

# Do recovery processes need empowered frontline employees?

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to investigate whether frontline employee empowerment (FEE) is necessary in the presence of streamlined recovery processes when customers attribute responsibility for the recovery process to the service provider.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The hypotheses were tested through a survey conducted with 253 bank customers, combined with two laboratory experiments run with 354 undergraduate students to assess service recovery efforts by an online store and a clinical laboratory.

**Findings** – Customers who attribute more responsibility for the recovery process to service providers only become more satisfied with FEE when recovery processes are not streamlined. The presence of streamlined processes and FEE is not sufficient to raise post-recovery satisfaction levels in individuals who attribute little responsibility for the process to service providers.

**Originality/value** – The study extends the literature on contingencies that influence the design of recovery strategies by showing when FEE matters. It also highlights the risks of designing service recovery practices, such as FEE or streamlined recovery processes, without considering that different customers do not evaluate such efforts in the same fashion. Research on service recovery design needs to fully integrate concepts from marketing, operations and human resources when the goal is to evaluate the effectiveness of such practices. The outcomes also offer managers insights for designing recovery strategies.

**Keywords** Post-recovery satisfaction, Frontline employee empowerment, Service provider responsibility attribution, Streamlined recovery processes

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Empowerment of frontline employees is deemed a central dimension in designing service recovery strategies (Smith *et al.*, 2012; Smith and Karwan, 2010) and a means to increase post-recovery customer satisfaction (e.g. Bowen and Lawler, 1995; Boshoff, 2005; Hart *et al.*, 1990; Miller *et al.*, 2000; Ogbeide *et al.*, 2017; Smith and Karwan, 2010). Employee empowerment means giving frontline employees the authority and responsibility to handle recovery activities (Contiero *et al.*, 2016) and decide on the best course of action to solve customer problems (Bowen and Lawler, 1992; Hart *et al.*, 1990).



The service recovery literature broadly advocates for the empowerment of frontline employees due to its benefits. Empowered employees make better decisions during the recovery process (Brown *et al.*, 1996), dedicate more attention to customer demands (Gil *et al.*, 2015), answer complaints faster (Miller *et al.*, 2000) and provide more assertive solutions to customer problems (Grönroos, 2007).

However, artificial intelligence is shaping the future of customer service. Given the choice, 70 percent of customers nowadays prefer messaging to voice in customer support, and artificial intelligence-powered agents (like IBM's Watson) can address up to 80 percent of customers' questions (Vennard, 2017). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that recovery processes will become more based on artificial intelligence and less on human workforce. Such changes may alter customer perceptions of recovery processes, creating the need to revisit the role employee empowerment plays in them.

Streamlined recovery processes are expected to be crucial in contexts where consumers expect more efficient and responsive customer support systems. Streamlined processes have fewer steps and queues, and they use only the smallest amount of information and resources necessary to solve customers' problems. They also enable faster and more effective responses to customer complaints, leading to increased customer satisfaction (Hart *et al.*, 1990). Considering the future that lies ahead, a question that remains is whether frontline employee empowerment (FEE) is indeed necessary when recovery processes are already streamlined and efficient.

A further issue in understanding the importance of employee empowerment and streamlined recovery processes is to whom customers attribute responsibility for the service process. Previous studies found out that customers' evaluations of their satisfaction with service processes change according to whom they see as responsible for, or in control of, the process (Guo *et al.*, 2016; Van Raaij and Pruyn, 1998). Studies on the role of FEE as a means to increase post-recovery satisfaction (PRS) have largely ignored this aspect. Indeed, very few studies in the service recovery literature address the relationship of recovery processes to customer opinions and employee participation (Van Vaerenbergh and Orsingher, 2016).

Attribution theory, which explains how individuals assign responsibility for events and actions (Van Raaij and Pruyn, 1998), suggests that the more customers attribute responsibility for the recovery process to service providers, the more they are likely to hold firms accountable (Swanson and Kelley, 2001). As a consequence, customers become more sensitive to recovery practices (Homburg *et al.*, 2010), such as empowered frontline employees or streamlined recovery processes. Therefore, customers' attribution of responsibility for the service process is key to understanding the relative importance of these recovery practices.

This paper explores the ability of FEE and streamlined recovery processes to recoup customer satisfaction, taking into account the role played by the responsibility customers attribute for the recovery process to the service provider. We devised a series of three studies to distinguish the roles of FEE and streamlined recovery processes, taking into account the moderating effect of customer attribution of responsibility for the recovery process to the service provider. The proposed hypotheses were tested through a survey with 253 bank customers, combined with two laboratory experiments conducted with 354 undergraduate students, who assessed the service recovery efforts by an online store and a clinical laboratory.

In the next section, we review the literature on the role played by FEE in PRS. We also discuss streamlined recovery processes as an alternative to FEE. Then we use attribution theory to understand to what extent customer attribution of responsibility for the process influences customer evaluation of both FEE and streamlined recovery processes.

## Literature review

### *Frontline employee empowerment in service recovery*

Service recovery is the process that companies use to solve customer problems, improve the delivery process and recover customer satisfaction after a failure in service delivery

(Johnston *et al.*, 2017; Miller *et al.*, 2000; Tax and Brown, 1998). Although recovery processes vary from company to company, they usually involve acknowledging the failure, an apology and the actions needed for solving the problem (Johnston and Michel, 2008). Smith *et al.* (2009), as well as other authors who built on their work (Contiero *et al.*, 2016; Smith *et al.*, 2012; Smith and Karwan, 2010), propose that the design of a service recovery system involves seven dimensions: accessibility, comprehensiveness, formality, human intensity, system intensity, influence and decentralization.

Accessibility relates to how the firm captures the voice of the customer when failures occur. Comprehensiveness involves the range of potential recovery actions firms can employ. The level of formality reflects the use of explicit rules, procedures and norms to guide recovery activities. The human and system intensity dimensions involve the resources committed to train the workforce and develop the operation. Influence indicates the level of customer involvement in the recovery process. Finally, decentralization relates to the locus of authority to handle recovery activities. It is equivalent to FEE (Smith *et al.*, 2012).

Whereas the literature on employee empowerment is extensive and highlights the importance of psychological empowerment, i.e., employees' intrinsic motivation toward their work (Maynard *et al.*, 2012), the service recovery literature focuses on structural empowerment. Structural empowerment involves delegating authority to employees so that they can decide how to solve customer problems and implement the necessary actions (Contiero *et al.*, 2016; Bowen and Lawler, 1992; Smith *et al.*, 2012). The underlying logic is to decentralize the decision-making process to give employees the ability to manage the recovery process (Smith *et al.*, 2012). Nonempowered frontline employees have to follow predefined recovery scripts, ask for permission to make decisions that deviate from scripts, wait for authorization and pass the responsibility on to managers or other functional areas (Boshoff, 2005).

