems to have the opposite effect, by

pushing the frontline employees to act self-determined (e.g., stimulation of creativity, seeking new solutions). This type of leadership style assumes the risk that the frontline employees are prone to focus on their own values and may develop their values in a different direction than their leaders' expectations. When the discrepancy between their own values and a leader's expectations grows, it ultimately promotes person-role conflicts and lowers frontline employees' job performance. Therefore, the various transformational leadership styles lead to either pull or push effects that respectively temper or foster the person-role conflicts perceived by frontline employees and ultimately affect their job performance.

The missing effect of individualized consideration on person-role conflicts and job performance might be clarified by a paradox that Avolio and Bass (1995) explain: while charisma-related transformational leadership is related to the group's or organization's interests, individualized consideration may only be related to the maximum development of an individual per se. Hence, supervisors that lead frontline employees by individualized consideration may only aim at developing their subordinates which rather motivates them to focus on their self-interest (Avolio & Bass, 1995). Individually developed frontline employees might, thus, not change their own values in direction of those of their organization respectively supervisor, while the supervisor nonetheless keeps in mind the common, organizational goals. This missing convergence of their values, hence, does not lead to lower person-role conflicts even if problems are discussed and the frontline employees are supported individually.

Fourth, our findings indicate that individual cultural values affecting the role perception of frontline employees are crucial for how severe person-role conflicts ultimately affect frontline employees' job performance. Thus, we contribute to

research on the effects of individual cultural values in service settings (Chan et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2008). To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to show that collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance, as individual cultural dimensions noted by Yoo et al. (2011), moderate the link between perceived person-role conflicts and job performance. Moreover, these moderating factors also affect the indirect effects of transformational leadership over person-role conflicts on job performance. While collectivism and uncertainty avoidance lead to a strengthening of the indirect effects and, thus, a divergence of the push and pull effects, power distance converges the push and pull effects of transformational leadership by weakening the indirect effects. Hence, the effect of a manager's transformational leadership style on a frontline employee's job performance is determined by the frontline employee's individual characteristics (i.e., individual culture).

This divergence respectively convergence of the effects may, on the one hand, explain prior studies' differing results on the differential effects of transformational leadership styles on stress (Diebig et al., 2016; MacKenzie et al., 2001; Podsakoff et al., 1996). On the other hand, our results contribute to earlier service research that found different effects of overall role conflicts on frontline employees' job performance (Babin & Boles, 1996; Gilboa et al., 2008; Singh, 1998, 2000; Zablah et al., 2012). According to our results, the levels of frontline employees' collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance can determine the effect size of person-role conflicts on job performance, which offers a possible explanation for the inconsistencies in prior research. Summarizing, our findings show that individual culture as a type of personal characteristic should not be neglected – neither in role stress nor in transformational leadership research.

3.5.2 Managerial implications

Our study contributes to practice in two major ways. First, according to our results, service organizations should introduce special leadership programs to train service firm managers to lead frontline employees by creating visions and shared goals as well as providing role models. In summary, they should learn to create stable conditions in which frontline employees know their responsibilities and how they can act to fulfill their duties. Service managers should be sensitized to which tools are most effective in leading their service staff. This training should highlight that, in highly stressful occupations such as frontline service, fostering creativity is not effective in reducing person-role conflicts. Managers should learn implementable behavior that transmits the intended leadership style to their employees. Such sessions could, for example, contain lessons in which managers learn how to share their visions with their employees, how to act as helpful role model, and how to avoid challenging tasks in search of new ways and solutions when they want to reduce person-role conflicts.

Second, our individual cultural value findings suggest that service firms should hone their hiring procedures to identify individual cultural value profiles. Questionnaires assessing candidates' personalities could measure individual cultural values. Knowing the levels of collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance can help managers direct frontline employees more effectively. In the first place, managers of frontline employees can better understand how and why their employees might react differently to the same level of person-role conflicts. Thusly, managers might provide additional support to those employees that are at higher risk to suffer from high levels of person-role conflicts which would affect their job performance to a higher degree, namely, those with a rather collectivistic orientation,

small power distance, and higher uncertainty avoidance. In addition, the current study's results show that, while collectivism and uncertainty avoidance strengthen the particular effect of a transformational leadership style on job performance, a high level of power distance weakens all effects. Hence, managers of frontline employees could use this knowledge to either leverage the effects of their adapted effective charisma-related leadership styles or mitigate the negative effects of intellectual stimulation. Doing so should ultimately produce higher levels of job performance.

3.5.3 Limitations and further research directions

This study has some limitations that point to further research opportunities. The model only includes transformational leadership styles, but the influence of transactional leadership styles or laissez-faire leadership could be another worthwhile topic to explore. The effectiveness of those styles in service settings might also change in ways contrary to general assumptions such that leadership styles like contingent reward might be less effective in reducing person-role conflicts that in lessening, e.g., role ambiguity (MacKenzie et al., 2001).

In addition, we measured all transformational leadership styles with only two items, for two reasons. First, previous research has used the transformational leadership scale and its German translation often enough that we could assume that the items would be valid and reliable when we chose those with the highest factor loadings. Our reliability tests affirm this assumption. Second, to ensure a reasonable sample size, we designed the questionnaire to be as short as possible. The study demanded long preparation and was only executable once, so we sought to minimize the risk of incomplete questionnaires due to length or complexity. Nonetheless,

further research should validate the results of our study using the complete, original number of items available to assess all transformational leadership styles.

Finally, uncertainty avoidance shows a high mean value and small standard deviation. The variance of this factor within our sample thus is not very high, which actually offers stronger affirmation for the moderating effect, in that it is significant even when uncertainty avoidance is high and its variance is low. We expect that with more variance of uncertainty avoidance in a sample, the moderating effect would grow even stronger. However, we conducted our study in three countries belonging to the same broad cultural area (Europe). It would be worthwhile to investigate countries outside Europe.

3.6 References

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4 Effective Coping Strategies for Stressed Frontline Employees in Service Occupations: Outcomes and Drivers³

Despite extensive research on the negative outcomes of role ambiguity in boundary-spanning positions, insights into how to prevent frontline employees from experiencing role ambiguity are sparse. This study addresses which frontline employees' problem-focused coping strategies might effectively reduce perceived role ambiguity. The gathered evidence indicates that only action coping is effective, whereas instrumental support seeking does even enhance perceived role ambiguity. An examination of intrinsic and extrinsic coping resources as drivers of coping reveals that conscientiousness and supervisor support are helpful coping resources. Contrary, neuroticism drives insufficient coping and inhibits the use of effective coping resources. Managers of service firms should provide training to ensure effective supervisor support plus consider the personality traits of potential employees in recruitment procedures to reduce and prevent experienced role ambiguity among frontline employees.