#### *Frontline employee empowerment and post-recovery satisfaction*

When customers complain, they have expectations of how their problem will be solved. PRS depends on the extent to which companies can meet these expectations. If the company exceeds a customer's initial expectations regarding how the problem should be handled, the customer tends to become more satisfied (Andreassen, 2000). FEE can increase PRS for different reasons.

Frontline employees tend to have a good understanding of what customers expect, given the close relationship that they maintain with the latter. Therefore, frontline employees can take advantage of this knowledge to make better decisions during the recovery process (Brown *et al.*, 1996). Chebat and Kollias (2000) add that, by increasing a company's flexibility to solve problems, FEE may generate more customized recovery solutions. When employees have a certain freedom to act, they tend to be more effective (Maynard *et al.*, 2012), perform beyond contractual expectations (Gil *et al.*, 2015) and fulfill a wider range of customer demands (Liao and Chuang, 2004), improving the quality of the customer-employee interaction. FEE also reduces the steps needed to complete the recovery process because employees do not need to ask permission to supervisors (Boshoff and Leong, 1998) and other functional areas (Boshoff, 2005).

These aspects seem to increase process flexibility, lead to better solutions to customer problems (Grönroos, 2007), provide a sense of fair treatment and enable faster response to complaints (Miller *et al.*, 2000). Therefore, FEE might increase the perception that the recovery process is flexible, personal, responsive and convenient (Tax and Brown, 1998), contributing to meet, or exceed, customers' initial expectations (Mattila, 2001; Wirtz and Mattila, 2004). Different studies consistently show that FEE is a way to increase PRS (e.g. Bowen and Lawler, 1992; Boshoff, 2005; Hart *et al.*, 1990; Miller *et al.*, 2000; Ogbeide *et al.*, 2017; Tax and Brown, 1998).

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*Streamlined processes as an alternative to frontline employee empowerment*

FEE reduces time- and resource-wasting activities. Therefore, it increases the operating efficiency of the recovery process, i.e., the effectiveness in transforming inputs into outputs (Talluri *et al.*, 2013). Operating efficiency is an essential aspect of the service recovery process (e.g. Boshoff, 1997; Boshoff and Leong, 1998; Wirtz and Mattila, 2004) that helps increase customer satisfaction (Hart *et al.*, 1990).

However, empowering frontline employees is not the only way to improve the operating efficiency of a recovery process. A streamlined recovery process can also be highly efficient. A streamlined process is a process that has little waste of productive resources, such as materials, work in progress, people and process technology (based on Lewis, 2000). Building on this idea, we define a streamlined recovery process as one that involves few steps and queues and one that uses only the smallest amount of information and resources necessary to perform service recovery.

Process flow improvement, “zero-defect” programs and automation are some practices that can streamline service processes (Malmbrandt and Åhlström, 2013; Sunder *et al.*, 2018). Employee empowerment enables implementing these practices because employees gain autonomy to identify improvement possibilities and act upon them (Hirzel *et al.*, 2017; Leyer *et al.*, 2019). Nevertheless, firms do not need to implement such practices to create streamlined recovery processes. They can design a simple recovery process upfront, supported by information and communication systems, eliminating queues or the need to provide excessive amounts of supporting documentation. Therefore, in this paper, we focus on the presence (or absence) of a streamlined recovery process, rather than on the practices adopted to streamline it and on the use of employee empowerment during the recovery process.

Both FEE and streamlined recovery processes may improve operating efficiency in the recovery process. Boshoff and Leong (1998) argue that they may be interchangeable when it comes to offering a speedy and successful resolution to customers’ complaints, but FEE should be preferred because it renders the work less tedious and reduces employee turnover. However, we propose that streamlined recovery processes are better when operating efficiency is the goal.

Even empowered frontline employees cannot eliminate resource-wasting activities, solve problems in information and communication systems or reduce the amount of information needed to perform the process. Well-designed streamlined processes may be more effective than complicated processes with empowered employees. Moreover, customers want their problems solved immediately (Johnston and Fern, 1999). Short processes without queues, supported by information and communication technology, have low throughput time (cf. Schmenner, 2004) and may solve customers’ problems quickly, even if employees have to follow scripts and ask permission. In line with this logic, Li and Fang (2016) show that firms with clear guidelines on recovery processes have higher levels of effectiveness, no matter whether empowerment levels are high or low. Therefore, streamlined recovery processes themselves may have an operating efficiency level that satisfies customers, rendering FEE unnecessary.

*The role of attribution of responsibility in recovery processes*

Attribution theory explains how individuals assign responsibility for events and actions and how this attribution shapes their reactions to successful or unsuccessful outcomes (Van Vaerenbergh *et al.*, 2014). Such reactions will depend on how people evaluate whether events or actions can be controlled and prevented (controllability), if they are recurrent over time or likely to happen just once (stability) and who is responsible for them (locus of causality) (Swanson and Kelley, 2001; Van Raaij and Pruyn, 1998).

Service research has extensively used attribution theory to explain how the attribution of responsibility for service failure influences people’s evaluations of outcomes

(see Van Vaerenbergh *et al.*, 2014). However, less attention has been dedicated to the attribution of responsibility for the recovery process. Yet, evidence shows that who is seen as accountable for controlling the service recovery process matters when it comes to evaluating recovery outcomes (Bradley and Sparks, 2002; Guo *et al.*, 2016; Homburg *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, we contend that the attribution of responsibility for the recovery process is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of FEE and streamlined recovery processes in increasing PRS.

Customers may attribute responsibility for service process outcomes to their own efforts and ability to manage the process, to chance, or to the service provider's efforts, attitudes, skills, resources and processes (cf. Van Raaij and Pruyn, 1998). Customers that attribute responsibility for the recovery process to the service provider see them as responsible for solving service failures. They also hold firms accountable (Swanson and Kelley, 2001). These customers, therefore, are more likely to pay careful attention to the efforts the service provider makes to solve the problem.

Conversely, customers attributing little responsibility to service providers do not perceive recovery outcomes as a function of what the providers do. They may assign the responsibility to themselves, or to chance. They may also equally attribute some of the responsibility to themselves, the provider and chance. In any case, these individuals should be less sensitive to recovery practices, such as FEE or a streamlined recovery process. Next, we formulate the hypotheses of the study.

### **Hypotheses**

Central to our theoretical development is the notion that customer attribution of responsibility for the recovery process influences the way individuals evaluate their satisfaction with a firm's efforts in the recovery process. First, we develop the hypothesis concerning FEE and then we investigate the role of streamlined processes.

Customers who assign responsibility for the recovery process to the service provider (high service provider responsibility attribution (SPRA)) see providers as responsible for solving service failures. They blame the company if the service provider makes no visible effort to recover the service failure (Van Raaij and Pruyn, 1998) and they tend to pay closer attention to the firm's recovery practices. Moreover, these customers are less sensitive to the investment firms make to solve complaints, thus increasing the need for a high-quality recovery process to guarantee a favorable evaluation (Homburg *et al.*, 2010).

If this reasoning is correct, these customers should have a stronger perception of the benefits of FEE. In other words, these customers should value the fact that the company is trying to solve their problems by empowering frontline employees and, therefore, they should become more satisfied as a result. This reasoning is in line with Bradley and Sparks (2002), who posit that customers who assign the responsibility for service process quality to firms derive more satisfaction from their relationship with service providers. These customers prefer that the service providers take charge of, and guide them through, the process.

On the other hand, customers who attribute little responsibility to service providers (low SPRA) do not perceive recovery outcomes as a function of what the service providers do. Therefore, they should not be impressed by FEE. As FEE leads to faster and more precise answers to service failures, it should increase customer PRS. However, these customers would not "give extra points" to the company for having employees that conduct the process well. In other words, although FEE can somehow contribute to increasing PRS for individuals that do not assign responsibility for solving the problem to the service provider, these individuals are not especially impressed with the service provider's efforts. Therefore, customer attribution of responsibility for the recovery

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process to the service provider should moderate the relationship between FEE and PRS, and the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H1.* The positive impact of FEE on PRS is stronger when customer attribution of responsibility for the recovery process to service providers is high than when it is low.

Similarly to FEE, we suggest that customer attribution of responsibility for the recovery process to service providers moderates the relationship between streamlined recovery processes and PRS. Individuals that assign responsibility for the recovery processes to the service provider should perceive the benefits of a streamlined recovery process because they value and prefer when the company is in charge (Bradley and Sparks, 2002). Therefore, their satisfaction with the presence of a streamlined recovery process should be higher than in individuals who attribute little responsibility for the recovery processes to the service provider. Moreover, if we believe that streamlined recovery processes may lead to the operating efficiency that customers expect, FEE should play a minor role in increasing customer PRS when streamlined processes are in place.

On the other hand, FEE should compensate for the lack of a streamlined process. In such case, the effect described in *H1* is expected to happen, that is, FEE should contribute more to PRS in individuals that attribute high responsibility for the recovery processes to the service providers than in individuals who assign lower responsibility to service providers. The above discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

- H2a.* If the recovery process is not streamlined, *H1* holds, that is, the positive impact of FEE on PRS is stronger when customer attribution of responsibility for the recovery process to service providers is high than when it is low.
- H2b.* If the recovery process is streamlined, regardless of FEE, the positive impact of this process on PRS is stronger when customer attribution of responsibility for the recovery process to service providers is high than when it is low.

## Overview of the studies

We conducted three complementary studies to test the hypotheses. Study 1 is a survey that enabled us to validate the measurement model, evaluate the impact of the control variables and test *H1*. Study 2's objective was to test *H1* using a laboratory experiment simulating a recovery process. Study 3 is also a laboratory experiment in which we tested *H2*.

It is important to highlight some characteristics of the three studies that tie them together. First, the three services examined in the studies are high volume services. Since the level of FEE is contingent upon the type of service, we focused on these services because they are supposed to require the highest level of FEE (Smith *et al.*, 2012). Second, although the type of experienced failure differed across the studies, we selected failures with similar levels of severity for each study. Moreover, in the two experiments we manipulated FEE in the same way (i.e. the same attendant registers the complaint, verifies and solves the problem vs the attendant contacts other areas to solve the problem and she needs a supervisor's authorization). These scenarios were based on Boshoff and Leong's (1998) scenarios.

### Study 1

*Population, data collection and sample.* Retail bank customers who had experienced a service failure were our target population. Retail banks are a good setting for studying recovery processes because they offer high volume services in which failures are likely to happen, and they usually have service recovery processes in place (Duffy *et al.*, 2006).

Unpaid volunteers self-completed 311 online and paper-and-pencil questionnaires. We obtained 150 answers via Facebook after exposing the online questionnaire to 950 contacts (response rate = 15.8 percent) and 92 answers after e-mailing it to 160 personal contacts (response rate = 57.5 percent). We also collected 69 answers by applying a physical version of the questionnaire to 650 students, staff and faculty members of five higher education institutions (response rate = 10.6 percent).

We asked respondents to think of a problem they had had with their bank in the recent past and to answer the questionnaire focusing solely on this specific experience. Respondents had to explain the bank service failure they had experienced. We eliminated 58 questionnaires that: described situations which were not considered service failures (e.g. the bank offers poor quality services or the bank does not offer the attention I want); had a standard deviation below 0.5 between questions; or were incomplete. The final sample consisted of 253 answers.

Although we used a convenience sample, the profile of the respondents regarding age, sex and marital status (Table I) approximately matched the demographic distribution of bank account holders in the country where the data were collected (Brazil). Table I also shows the main types of failure experienced and the seven retail banks where they happened. The retail bank market in Brazil is concentrated and the top five banks in Table I own 89.5 percent of all the physical branches in the country.

*Scales and data collection.* All the scales were measured using seven-point Likert-type scales (1 = I totally disagree; 7 = I totally agree). FEE was measured through four items: two items came from the RECOVSTAT FEE dimension (Boshoff, 2005) and the other two were created based on the descriptions of the manipulations of FEE used by Boshoff and Leong (1998). PRS was measured using three items from Dong *et al.*'s (2008) scale. The scales for

Demographics	Classes	Census 2015 <sup>a</sup> Freq.	Sample ( <i>n</i> = 253) Freq.
Sex	Male	48.6	49.4
	Female	51.4	50.6
Age	24 or less	16.6	23.3
	25–39	23.5	42.7
	40–59	24.6	30.4
	60 or more	13.0	3.6
Marital status	Single	49.0	46.6
	Married	38.7	46.2
	Other	12.3	7.1
Service failures experienced	Incorrect charges to account	n/a	41.1
	Issues opening and closing accounts	n/a	12.2
	Loan concessions	n/a	9.8
	Credit card frauds	n/a	8.7
	ATM problems	n/a	5.5
	Security key validation	n/a	5.1
	Other	n/a	17.6
Retail bank	Bradesco	n/a	22.5
	Itau-Unibanco	n/a	19.0
	Santander	n/a	28.5
	Caixa Econômica Federal	n/a	10.6
	Banco do Brasil	n/a	18.2
	Safra	n/a	0.8
	HSBC	n/a	0.4

**Table I.** Sample demographics **Note:** n/a = info not available of on Census **Source:** <sup>a</sup>IBGE (2015)

SPRA, internal responsibility attribution (IRA), and chance responsibility attribution (CRA) were adapted from the work by Büttgen *et al.* (2012). IRA and CRA were used in the analyses as covariates. Since Büttgen *et al.* (2012) aimed to capture perceptions of control over future outcomes, we adapted their scales to capture who was responsible for the recovery process and its outcomes. The scales are in Table AI.