Keywords: Role ambiguity, coping, coping resources, personality traits, social support

³ This study is currently under review at the Journal of Business Research.

4.1 Introduction

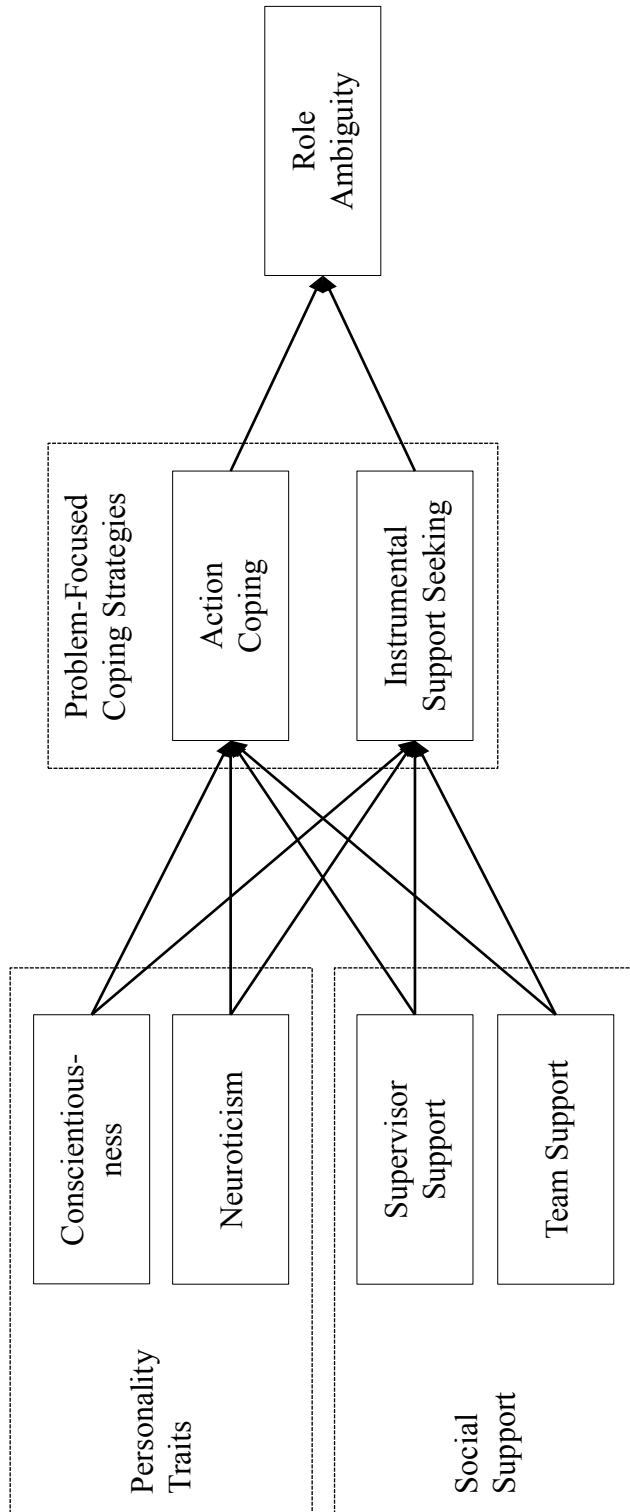
Customer service is increasingly important in a service-dominated world and frontline employees' job performance largely drives customer satisfaction, such that it constitutes an essential, key competence for successful service firms (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Chan & Wan, 2012; Mascio, 2010). Increasingly diversified customer demands, new technologies that mediate customer-employee contacts, and the growing complexity of service firms also combine to foster insecurity and ambiguity for frontline employees (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014; Zablah, Franke, Brown, & Bartholomew, 2012). Thus, it is not surprising that boundary-spanning frontline employees' role ambiguity (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970; Singh, 1998) is still a major issue for service firms, even if research cautions about its negative outcomes, such as decreased job satisfaction and job performance, burnout, and withdrawal (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014; Singh, 2000). Service employees even rank among the highest scores on job strain rankings (Eurofound and EU-OSHA, 2014).

Research into how to prevent frontline employees from experiencing role ambiguity is insufficient though (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014; Singh, 2000; Zablah et al., 2012). Coping, a self-applied stress reduction method that attracts attention in life, consumer, and general occupational stress research, remains under-researched in boundary spanner service research (Boyd, Lewin, & Sager, 2009; Goolsby, 1992). Few extant studies examine the relation of frontline employees' role ambiguity and coping based on the model by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) that differentiates between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping (Boyd et al., 2009; Lewin & Sager, 2008). These studies investigate the stress reduction of both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping on an overall level and show that problem-focused

coping is generally sufficient for stress reduction (Boyd et al., 2009; Lewin & Sager, 2008). However, recent consumer coping research reveals that problem-focused coping contains two distinct coping strategies that have different effects on consumers' stress perceptions: action coping and instrumental support seeking (Duhachek, 2005; Strizhakova, Tsarenko, & Ruth, 2012). Similar differential effects of problem-focused coping strategies on frontline employees' role ambiguity perceptions have hitherto not been examined by existing service literature nor have the coping resources that might trigger the use of both strategies.

Noting the limited results regarding boundary spanners' problem-focused coping strategies, we investigate which problem-focused coping strategy – action coping or instrumental support seeking (Duhachek, 2005) – most effectively reduces perceived role ambiguity among frontline employees. We also specify the resources that trigger the use of these coping strategies, determining whether intrinsic (personality traits conscientiousness and neuroticism) or extrinsic (social support by supervisors or the team) coping resources promote the use of effective and prevent the use of ineffective coping strategies. Our research model is depicted in Figure 3.

Using data from 390 retail bank employees to answer these research questions, we find that only action coping can reduce role ambiguity. Instrumental support seeking even has a significant positive effect on role ambiguity. In turn, by considering the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic coping resources on coping, we find that conscientiousness and supervisor support are helpful resources for action coping, while neuroticism promotes the use of instrumental support seeking. Moreover, neuroticism is an important moderating factor, inhibiting the positive effect of supervisor support on action coping, whereas team support strengthens this effect. In an additional analysis, we underline the importance of managing frontline



Control Variables: Gender, Age, Tenure, Country of

Figure 3. Research Model

employees' role ambiguity as it has a significant negative impact on customers' positive word of mouth and trust.