We took different measures during data collection to reduce common method variance (cf. Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Specifically, we asked subjects open-ended questions to make them recollect more precisely what happened during the recovery process, randomized scale items within each block of questions, and we added a marker variable (MV) to the questionnaire to test for common method bias after data collection (cf. Williams *et al.*, 2010). The MV was the level of agreement with the statement “I carefully elaborated my complaint before contacting the Bank” (1 = I totally disagree; 7 = I totally agree). This variable was collected using the same questionnaire, method and scales of the other variables and should suffer from similar biases.

In order to check for common method variance, we calculated the correlations between the MV and the items on the FEE, PRS, SPRA, IRA and CRA scales (Lindell and Whitney, 2001). The smallest correlation ( $r = 0.02$ ) was used in the partial correlation adjustment. Correlations between items of the same construct remained significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) after the adjustment, suggesting that the results were not tainted by common method variance (Lindell and Whitney, 2001). The MV also did not yield significant correlations ( $p$ -values ranging between 0.07 and 0.39) with the items on the FEE, PRS and CRA scales. The MV showed low, although significant (0.17 to 0.27;  $p < 0.01$ ), adjusted correlations with one item on the SPRA scale and three items on the IRA scale.

*Validity, reliability and common method variance analyses.* We employed confirmatory factor analysis, using the maximum likelihood estimation method in AMOS 16, to assess the validity and reliability of our measures. The five-dimension model – FEE, SPRA, IRA, CRA and PRS – had a good fit was valid and reliable. The normed  $\chi^2$  was 2.43, RMSEA (0.075) was below the recommended minimum value of 0.08, and the incremental fit indexes CFI (0.94), TLI (0.93) and IFI (0.94) were above the recommended threshold of 0.9 (cf. Kline, 2005). All loadings were positive and statistically different from zero ( $p < 0.01$ ). The average variances extracted (AVE) were above 50 percent and the composite reliability indexes were above 0.7 (cf. Hair *et al.*, 2006). SIC scores were lower than the AVE’s for all the constructs, indicating discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Since the scales were valid and reliable (see statistics in Table AI), we averaged the items for each construct and used the resulting values in the analysis.

*Controls.* ANOVA tests showed that the PRS means did not differ significantly ( $p > 0.05$ ) according to the sex, marital status and age of the respondents, or the bank where the complaint was placed. PRS varied ( $p < 0.01$ ) depending on the failure resolution (yes = 1; no = 0), the compensation offered (“The compensation offered was satisfactory,” 1 = I totally disagree; 7 = I totally agree), and the failure’s severity (“How important was the failure you experienced?,” 1 = not important; 7 = very important) (cf. Mattila, 2001). Therefore, compensation, failure severity and failure resolution were controlled for in the regression analysis together with IRA and CRA. We also tested for “fundamental attribution error,” that is, people see themselves as responsible for success, but attribute failure to third parties (Van Raaij and Pruyn, 1998). This bias could lead individuals to show low SPRA in successful recovery processes and high SPRA in unsuccessful recovery processes. The SPRA mean was significantly higher when service failures were solved ( $M = 4.79$ ;  $SD = 1.56$ ) than when they were not ( $M = 3.33$ ;  $SD = 1.22$ ;  $t(53.6)$ , equal variances not assumed) =  $-6.29$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting the absence of a “fundamental attribution error.”

*Results.* Regression analyses with PRS as the dependent variable were used to test the first hypothesis. We conducted four regression analyses (Table II). The variance inflators were only higher than 10 for interaction terms, suggesting an absence of multicollinearity.

**Table II.**  
Regression weights  
and VIF measures

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Std. Coef.	VIF	Std. Coef.	VIF	Std. Coef.	VIF	Std. Coef.	VIF
Failure resolution(dummy)	0.22**	1.01	0.15**	1.16	0.14**	1.18	0.14**	1.18
Failure severity	-0.07	1.02	-0.11**	1.10	-0.13**	1.14	-0.13**	1.14
Compensation	0.63**	1.14	0.50**	1.34	0.50**	1.34	0.50**	1.34
IRA	0.07	1.10	0.07	1.11	0.07	1.12	0.05	3.65
CRA	-0.07	1.02	-0.08	1.06	-0.07	1.06	-0.12	5.09
FEE			0.02	1.13	-0.25	10.54	-0.19	15.15
SPRA			0.32**	1.38	0.47**	4.20	0.47**	4.27
FEE × SPRA					-0.30**	11.32	-0.30*	11.50
FEE × IRA							0.04	8.06
FEE × CRA							0.07	8.31
R <sup>2</sup>	0.545		0.623		0.631		0.631	
R <sup>2</sup> Change	n/a		0.078		0.008		0.001	
Sig. F change	n/a		0.001		0.025		0.755	

**Notes:** n/a = info not available of on Census. \*Significant at the 0.05 and 0.01 levels respectively

The first regression (Model 1) included only the control variables failure resolution, compensation, failure severity, IRA and CRA. The two main independent variables – FEE and SPRA – were added in the second regression (Model 2). The R<sup>2</sup> change (0.078,  $p < 0.01$ ) indicated an improvement in the model. The interaction term FEE × SPRA was added in the third regression (Model 3). The R<sup>2</sup> change was 0.008, but significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting that the interaction contributed to the variance explained. This regression was used to test *H1*. SPRA was significant ( $b = 0.47$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) as well as the interaction FEE × SPRA ( $b = -0.30$ ,  $SE = 0.025$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), confirming *H1*. One more regression was run to increase the robustness of our analysis and confirm that only SPRA moderated the relationship between FEE and PRS. The interactions FEE × IRA and FEE × CRA were added in the fourth regression (Model 4). The R<sup>2</sup> change was not significant ( $p = 0.75$ ), and neither were the interaction terms, indicating that these two interactions did not improve the model.