These results contribute to service research and, especially, role stress and coping research in four main ways. First, by extending and differentiating prior findings from boundary spanner research (Boyd et al., 2009; Lewin & Sager, 2008), we show that action coping is the only problem-focused coping strategy reducing role ambiguity among frontline employees, not instrumental support seeking. Second, we identify conscientiousness and supervisor support as important drivers of effective action coping, which extends prior conceptual research (Goolsby, 1992; Porter, Kraft, & Claycomb, 2003) with concrete insights into effective coping resources. Third, we are the first to analyze interactions between personality traits and social support and their effects on coping (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010) and find that neuroticism is an important dysfunctional factor, triggering ineffective coping and inhibiting the positive effects of supervisor support. Fourth, we show empirically that social support in a service firm must be differentiated between supervisor support and team support (Susskind, Kacmar, & Borchgrevink, 2003); each social support type has different effects on the use of coping strategies. Supervisor support directly pushes frontline employees to autonomously resolve ambiguities, while team support is only effective as an assistant coping resource for supervisor support.

In the next section, we outline research on role ambiguity and coping as well as on drivers of coping to develop our hypotheses. We then explain the study context, sample, and measures, followed by the results of our study. Finally, we highlight both research and managerial implications and identify directions for further research.

4.2 Research Background and Hypotheses Development

4.2.1 Experiencing role ambiguity in service settings

Role ambiguity is a common phenomenon experienced by frontline employees in boundary-spanning positions (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014; Singh, 1998, 2000). It is defined as a lack of clarity regarding behavioral requirements (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Rizzo et al., 1970), and occurs when frontline employees do not have the information they need to fulfill their roles (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003). Role ambiguity leads to negative job outcomes, such as lower job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational commitment and a higher propensity for burnout and withdrawal (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014; Singh, 1998, 2000; Zablah et al., 2012). Lessening experienced role ambiguity thus is important for maintaining and promoting frontline employees' job satisfaction and job performance (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014; Singh, 1998, 2000), which fosters perceived service quality, satisfaction, positive word of mouth, and loyalty on the customer side (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Liao & Chuang, 2004, 2007), all of which should contribute to a service firm's success.

4.2.2 Coping with role ambiguity

According to coping theory, cognitive or behavioral "efforts to master conditions that tax or exceed adaptive resources" (Latack, 1986, p. 377) can reduce perceptions of stress in a dynamic process (Goolsby, 1992; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Despite the high relevance of coping and its effects on stress perceptions, pertinent research related to boundary-spanning settings is scarce and does not consider most up-to-date results of coping research in other settings (Duhachek,

2005; Goolsby, 1992; Porter et al., 2003). Earlier research differentiates problem-focused from emotion-focused coping (Goolsby, 1992; Latack, 1986; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Hence, an attempt to manipulate the environment to reduce the source of stress (problem-focused coping) differs from a reappraisal of the environment stimuli to manage the negative emotions caused by that source (emotion-focused coping; Goolsby, 1992; Latack, 1986; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Existing research on boundary spanner coping generally shows sufficiency in stress reduction of overall problem-focused coping and insufficiency of emotion-focused coping (Boyd et al., 2009; Lewin & Sager, 2008). However, Duhachek (2005) argues that only distinguishing problem-focused from emotion-focused coping is theoretically and empirically inaccurate; he instead subdivides problem-focused coping into two different strategies: action coping and instrumental support seeking (Duhachek, 2005). Despite first results on consumer coping indicate differential effects on stress perceptions (Duhachek, 2005; Strizhakova et al., 2012), the two problem-focused coping strategies have hitherto not been examined separately by existing service literature.

Action coping implies autonomously engaging in problem-solving behavior, including cognitive and behavioral actions targeted at solving the problem (Duhachek, 2005). Existing coping research proposes that a positive attitude toward a stressor in turn implies that the recipient believes in successfully manipulating the environment to reduce the source of ambiguity (Boyd et al., 2009; Goolsby, 1992; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This positive, constructive attitude toward the stressors helps people perceive ambiguity as less severe (Goolsby, 1992; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lewin & Sager, 2008). Moreover, through action coping the recipient actually eliminates uncertainties (Goolsby, 1992). In boundary-spanning settings, such a self-

reliant and proactive approach should be effective. Frontline employees who actively solve problems likely recognize their strict work conditions (Chan & Wan, 2012) and find a solution that fits these conditions to manage role ambiguity.

H₁: The tendency to use action coping reduces perceived role ambiguity of frontline employees.

Instrumental support seeking refers to turning to social resources to seek solutions for faced stressors (Duhachek, 2005; Strizhakova et al., 2012). Unlike action coping though, it requires the involvement of others. The few, ambiguous studies in this realm tend to neglect single subdimensions of problem-focused coping, though Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) show that instrumental support seeking differs notably from action coping. We argue that in boundary-spanning positions, instrumental support seeking cannot reduce role ambiguity effectively. Frontline employees cannot consult others in the first place and, thus, do not receive feedback during the actually stressful, ambiguous situation (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Rich, 2001). Moreover, the strict work conditions of frontline employees and heterogeneous customer demands (Chan & Wan, 2012) make it difficult for anyone else to help a frontline employee find solutions for specific uncertainties. Instrumental support seeking even might be damaging, in that people continue to focus on the ambiguous situation while telling others about it (Strizhakova et al., 2012). If others cannot help change the situation, such instrumental support seeking may intensify the constantly repeated, negative emotions (Strizhakova et al., 2012). Thus, instrumental support seeking might not

solve frontline employees' role ambiguity perceptions but instead may intensify the feeling of being insecure.

H₂: The tendency to use instrumental support seeking enhances the perceived role ambiguity of frontline employees.

4.2.3 Coping resources

According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress and coping, the choice of effective or ineffective coping strategies depends on the coping resources available to the person. Conceptual research on boundary spanner coping already distinguishes intrinsic (personal) from extrinsic (environmental) coping resources, which might push employees to use certain coping strategies (Goolsby, 1992; Thoits, 1995). Conceptual research on coping in private contexts also highlights personality traits and social support aspects as the most important tools for coping with stress (DeLongis & Holtzman, 2005). To extend such conceptual studies, empirical evidence is needed to explain why and how personality traits and social support affect boundary spanners' choices of coping strategies.