To decompose the significant interaction, we followed Spiller *et al.* (2013) and used the Johnson–Neyman technique to identify the range(s) of SPRA for which the simple effect of the FEE manipulation was significant. This analysis revealed that for all values of SPRA above 6.76 ( $b_{JN} = 0.13$ ;  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p = 0.05$ , 12 percent of the sample), there is a significant and positive effect of FEE on PRS, but not for any value below 6.76.

The results confirmed *H1*, that is, customer attribution of responsibility to service providers moderates the relationship between FEE and PRS. The effect of FEE on PRS is significant when SPRA is high (all values above 6.76), but not when it is low ( $< 6.76$ ). It is important to highlight that the banks in the sample probably had different service recovery policies. In addition, customers may have talked to employees with different empowerment levels when making their complaints. Different failures were also reported, and reactions differed according to their severity. These differences probably led to the relatively low variance explained by the interaction FEE × SPRA and the small range of values for which the effect of the FEE was significant. We, thus, conducted an experiment to confirm the results of Study 1 and overcome some of these shortcomings.

### Study 2

Study 2 was a laboratory experiment to further test the hypothesis that SPRA moderates the impact of FEE (FEE) on PRS.

*Participants, design and procedures.* 119 undergraduate students (61 percent male, mean age = 21) were invited to participate in a between-subjects experiment, in which SPRA was measured and FEE was manipulated (high vs low). There is ample debate about the appropriateness of using undergraduate student samples (Barr and Hitt, 1986). Undergraduate students have more cognitive skills and less experience than nonstudents (Sears, 1986). In defense of our sampling method, most of the students that participated in the studies reported having some working experience and came from a diverse range of majors, increasing their representativeness. Furthermore, Peterson (2001, p. 458) found that, although college student responses are more homogenous than those of nonstudent subjects, “this greater homogeneity didn’t translate into more powerful hypothesis tests or larger effect sizes than would be observed for samples of nonstudents.” We also took care in only exposing respondents to situations that are relatively common, even for college students.

The students were approached during class breaks and were asked to answer an online survey in the computer laboratory. Participants read a scenario asking them to imagine that they had purchased a smartphone from an online store and that they should receive the product within five days. However, after ten days they had not yet received the product and then called the store’s customer service. In the condition with an empowered employee (high FEE), the representative verified that the smartphone had not been delivered because of a store failure and decided to send a new one. In the condition with a nonempowered employee (low FEE), the representative passed the call on to the supervisor, who passed the call on to the customer service manager, who finally passed the call on to the warehouse supervisor. The warehouse supervisor verified that the smartphone had not been delivered due to the store’s fault and decided that a new one would be sent. Then, she transferred the call to the customer service employee to conclude the transaction.

After reading the scenario, respondents were exposed to the same seven-point scales used in Study 1. First, they rated the importance of the service failure ( $M = 6.22$ ;  $SD = 0.97$ ; 97.6 percent equal to or above the scale’s mid-point). Failure severity was similar to the value observed in Study 1 ( $M = 5.88$ ;  $SD = 1.42$ ). Then, to check the manipulation, respondents completed the FEE items ( $M = 4.39$ ;  $SD = 1.81$ ;  $\alpha = 0.89$ ). Next, participants indicated how satisfied they were post-recovery ( $M = 5.01$ ;  $SD = 1.44$ ;  $\alpha = 0.92$ ) and completed the three items on the SPRA scale ( $M = 5.14$ ;  $SD = 1.19$ ;  $\alpha = 0.73$ ).

*Manipulation check.* Confirming the manipulation of empowerment, participants exposed to the high FEE condition perceived a higher level of FEE ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ) compared to participants exposed to the low FEE condition ( $M = 2.16$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ;  $F(1,117) = 45.30$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.28$ ).

*Results.* Given that the independent variable SPRA is continuous, and that dichotomizing IV’s has been extensively criticized (e.g. Fitzsimons, 2008), we opted to test *H1* by running a moderation analysis using Hayes’s (2013, Model 1) PROCESS macro. FEE (1 = high; 0 = low), SPRA and their interaction were included as independent variables, and PRS was included as the dependent variable. The analysis yielded a significant SPRA effect ( $b = 0.33$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $t(115) = 2.47$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and a significant FEE  $\times$  SPRA interaction effect ( $b = 0.40$ ,  $SE = 0.20$ ,  $t(115) = 2.05$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Using the Johnson–Neyman technique, we found out that for all values of SPRA above 4.74 ( $b_{JN} = 0.48$ ;  $SE = 0.24$ ,  $p = 0.05$ , 56 percent of the sample), there is a significant and positive effect of FEE on PRS, but not for any value below 4.74. The analysis confirmed *H1* by revealing that the effect of FEE on PRS is significant only when SPRA is high (all values above 4.74), but not when it is low (all values below 4.74).

In order to show these results graphically (Figure 1), we estimated the regression for two convenient values of SPRA: mean less one standard deviation (3.78) – below the Johnson–Neyman threshold, and mean plus one standard deviation (6.22) – above the Johnson–Neyman threshold. Participants with a lower level of SPRA were equally satisfied post-recovery regardless of the FEE level ( $M_{\text{low FEE}} = 3.95$  vs  $M_{\text{high FEE}} = 4.04$ ;  $b = 0.10$ ,  $SE = 0.34$ ,  $t(115) = 0.28$ ,  $p = 0.78$ ). Participants with a higher level of SPRA were more satisfied post-recovery in the high FEE condition ( $M = 5.82$ ) than in the low FEE condition ( $M = 4.74$ ;  $b = 1.08$ ,  $SE = 0.33$ ,  $t(115) = 3.26$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

The second study also confirmed *H1* using a different method. Using an experiment to confirm the results of the survey increases the validity of the findings and reduces endogeneity concerns (cf. Ketokivi and McIntosh, 2017).

### Study 3

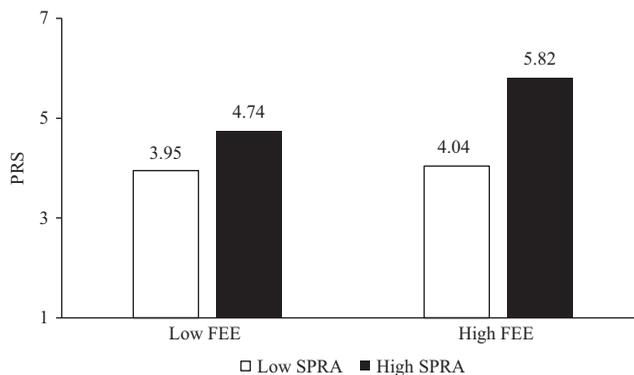
Study 3 was designed to test *H2* and explore to what extent FEE is necessary when recovery processes are streamlined.