A meta-analysis of life stress coping by Connor-Smith and Flachsbart (2007) indicates that personality traits relate to certain coping strategies, especially in stressful settings (e.g., boundary-spanning occupations). Conscientiousness is most strongly related to particular problem-solving and engagement coping strategies; neuroticism predicts support seeking responses (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007). Accordingly, we focus on conscientiousness and neuroticism as internal coping resources in this study.

Conscientiousness encompasses personality facets such as perfectionism, diligence, organization, and prudence (Ashton & Lee, 2009). People with high levels of conscientiousness can perform boring or unpleasant tasks, because they can focus on the positive aspects of such tasks without being bothered (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007; McCrae & John, 1992). They exhibit high levels of discipline, impulse control, persistence, and achievement orientation (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007). Such capabilities to solve problems autonomously and focus on potential solutions to a problem should support the use of action coping in customer contact settings while also preventing frontline employees from seeking help from others (instrumental support seeking).

H₃: Conscientiousness (a) promotes the tendency of frontline employees to use action coping and (b) lessens their tendency to use instrumental support seeking.

Neuroticism refers to aspects such as sentimentality, anxiety, and dependence (Ashton & Lee, 2009), related to negative emotionality and physiological reactivity to stress (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007; McCrae & John, 1992). Ashton and Lee (2009) assert that neuroticism implies being dependent on others, because highly neurotic people are vulnerable to distress and tend to seek comfort from others. Highly neurotic frontline employees thus may be likely to engage in instrumental support seeking, and their negative emotionality may distract them from autonomously solving problems.

H₄: Neuroticism (a) lessens the tendency of frontline employees to use action coping and (b) promotes their tendency to use instrumental support seeking.

According to Thoits' (1995) conceptual view, perception of social support is another important determinant of coping strategies. DeLongis and Holtzman (2005) assert that the perception of being socially supported is crucial for coping with life stress. However, these conceptual findings cannot specify the impact of social support on action coping and instrumental support seeking. Nor is it clear whether social support should come from a supervisor (supervisor support) or colleagues (team support; Liaw, Chi, & Chuang, 2010; Susskind et al., 2003). The impact of both these support dimensions on the use of problem-focused coping strategies has not been examined previously.

Supervisor support is the degree to which a supervisor cares for an employee's well-being and offers work-related assistance to facilitate his or her job performance (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988; Susskind et al., 2003). Team or coworker support instead refers to the extent to which colleagues provide work-related assistance to one another (Susskind et al., 2003). We predict that supervisor and team support are intended to support a frontline employee's efforts to fulfill his or her role requirements autonomously (action coping) while simultaneously preventing this employee from seeking the help of others (instrumental support seeking). However, whereas supervisor support likely is driven by motivating employees to autonomously fulfill the organization's operational goals, team support lacks hierarchical differences and thus tends to be more informal (Liaw et al., 2010; Susskind et al., 2003). Accordingly, team support might reflect an intention to keep

additional tasks from being assigned to oneself, were those tasks to be handed over by an instrumental support seeking coworker.

H₅: (a) Supervisor support and (b) team support promote the tendency of frontline employees to use action coping.

H₆: (a) Supervisor support and (b) team support lessen the tendency of frontline employees to use instrumental support seeking.

4.3 Methodology

4.3.1 Study context

We chose retail banking as the context for our study, such that we interviewed retail banking counselors from branches of six banks in three countries (France, Germany, and Poland) to test the hypothesized relationships. Retail banking represents an appropriate setting for this analysis. First, retail banking employees perform typical frontline functions in boundary-spanning positions (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003), and the frontline employees, managers, and customers are all involved in the service process to a high degree (Chebat & Kollias, 2000). Banking service provision thus offers the potential to generate substantial role ambiguity (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Chebat & Kollias, 2000; Rigopoulou, Theodosiou, Katsikea, & Perdakis, 2012). Second, banking services tend to be comparable across countries, due to their internationality and high standardization (Malhotra, Ulgado, Agarwal, Shainesh, & Wu, 2005; Schumann et al., 2010). We selected different branches in both urban and rural areas and in economically well-off and struggling neighborhoods. Thus, our study purposefully includes three countries, various

organizational climates (different banks), regional areas within countries, and performance levels (different branches). Accordingly, we confirmed that all interrogated bank employees had similar responsibilities (i.e., account management and investment consulting).

4.3.2 Sample and sampling procedure

Before collecting the data with paper-and-pencil questionnaires, we pretested the items. After asking managers of 92 branches of the six banks to inform their employees about the survey, we provided instructions for how to complete the questionnaires in each branch, with supportive video clips that contained instructions in several languages. The employees answered the survey anonymously in the bank, and their participation was voluntary, without any incentive. We collected data from 390 frontline banking counselors, 43% from Poland, 33% from Germany, and 24% from France. 70% of the respondents were female and 30% were male. They ranged in age from 20 to 63 years ($M = 37.18$, $SD = 9.73$) and primarily had graduated with a university (55%) or high school (44%) degree. On average, they had worked about 13 years for their current bank ($M = 152.95$, $SD = 122.84$ – numbers in month). 94% of the employees were employed full-time. They all worked in direct contact with customers and had a manager who provided job instructions.

4.3.3 Measures

We measured the two coping strategies with items developed by Duhachek (2005). We used four items for action coping and three items for instrumental support seeking. Duhachek's (2005) scale was developed in relation to consumer stress, but he took the items from other settings, including occupational stress

research (Carver et al., 1989; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and argues for the applicability of the scale to various settings, in support of their use for our study. Respondents rated the items on 7-point scales, ranging from “never” to “always”.

The four role ambiguity items came from the questionnaire developed by Rizzo et al. (1970). They have been used often in studies examining the role ambiguity of frontline employees and are generally deemed appropriate for such purposes (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Zablah et al., 2012). For role ambiguity, the 7-point scales ranged from “totally disagree” to “totally agree”.

To examine the drivers of coping, we measured conscientiousness and neuroticism with three items each from the HEXACO personality inventory – revised (PI-R) (Lee & Ashton, 2016). This personality inventory applies well in workplace contexts (Bourdage, Wiltshire, & Lee, 2015). Participants rated their personality traits on 7-point scales ranging from “totally disagree” to “totally agree”.

Finally, we included four items from Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli (2001) for supervisor support in the questionnaire; they have been validated in several studies in organizational contexts. We measured team support with one item from Lievens, Conway, and Corte (2008). As Rossiter (2002) argues, the use of single-item measures is appropriate for simple, unambiguous constructs that can be easily judged by all raters. Prior research also argues that surveys should be as short as possible to minimize the risk of defection from field studies (Schumann, Wangenheim, & Groene, 2014). Both the supervisor and team support items were assessed on 7-point scales ranging from “totally disagree” to “totally agree”.

Because our study took place in three different countries, we translated all items from English into French, German, and Polish, using the back-translation method recommended by Brislin (1970). For the conscientiousness and neuroticism

items, HEXACO PI-R already is available in French, German, and Polish (Lee & Ashton, 2016), so in those cases, we used the existing translations. Table 4 summarizes all the items used in the study.

Table 4

Measurement Items

Name (Abbr.) and Source	Items
Action coping (AC) (Duhachek, 2005)	Concentrate on ways the problem could be solved. Try to make a plan of action. Generate potential solutions. Think about the best way to handle things.
Instrumental support seeking (ISS) (Duhachek, 2005)	Ask friends/colleagues with similar experiences what they did. Try to get advice from someone about what to do. Have a friend assist me in fixing the problem.
Role ambiguity (RA) (Rizzo et al., 1970)	I feel certain about how much authority I have. R I know what my responsibilities are. R I know exactly what is expected of me. R Explanation is clear of what has to be done. R
Conscientiousness (CON) (Lee & Ashton, 2016)	I often check my work over repeatedly to find any mistakes. I always try to be accurate in my work, even at the expense of time. People often call me a perfectionist.
Neuroticism (NEU) (Lee & Ashton, 2016)	I feel like crying when I see other people crying. When someone I know well is unhappy, I can almost feel that person's pain myself. I feel strong emotions when someone close to me is going away for a long time.
Supervisor support (SUS) (Rhoades et al., 2001)	My supervisor cares about my opinions. My supervisor really cares about my well-being. My supervisor strongly considers my goals and values. Help is available from my supervisor when I have a problem.
Team support (TS) (Lievens et al., 2008)	Employees work constructively together in teams and help each other.

Notes. **R** = reversed-coded items, inverted before the analyses.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics, Intercorrelations, Validity, and Reliabilities

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	a.	b.	c.	d.	e.	f.	g.
a. AC	6.11	0.72	.78						
b. ISS	4.11	1.55	.17**	.81					
c. RA	1.84	1.05	-.40***	.02	.85				
d. CON	5.12	1.25	.45***	.21***	-.33***	.68			
e. NEU	4.69	1.48	.16**	.37***	-.08	.36***	.74		
f. SUS	5.33	1.47	.15**	.04	-.28***	.09	-.05	.88	
g. TS	5.05	1.54	.17**	.05	-.25***	.25***	.04	.38***	-
AVE			.60	.65	.73	.46	.54	.78	-
FR			.86	.85	.91	.71	.78	.93	-
α			.85	.85	.91	.69	.76	.93	-

Notes. AC = action coping, ISS = instrumental support seeking, RA = role ambiguity, CON = conscientiousness, NEU = neuroticism, SUS = supervisor support, TS = team support; AVE = average variance extracted, FR = factor reliability, and α = Cronbach's α . Numbers on the diagonal in italics show the square root of the AVE; because team support was measured by a single item, we calculated no AVE-, FR- and α -values for this factor.

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$.

4.4 Analysis and Results

4.4.1 Reliability tests

We conducted several tests to confirm the reliability and validity of our data. The results of a confirmatory factor analysis show support for the assumption of the reliability and convergent and discriminant validity, in that the measurement model with factor structure indicates reasonable fit ($\chi^2 = 429.90$, $df = 189$, $\chi^2/df = 2.27$, confirmatory fit index (CFI) = .95, normed fit index (NFI) = .91, and root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) = .06). The Cronbach's α , factor reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) values exceed their recommended levels (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Nunnally, 1978) with the exception of two minor deviations of conscientiousness (Cronbach's $\alpha = .69$; AVE = .46). All factors fulfill Fornell and Larcker's (1981) discriminant validity

criterion; the square root of the AVE of every factor is higher than its highest interrelation with any other factor (Table 5).

4.4.2 Common method variance

This study could suffer from common method variance, because we measured the dependent and independent variables at the same point of time, using self-assessments by the same respondents (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). To minimize the risk of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), we included items with different anchors in our questionnaire. We also asked all participants to answer the questions as spontaneously and honestly as possible, and we assured them that there were no wrong answers. Finally, we guaranteed that all data would be treated anonymously and confidentially. After collecting the data, we controlled for common method variance empirically, by adding a common method factor to the measurement model with the factor structure from the confirmatory factor analysis that was constrained to load equally on all observed variables. Next, we squared the value of this factor loading to get the common method variance, which was .07. The model fit was worse than that for the initial model ($\chi^2 = 503.24$, $df = 194$, $\chi^2/df = 2.59$, CFI = .93, NFI = .90, RMSEA = .06), indicating that common variance is negligible for our study.

4.4.3 Test for measurement invariance

Because this study was executed in three different countries, we tested all the scales for measurement invariance across the three countries, according to the procedure recommended by Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998). We began by testing for configural invariance, using the measurement model with the factor

structure from the confirmatory factor analysis, and we split the data into three groups (i.e., France, Germany, and Poland). Thus, we could estimate the model on the country level. The results support our prediction of configural invariance, with appropriate model fit ($\chi^2 = 854.76$, $df = 522$, $\chi^2/df = 1.64$, CFI = .93, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .91, RMSEA = .04). All standardized factor loadings are significant across the three countries, and nearly all of them are above the recommended level of .50 (Birgelen, Ruyter, Jong, & Wetzels, 2002), with the exception of one item in the German sample (i.e., .41 for one conscientiousness item). This evidence indicates that our data are configurally invariant, so we test next for metric invariance by constraining all the factor loadings to be equal across the three countries (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). The model fit of the constrained model does not indicate full metric invariance. Following Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998), we tested instead for partial metric invariance, by comparing the completely constrained model with models in which one factor loading was not constrained to be equal across the three countries anymore. The results of this comparison reveal full metric invariance of three scales (action coping, conscientiousness, and neuroticism) and partial metric invariance of the remaining scales (instrumental support seeking, role ambiguity, and supervisor support). After identifying the partial metric invariant scales, we established a partial metric invariant model that shows reasonable fit ($\chi^2 = 924.71$, $df = 530$, $\chi^2/df = 1.74$, CFI = .91, TLI = .90, RMSEA = .04). Having confirmed the partial metric invariance of our data, we did not proceed further to test for scalar invariance, because our hypotheses tests do not include comparisons of mean values (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998).