*Participants and design.* 235 undergraduate students (65 percent male, mean age = 21) were invited to participate in a 2 (FEE: high vs low)  $\times$  2 (streamlined recovery process: present vs absent) between-subjects laboratory experiment, in which SPRA was measured.

*Procedure.* Participants were approached during class breaks and asked to answer an online questionnaire in the computer laboratory. Participants were asked to read the scenario carefully and answer the questions that followed. The scenario asked participants to imagine that they had a few clinical tests taken. Then, when they downloaded the results from the laboratory website, they noticed that the results belonged to someone else. Next, the participants were asked to imagine that they called the laboratory’s customer service and that the representative asked for their tracking number to register the complaint.

In the high FEE scenario, participants had to imagine that the representative verified that the records were wrong due to a laboratory failure and then she solved the problem herself. In the low FEE scenario, the representative first talked on the phone with the registration office and then with the laboratory’s report generation area. Afterwards, before issuing a new results report, the attendant had to ask her supervisor to approve the changes.

To manipulate whether the recovery processes were streamlined or not, the scenarios differed along the presence of queues and waiting time, the amount of information required and the quality of resources needed to solve the problem. In the nonstreamlined recovery



**Figure 1.** Post-recovery satisfaction (PRS)  $\times$  service provider responsibility attribution (SPRA)  $\times$  frontline employee empowerment (FEE) (Study 2)

process, the customer had to wait in a queue of calls to place the complaint, and had to wait for the attendant to look for the medical records. The customer was informed that the IT system was slow and had to provide the service protocol number, the full name, ID and the doctor's ID number. In the streamlined recovery process, the customer did not have to wait to place the complaint and provided only the service protocol number. There were no problems with the IT system and the attendant found the medical records easily.

After reading the scenario, respondents were asked to rate the importance of the service failure ( $M = 5.52$ ;  $SD = 1.40$ ; 92.3 percent equal to or above the scale's mid-point). Failure severity ratings were similar to the two previous studies. Health related issues might be considered more critical than late deliveries (failure in Study 2), if individuals believe there is something wrong with their health. However, in the third study, individuals knew upfront that the laboratory test belonged to another patient and were trying to recoup their own tests. Respondents were also asked to rate the probability that the event described in the scenario could have happened to them ( $M = 5.66$ ;  $SD = 1.34$ ; 93.1 percent equal to or above the scale's mid-point). These results suggest that the scenario was considered realistic and the service failure was important for most of the participants.

To check the FEE manipulation, respondents completed the same four items validated in Study 1 ( $M = 4.09$ ;  $SD = 1.60$ ;  $\alpha = 0.86$ ). To check the manipulation of a streamlined recovery process, respondents evaluated the process along six items based on the indicators proposed by Boshoff (2007) and on a technical document describing call center efficiency (Teclan, 2016). The six items evaluate the process during the call ("Total call duration, from start to end, was short"; "Call waiting time was short"; "It was easy to place my complaint and solve my problem," "The service rendered by the call center was efficient"; "I had to provide little information to solve my problem"; "The support systems and resources helped the employee during my call"). All items were measured along seven-point Likert type scales ( $M = 3.36$ ;  $SD = 1.66$ ;  $\alpha = 0.94$ ).

Next, using the scales already validated in Study 1, participants indicated how satisfied they were with the recovery process ( $M = 4.76$ ;  $SD = 1.39$ ;  $\alpha = 0.89$ ) and completed the three items on the SPRA scale ( $M = 5.29$ ;  $SD = 1.07$ ;  $\alpha = 0.70$ ).

*Manipulation checks.* As expected, an ANOVA 2 (FEE: high vs low)  $\times$  2 (streamlined recovery process: present vs absent) with perceived FEE as the dependent variable revealed only a main effect of FEE ( $F(1, 231) = 20.51, p < 0.01, \eta_p^2 = 0.08$ ). The perceived FEE in the condition with high FEE was significantly higher ( $M = 4.55$ ) than that in the condition with low empowerment ( $M = 3.64$ ;  $t(233) = 4.54, p < 0.01$ ). A similar ANOVA with the perception of a streamlined recovery process revealed only a main effect of the streamlined process perception scale ( $F(1, 231) = 190.06, p < 0.01, \eta_p^2 = 0.45$ ). The condition with a streamlined process resulted in higher streamlined process perceptions ( $M = 4.45$ ) than the condition with a nonstreamlined process ( $M = 2.22$ ;  $t(233) = 13.81, p < 0.01$ ). These results suggest that both manipulations were successful.

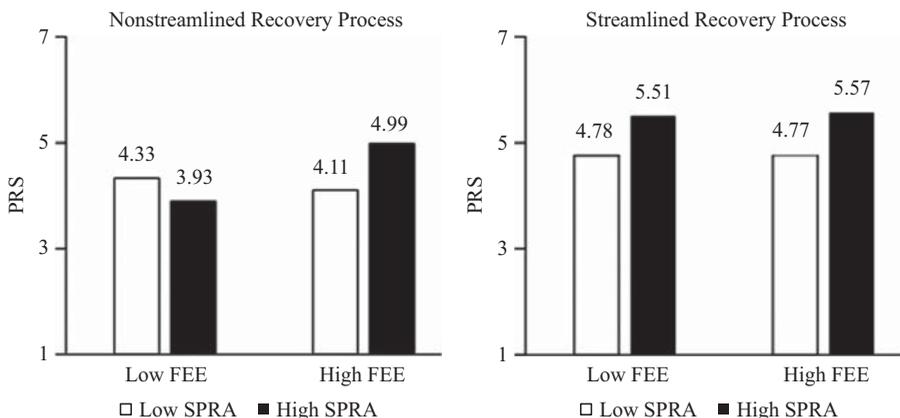
*Results.* We run a moderation analysis using Hayes's (2013, Model 3) PROCESS macro to test  $H2$ . Specifically, we included FEE (1 = high; 0 = low), streamlined process (1 = present; 0 = absent), SPRA, and all the interactions as independent variables, and PRS as the dependent variable. The analysis yielded a significant effect of FEE ( $b = -2.79, SE = 1.28, t(227) = -2.19, p < 0.05$ ), a significant FEE  $\times$  SPRA interaction effect ( $b = 0.62, SE = 24, t(227) = 2.56, p < 0.05$ ), a significant streamlined process  $\times$  SPRA interaction effect ( $b = 0.53, SE = 0.24, t(227) = 2.23, p < 0.05$ ) and a marginally significant FEE  $\times$  streamlined process  $\times$  SPRA interaction effect ( $b = -0.59, SE = 0.33, t(227) = -1.79, p < 0.1$ ). To decompose the interaction between the three variables, we ran two moderation analyses (one for each level of the streamlined recovery process) using Hayes' (2013, Model 1) PROCESS macro similar to the analysis in Study 2.