4.4.4 Hypotheses tests

4.4.4.1 Test of direct effects

To test the hypothesized model, we used structural equation modeling using maximum likelihood with all possible direct effects, and we controlled for participants' gender, age, tenure, and country of origin. In general, the model shows reasonable fit ($\chi^2 = 645.15$, $df = 265$, $\chi^2/df = 2.43$, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .06). In support of H₁, action coping reduces perceptions of role ambiguity significantly ($\beta = -.26$, $p < .001$). In support of H₂, we find a significant positive effect of instrumental support seeking on role ambiguity ($\beta = .14$, $p < .01$). The results support H_{3a} but not H_{3b}, in that conscientiousness has a significant positive effect on the tendency to use action coping ($\beta = .40$, $p < .001$) but no significant negative effect on instrumental support seeking ($\beta = .08$, $p = .29$). We can support H_{4b} but not H_{4a}, because neuroticism has a significant positive effect on instrumental support seeking ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$), but not on action coping ($\beta = -.05$, $p = .49$). In support of H_{5a} but not H_{5b}, supervisor support ($\beta = .14$, $p = .01$) but not team support ($\beta = .02$, $p = .71$) promote a tendency to use action coping. Finally, we must reject H_{6a} and H_{6b}, because supervisor support ($\beta = .07$, $p = .25$) and team support ($\beta = -.01$, $p = .91$) have no significant effects on instrumental support seeking.

4.4.4.2 Test of mediating effects

To test the indirect, direct, and total effects of all four coping resources on role ambiguity (over action coping and instrumental support seeking), we adopted Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes's (2007) bootstrap method, as recommended for mediation analyses. The indirect effect of conscientiousness on role ambiguity is negative and significant ($\beta = -.09$, $p < .01$), as is the direct ($\beta = -.17$, $p = .04$) and

total ($\beta = -.26, p < .01$) effect. We can classify the indirect effect as a complementary mediation (Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010). The indirect effect of neuroticism on role ambiguity is positive and significant ($\beta = .06, p = .02$), while the direct ($\beta = -.02, p = .80$) and total ($\beta = .04, p = .63$) effects are not significant, signaling indirect-only mediation (Zhao et al., 2010). With regard to supervisor support, we do not find a significant indirect effect on role ambiguity ($\beta = -.03, p = .12$), but a significant and negative direct and total effect (direct $\beta = -.21, p < .01$; total $\beta = -.24, p < .01$). That is, it represents a direct-only nonmediation (Zhao et al., 2010). Last, the indirect, direct, and total effect of team support on role ambiguity are not significant (indirect $\beta = -.01, p = .70$; direct $\beta = -.11, p = .12$; total $\beta = -.12, p = .11$) – a no-effect nonmediation (Zhao et al., 2010).

4.4.4.3 Test of interaction effects

Carver and Connor-Smith (2010) propose that coping resources such as social support and personality traits might interact with each other. Such interactions should lead to a strengthening or weakening of coping resources' effects on the coping strategies in the already proposed directions. Such potential interactions have not been examined yet (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). We, hence, tested for potential interactions among coping resources according to the procedure for moderations in structural equation models recommended by Marsh, Wen, and Hau (2004) and Wu, Wen, Marsh, and Hau (2013). Neuroticism weakens the positive effect of supervisor support on action coping ($\beta = -.14, p = .02$), while team support strengthens this positive effect ($\beta = .19, p < .001$).

4.4.4.4 *Role ambiguity's effects on customer perceptions*

Due to lower job satisfaction and job performance, role ambiguity, ultimately, may lead to a decline of positive word of mouth and trust on the customer side. However, a direct effect of frontline employees' perceived role ambiguity on customers' positive word of mouth and trust has hitherto not been shown. We examine this relation in an additional analysis to underline the importance of sufficient role ambiguity self-management by frontline employees. Parallel to the retail banking employee survey, we additionally interviewed 1,318 customers of 343 of the 390 employees with paper-and-pencil-questionnaires. Customers were contacted by their corresponding employee that received both their own surveys and the matching customer surveys in a conjunct package by their supervisors. After the data collection, we could match customer and employee surveys by anonymous codes that were pre-printed on the questionnaires and administrated by a third party agency. Customer surveys contained four items for customers' positive word of mouth from Bove, Pervan, Beatty, and Shiu (2009) ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.48$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$; 7-point scales ranging from "totally disagree" to "totally agree", e.g., "I encourage my friends and relatives to go to my bank"). We measured customers' trust in the bank with one item ("Overall I trust my bank...") adapted from Schumann et al. (2010) on a 10-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "completely" ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.23$). Results of hierarchical linear regression modelling estimated with the restricted maximum likelihood procedure show that frontline employees' perceived role ambiguity (level 2) significantly affects both customers' positive word of mouth ($b = -0.12$, $p = .02$) and trust ($b = -0.11$, $p = .01$ – both level 1) in a negative way. In both models we controlled for employees' and customers' gender, age, and country of origin and employees' tenure.

4.5 Discussion

4.5.1 Review of empirical findings and research implications

The results of our study contribute to service research and especially role stress and coping research in four main ways. First, in boundary-spanning settings, only action coping reduces role ambiguity of frontline employees. Instrumental support seeking is not effective for lowering experienced role ambiguity, a finding that extends and specifies prior research that has examined the dimension as one factor (i.e., problem-focused coping; Boyd et al., 2009; Koeske, Kirk, & Koeske, 1993; Lewin & Sager, 2008). The exclusive effect of instrumental support seeking on frontline employees' role ambiguity has not been examined. Our novel finding indicates that instrumental support seeking has an enhancing effect on role ambiguity. Boundary spanners who keep telling others about their unclear tasks seem to intensify feelings of ambiguity, by concentrating on it without actually solving the problem. This finding affirms Strizhakova et al.'s (2012) evidence showing a similar effect for support seekers in a consumer context. Overall, the effectiveness of consulting others in a boundary-spanning context to seek solutions to problems seems even counterproductive. Thus, our findings reveal that future studies should examine both problem-focused coping strategies separately as they can have opposite effects.

Second, this study offers an initial model of coping resources that can help frontline employees engage in effective coping. Conscientiousness and supervisor support are important drivers of effective action coping, while neuroticism triggers the use of instrumental support seeking. Our findings extend conceptual evidence by specifying concrete, effective, internal and external coping resources (Goolsby, 1992; Porter et al., 2003). Our results only partially confirm findings from research

into coping in a private context though (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007). That is, we do not find a negative effect of neuroticism on action coping or conscientiousness on instrumental support seeking, perhaps as a result of the professional context, in which personality may work differently than in private settings (O'Brien & DeLongis, 1996). The impact of personality traits on coping behavior differs across diverse settings, because the domain of a stressor largely determines the effect of personality traits on the use of coping strategies (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Lee-Baggeley, Preece, & DeLongis, 2005). For example, O'Brien and DeLongis (1996) argue that the effect of personality traits on coping is moderated by situational factors such as work contexts.

Third, our findings contribute to research on the moderating effects of personality traits and how they affect the choice of coping strategies, insofar as such interactions are generally rather unexplored (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). Even if neuroticism has no direct negative effect on action coping, it is an important moderating factor that inhibits the positive effect of supervisor support on action coping. Our results show, for the first time, that the positive effect of supervisor support depends on the personality of a frontline employee. Although prior research has demonstrated an effect of supervisor support on the coping strategies conceptualized by Lazarus and Folkman (1984; Lewin & Sager, 2008), a moderating effect of personality on this kind of social support in service settings has not been considered. With our study, we identify an important contingency factor for the use of coping resources in a boundary-spanning context.

Fourth, in contrast with our expectations, there is a crucial difference between supervisor support and team support. Supervisors directly support employees' efforts to reach organizational goals and fulfill role requirements (i.e., action coping).

Coworkers' support, however, is only effective to support the use of action coping when supervisor support is already provided (i.e., strengthening this positive effect). This finding confirms and extends research by Susskind et al. (2003), who note a stronger relation between supervisor support and organizational goals. In case of coping, general help (i.e., team support) seems to only assist supervisor support that is really aimed at pushing the frontline employee to autonomously solve ambiguous situations (i.e., action coping). The different effects of supervisor and team support also confirm prior assertions, based on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), that social support in service settings comes from multiple, unequally operating sources (Susskind et al., 2003).

4.5.2 Managerial implications

From a managerial perspective, we offer three distinct suggestions. First, supervisor support in its current state should be favored over team support and implemented and/or trained in service firms. Such training might include explicit sessions in which supervisors learn how to communicate organizational goals to their employees. It also should focus on how the use of action coping can be transferred from a supervisor to employees through distinct support processes. Thus, managers should learn to advise their employees, to ensure they implement the use of action coping when they face stressors.

Second, team support has only a positive effect when supervisor support is already provided, such that frontline employees should be sensitized to the manners of supporting their colleagues. Service firms should implement frontline employee training sessions to help them learn to integrate organizational goals in their behavior toward colleagues. Hence, they should direct their type of support to be more

specific. The training for frontline employees thus might include sessions to discuss action coping solutions for routine problems.

Third, in their hiring procedures, service firms should consider including a personality trait profile to assess potential employees' conscientiousness and neuroticism. Our results indicate the need to consider the entire personality profile, instead of focusing on single personality traits. Accordingly, recruitment should focus on both highly conscientious and simultaneously less neurotic candidates. Candidates with such a personality profile should be identified and hired with preference.

4.5.3 Limitations and further research directions

This study has some limitations, pointing to directions for further research. First, self-assessments of applied coping strategies involve a risk of social desirability bias, so further studies could examine the effects of and on coping strategies rated by others. Still, as instrumental support seeking shows a rather high mean value, frontline employees in this study seemingly admitted to seek help at work pointing to realistic self-assessment. Second, we only tested the effects of two personality traits, reflecting prior findings by Carver and Connor-Smith (2010) and Connor-Smith and Flachsbart (2007). The three other personality traits – openness to experience, extraversion, and agreeableness – could have effects on the use of certain coping strategies though. Continued research could examine the effects of all Big Five personality traits on coping. Finally, we distinguished the two problem-focused coping strategies identified by Duhachek (2005). Because our model is a first attempt to analyze both drivers and outcomes of generally presumed effective problem-focused coping in a boundary-spanning context, we consider this focus adequate.

However, additional studies could analyze the subdimensions of emotion-focused coping, along with their drivers and outcomes, in boundary-spanning contexts.

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5 General Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This dissertation addresses four major challenges for frontline employees in new service environments: (a) the increasing internationalization of service firms (Jones, Chonko, Rangarajan, & Roberts, 2007), (b) the augmenting diversification of customer demands (Rapp et al., 2017), (c) the accreting autonomy in today's service occupations (Jong, Ruyter, & Wetzels, 2005), and (d) the growing importance of collaboration within service firms (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). All three studies of the dissertation contribute to existing service theory and practice by addressing these major challenges in four main ways.

First, the studies' results accentuate the importance to consider service firms' internationalization attempts as they have significant impact on frontline employees' role stress perceptions. Our findings confirm service research highlighting the importance of cross-cultural perspectives due to an increasing number of internationally operating service firms (Chan, Yim, & Lam, 2010; Nakata & Sivakumar, 2001; Soares, Farhangmehr, & Shoham, 2007). Moreover, our studies extend service literature by focusing on the frontline employee level and how internationalization affects frontline employees' role perceptions as extant research mostly examines internationalization effects on the customer side of the service encounter (Zhang, Beatty, & Walsh, 2008). To the best of my knowledge, our studies are the first to show that service firms' internationalization both adds complexity to frontline employees' individual role perceptions and affects supervisor – employee relationships by impairing leadership styles' effects on role stress perceptions and frontline employees' job performance. Thus, internationalization indeed changes

frontline employees' roles and resulting role stress, and should, therefore, not be neglected by future studies in this realm.