When the recovery process was not streamlined, the moderation analysis yielded a significant FEE effect ( $b = -2.79$ ,  $SE = 1.22$ ,  $t(111) = -2.28$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and a FEE  $\times$  SPRA interaction effect ( $b = 0.62$ ,  $SE = 0.23$ ,  $t(111) = 2.67$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Using the Johnson–Neyman technique, we found out that for all values of SPRA above 5.22 ( $b_{JN} = 0.46$ ;  $SE = 0.23$ ,  $p = 0.05$ , 50 percent of the sample), there is a significant and positive effect of FEE on PRS, but not for any value below 5.22.

We estimated the regression for two convenient values of SPRA to represent these results graphically: mean less one standard deviation and below the Johnson–Neyman threshold (4.12) and mean plus one standard deviation and above the Johnson–Neyman threshold (6.19). As shown in Figure 2 (Panel A), when the recovery process was not streamlined, participants with a lower level of SPRA were equally satisfied post-recovery ( $M_{\text{low FEE}} = 4.33$  vs  $M_{\text{high FEE}} = 4.11$ ;  $b = -0.23$ ,  $SE = 0.33$ ,  $t(111) = -0.68$ ,  $p = 0.50$ ). Conversely, participants with a higher level of SPRA were more satisfied post-recovery in the high FEE condition ( $M = 4.99$ ) than in the low FEE condition ( $M = 3.93$ ;  $b = 1.06$ ,  $SE = 0.33$ ,  $t(111) = 3.18$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). These results confirm *H2a* and replicate the results obtained in Studies 1 and 2. In the absence of a streamlined recovery process, the impact of FEE was stronger when the SPRA was high than when it was low.

When the recovery process was streamlined, the moderation analysis yielded a significant SPRA effect ( $b = 0.33$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ ,  $t(116) = 2.33$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) but not a FEE  $\times$  SPRA interaction effect ( $b = 0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.23$ ,  $t(116) = 0.14$ ,  $p = 0.89$ ). When the recovery process was streamlined, the effect of FEE on PRS was the same regardless of the level of SPRA. We estimated the regression for two convenient values of SPRA (mean minus one standard deviation  $-4.34$ , and mean plus one standard deviation  $-6.53$ ). As shown in Figure 2 – Panel B, when the recovery process was streamlined, participants with a lower level of SPRA were equally satisfied post-recovery ( $M_{\text{low FEE}} = 4.78$  vs  $M_{\text{high FEE}} = 4.77$ ;  $b = -0.01$ ,  $SE = 0.36$ ,  $t(116) = -0.03$ ,  $p = 0.97$ ). Participants with a higher level of SPRA were also equally satisfied post-recovery ( $M_{\text{low FEE}} = 5.51$  vs  $M_{\text{high FEE}} = 5.57$ ;  $b = 0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.365$ ,  $t(116) = 0.17$ ,  $p = 0.86$ ).

These results confirm *H2b* by showing that, when the recovery process was streamlined, FEE had little influence on PRS. A streamlined process contributes more to PRS in individuals who attribute high responsibility for the recovery processes to the service providers than to the satisfaction of individuals who assign lower responsibility to the service providers.



**Figure 2.** Post-recovery satisfaction (PRS)  $\times$  service provider responsibility attribution (SPRA)  $\times$  frontline employee empowerment (FEE)  $\times$  streamlined recovery process (Study 3)

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## Discussion

The results indicate that individuals who attribute more responsibility for the recovery process to service providers become more satisfied when they perceive that frontline employees are empowered, or that the recovery processes are streamlined. However, a streamlined process minimizes the benefits of FEE. On the other hand, when customers do not associate service recovery outcomes to the company's efforts, customer satisfaction levels are less influenced by FEE or the presence of streamlined processes.

These outcomes were observed in different settings using different methods, increasing the validity and generalizability of our findings. The use of complementary methods (survey and experiments) has been recommended in the service recovery literature (Michel, 2001), but few studies follow this path. Thus, our methodology allows for more confidence in the results observed and lays a stronger foundation for the theoretical and practical implications discussed next.

### *Theoretical implications*

FEE is seen as an essential pillar of designing service recovery efforts (Contiero *et al.*, 2016; Smith *et al.*, 2012; Smith and Karwan, 2010), especially in customer-oriented strategies (Contiero *et al.*, 2016). It is also considered a means to increase PRS (e.g. Bowen and Lawler, 1995; Hart *et al.*, 1990; Miller *et al.*, 2000; Ogbeide *et al.*, 2017; Sparks *et al.*, 1997). This research contributes to this literature in the following ways.

First, our results suggest that the effects of FEE as a recovery strategy to increase customer satisfaction may have been exaggerated in previous studies. We demonstrated the importance of considering the structure of service recovery processes and customers' attribution of responsibility for the recovery process to service providers. In doing so, this study highlights the risk of evaluating the impact of design decisions in service recovery processes, like FEE, on PRS without considering that customers do not evaluate such efforts in the same fashion, and that they simultaneously take other characteristics of the recovery processes into consideration. Research on recovery design should also evaluate to what extent different customers value FEE, depending on how firms receive complaints (accessibility) and on the recovery actions employed (comprehensiveness). We also need to understand better if FEE can influence different customers' perception of the formalization of recovery processes.

Second, this research extends current studies that explore the contingencies that influence the design of recovery strategies (e.g. Contiero *et al.*, 2016; Smith *et al.*, 2012) by showing that the structure of recovery processes, here represented by a streamlined process, also matters in the eyes of certain customers. This outcome is in line with Johnston and Michel's (2008) argument stating that the way the recovery process is structured is an essential driver of customer satisfaction with the recovery process. This study also raises questions about how recovery processes structure influences customer perceptions regarding recovery design dimensions other than FEE – such as accessibility or influence. For instance, future research could explore if the presence of a streamlined recovery process minimizes the need to offer customers a wider range of options to place their complaints (i.e. wider accessibility) or to promote deeper customer involvement in the recovery process (i.e. stronger influence).