Second, the studies' results indicate that frontline employees' role stress is affected by the increasing diversification of customer demands. Our findings add to the few existing studies examining effects of customers' behavior on frontline employees' role perceptions (Coelho, Augusto, & Lages, 2011; Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014). Existing research by Schmitz and Ganesan (2014) provides a rather generic overview of how customer complexity caused by differing demands can affect frontline employees' role perceptions. Our studies detail service research by primarily investigating different facets of role perceptions, role stress, and self-management approaches that are affected by the increasing number of diverse customer demands. The studies show that customer demands diversification triggers individual role complexity experienced by frontline employees, is a reason for frontline employees to experience ethical or moral conflicts, and impedes boundary spanners' effective coping with perceived role ambiguity. Accordingly, further research should engage in identifying further facets of frontline employees' role perceptions that are affected by this customer-related challenge of new service environments.

Third, findings of our studies emphasize that with increasing autonomy frontline employees' role structures change significantly. Former service research mostly analyzes the positive effects of frontline employees' autonomy, such as higher motivation, engagement, job satisfaction, job performance, or a lower propensity of burnout (Auh, Menguc, Spyropoulou, & Wang, 2016; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004). However, our studies confirm and extend findings by Langfred (2004) who shows a negative effect of

autonomy on job performance. Beyond, our results show that higher levels of autonomy and absent supervision accentuate the importance of help from other sources than the supervisor (i.e., colleagues and customers). Moreover, autonomy drives person-role conflicts perceived by boundary spanners, and annihilates the effectiveness of coping by instrumental support seeking for frontline employees. These results indicate that frontline employees' autonomy can have a negative side too – contradicting prior service research conclusions (e.g., Auh et al., 2016). Further studies should, hence, recognize such potential negative effects of autonomy in service occupations when examining frontline employees' role perceptions.

Fourth, all studies' results affirm the importance to consider the increasing application of teamwork in service occupations. Existing research on coworker effects on frontline employees' role perceptions has included coworker feedback as an important endorsement mechanism for frontline employees in service firms (Kohli & Jaworski, 1994). Our findings confirm and expand this knowledge by comparing coworkers' feedback with that of customers and supervisors plus including team support as another form of coworker assistance in service organizations. The studies' results show that coworkers' feedback seems to be most striking to buffer role ambiguity and role conflict enhancing effects of individual role complexity compared to customer and supervisor feedback. Besides, our findings reveal that perceived team support is, at least, an important moderating coping resource strengthening the positive effect of supervisor support on effective coping. Research on the effects of growing teamwork on boundary spanners' role perceptions in service firms should, hence, be continued and refined by future service research.

5.2 Managerial Implications

Beside the theoretical contributions of this dissertation, the results of all three studies offer, at least, four distinct suggestions for frontline employees' managers. First, internationalization and its impact on frontline employees' perceptions and behavior are yet omnipresent in the minds of internationally operating service firms' managers. The majority of service organizations already implements trainings to help frontline employees to adapt to volatile cultural circumstances. However, our findings indicate that both growing complexity within service organizations and individual cultural values are hard to change and need rather to be seen as stable. The assessment of frontline employees' individual cultural values during hiring procedures can be considered an effective approach to handle issues generated by internationalization. Matching managers and frontline employees with similar individual cultural values should lower perceived complexity and increase leadership effectiveness.

Second, prevalent service practice teaches frontline employees standardized work procedures to deal with customers. However, results on the increasing diversification of customer demands show that such approaches are not applicable to satisfy customers appropriately. According to our results, customer contact trainings should rather accept and include customer demands' increasing diversification. Such trainings should show frontline employees how to deal with diverse demands more effectively as well as how to treat customers in a way that they feel unique and individually appreciated. Those trainings reduce complexity for frontline employees and help them to act self-determined and unstressed in customer contact.

Third, common service firms' practice agrees that empowering frontline employees triggers their job performance and service firm's sales, accordingly.

However, our findings indicate that increasing autonomy also has a negative effect on frontline employees role perceptions as it can lead to higher individual role complexity, divergence between supervisor's and own job expectations, or less instrumental support seeking efficiency when coping with role ambiguity. According to these results, service firms' managers should consider potential negative effects of autonomy when empowering frontline employees. Before letting frontline employees work autonomously, managers should ascertain that their employees are in a position to act self-determined and conform to the supervisor's or organizational vision. These approaches should minimize the likelihood of autonomy's potential negative outcomes.

Fourth, our studies' results demonstrate that coworker feedback and team support should be promoted in service organizations. Nevertheless, our results indicate a need to direct team support by sensitizing frontline employees to the outcomes of their support. Service firm managers should consider the implementation of training sessions in service organizations in which frontline employees can learn how to support their colleagues effectively; e.g., by showing them how to integrate organizational goals in their support.

5.3 Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

Even though, this dissertation addresses four major challenges of today's service environments and their effects on frontline employees' occupations, there are further challenges for frontline employees in service occupations this dissertation does not address. On the one hand, recent research emphasizes the importance of examining the inclusion of new technologies in service encounters and its effect on frontline employees' job roles (Doorn et al., 2017; Singh, Brady, Arnold, & Brown,

2017). New technologies, such as self-service terminals (Marinova, Ruyter, Huang, Meuter, & Challagalla, 2017), robots (Doorn et al., 2017), or augmented reality (Rafaeli et al., 2017), contribute to a significant change in frontline employees' job environments. Rafaeli et al. (2017) argue that such technologies can either enrich service encounters, augment frontline employees, or even replace them. Thus, frontline employees need to adapt to the new settings created by technology implementation (Marinova et al., 2017). As this challenge is a whole research area on its own and all three studies of this dissertation concentrate on how frontline employees' roles are interpersonally affected, we did not consider this challenge when examining role stress in new service settings. However, future studies should aim at examining potential effects of new technology implementation on frontline employees' role perceptions.

On the other hand, big data storage and analytics is another challenge frontline employees face in today's service environments (Lam, Sleep, Hennig-Thurau, Sridhar, & Saboo, 2017; Rafaeli et al., 2017). The use of big data and customer information gathered from predictive analytics also change frontline employees' job roles in their encounter with customers (Rafaeli et al., 2017). Lam et al. (2017) reason that integration of big data usage in the frontline employee – customer service encounter is rather difficult and may even lead to unfavorable service outcomes. We did not include this challenge in the studies of this dissertation but rather concentrated on pure human interactions aiming at reducing the examinations' complexity. Nonetheless, the effects of big data usage by frontline employees in service encounters may significantly affect their role perceptions and should, hence, also be subject to further studies in the area of frontline employees' role stress.

5.4 References

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