Finally, there is a dearth of research evaluating how aspects of the service recovery system influence customer outcomes (Van Vaerenbergh and Orsingher, 2016). Moreover, Bitran and Pedrosa (1998) already pointed to the importance of considering customers' perceptions and behaviors in designing service processes, but few studies so far have done that in the service recovery literature. We take a step in this direction. In doing so, our study highlights the way a firm's recovery process may shape, and be shaped by, employees' actions and customers' preferences. We, thus, agree with Van Vaerenbergh and Orsingher

(2016) that service recovery research needs more interdisciplinary studies exploring the relationship between phenomena at the firm, employee and customer levels. By providing a more comprehensive understanding of service recovery, such research should challenge currently established assumptions.

#### *Practical implications*

The research outcomes also have implications for designing service recovery strategies. First, our results suggest that managers could invest in either FEE or in the creation of streamlined recovery processes, choosing the less costly alternative. It is important to consider that FEE may render activities less annoying to employees and reduce the turnover associated with repetitive processes (Boshoff and Leong, 1998). On the other hand, artificial intelligence-based systems, like IBM's Watson, may soon replace frontline employees in highly repetitive jobs – like call centers. In such cases, designing streamlined processes with fewer steps, fewer customer information demands and fewer restrictions to problem resolution will be fundamental. Customers sometimes also need to have multiple interactions with the firms to solve their problems. In such cases, combining streamlined processes and interactive stages with empowered employees may render service recovery more agreeable to customers.

Furthermore, the recovery practices analyzed do not seem to contribute much to PRS in individuals who do not attribute responsibility for the process to the service providers. This finding suggests that managers should take actions to make customers perceive that the firm controls quality (cf. Bradley and Sparks, 2002) in the service recovery process. At the beginning of the recovery process, the company could explain to individuals the value they place on providing high-quality services; that they have processes in place to solve the problem; and how much they are responsible for taking care of customers when failures occur. Such efforts could lead customers to attribute more responsibility to the service provider and, therefore, make customers more open to recovery strategies. Companies should test different scripts to assess which one could shift customers' responsibility attribution.

More research is needed to further guide managers on how to design recovery strategies. Future studies should evaluate when FEE is a better alternative than a streamlined recovery process, and how valuable it is to focus on one or the other. It would also be interesting to understand if customer satisfaction levels with streamlined recovery processes vary depending on the channel used to place the complaint (face-to-face vs call center vs online), and the type of interaction (with an artificial intelligence system or with humans). Finally, firms are increasingly working together to deliver customer-centric services and it will be important to understand to whom customers attribute the responsibility for the service process (Tax *et al.*, 2013). New research could explore how attribution of responsibility for the recovery process to different service providers shapes their evaluation of the recovery processes.

#### **Concluding remarks**

The research outcomes suggest that service recovery research needs to fully integrate concepts from marketing, operations and human resources to evaluate the effectiveness of service recovery practices in increasing customer PRS. It is widely acknowledged that research on service recovery derives insights from different knowledge fields. Nevertheless, to our knowledge, no previous study had dissociated the effects of FEE from the benefits associated with streamlined recovery processes. Neither have we found studies considering how customers' attribution of responsibility for the recovery process influences their evaluations. In doing so, this paper provides a more comprehensive view of the role of FEE in service recovery and it adds evidence on the importance of creating streamlined recovery processes. Such a multidisciplinary approach is necessary to understand recovery strategies in detail, as well as the conditions when different types of service recovery practices should be adopted.

### Limitations

This study is not without limitations. First, caution should be taken when generalizing the results to a broader population due to the fact that in two of the studies we used only undergraduate student sample. Second, even though we used complementary methods to test the first hypothesis, the one related to the role of streamlined processes was tested only in the second experiment. Moreover, this study focused on comparing FEE to streamlined processes, without taking into account other design dimensions of service recovery strategies (cf. Smith and Karwan, 2010). More research is needed to understand whether our findings would change when FEE is part of a more comprehensive recovery strategy.

We also evaluated the relationship between FEE, streamlined processes, SPRA and PRS in different types of services to increase the validity of the findings. However, outcomes are still limited to a specific context, i.e., high volume services. The importance of personal interaction and efficiency varies from service to service (Schmenner, 2004) and, in other settings, the importance of FEE may be different, as Ponsignon *et al.* (2011) posit. Finally, whereas we incorporated the concept of customer attribution of responsibility for the recovery process to service providers, we acknowledge that there are different concepts related to customer beliefs about control (Büttgen *et al.*, 2012) that were not explored here. Future research needs to further explore the role of other notions of control in the effectiveness of recovery strategies.

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### Further reading

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Constructs <sup>a</sup> , variables	CR	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	Std. loads <sup>b</sup>	
FEE(1)	0.90	<i>0.70</i>						
The employee I complained to did not have to find someone else to solve my problem							0.91	
My complaint was not passed on from one employee to another							0.86	
The employee did not have to wait for a manager's authorization to solve my problem							0.76	
The employee was able to solve my problem without the help of a manager							0.81	
PRS(2)	0.96	0.02	<i>0.89</i>					
I received a satisfactory solution to my problem on this occasion							0.96	
I am satisfied with the solution provided to my problem							0.96	
Overall, I felt satisfied with the solution to this problem							0.91	
SPRA(3)	0.73	0.07	0.45	<i>0.51</i>				
The solution to my complaint depended mainly on the bank's ability to solve it							0.31	
The quality of the solution was strongly determined by the efforts of the bank							0.83	
The efforts of the employees strongly determined the outcomes of the process							0.86	
IRA(4)	0.85	0.01	0.08	0.04	<i>0.59</i>			
The solution to my complaint depended mainly on how much effort I made							0.70	
My personal dedication was the main factor in finding the solution							0.74	
The solution strongly depended on my ability to help the bank							0.85	
Whether the solution was successful or not depended mainly on my involvement							0.77	
CRA(5)	0.75	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.02	<i>0.51</i>		
The solution to my problem was due to luck. I had little influence on the process							0.57	
The outcomes of the process to solve my complaint was mostly determined by fate							0.76	
It was a question of luck whether the problem could be solved or not							0.78	

**Table AI.**  
Factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), AVE and squared inter-construct correlations

Notes: <sup>a</sup>AVE in in the diagonal; <sup>b</sup>Significant at  $p < 0.01$

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