



**Original citation:** Nicholls, Richard and Gad Mohsen, M. (2019) *Managing customer-to-customer interaction (CCI) – insights from the frontline*. Journal of Services Marketing. ISSN 0887-6045 (In Press)

**Permanent WRaP URL:** <https://eprints.worc.ac.uk/id/eprint/8876>

### **Copyright and reuse:**

The Worcester Research and Publications (WRaP) makes this work available open access under the following conditions. Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRaP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

### **Publisher's statement:**

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Emerald Publishing on 4 November 2019, available online at <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JSM-11-2018-0329/full/html>

This accepted manuscript is deposited under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial International Licence 4.0 ([CC-BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)) To reuse the accepted manuscript for commercial purposes, permission should be sought by contacting [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)

### **A note on versions:**

The version presented here may differ from the published version or, version of record, if you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the 'permanent WRaP URL' above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

**For more information, please contact [wrapteam@worc.ac.uk](mailto:wrapteam@worc.ac.uk)**

## INTRODUCTION

Many services are characterised by the simultaneous presence of customers.

Interactions between service customers present in the service setting are increasingly the focus of service management research (Colm *et al.*, 2017; Heinonen *et al.*, 2018). A wide range of insights into customer-to-customer interactions (CCI) have been generated given its impact on the customer experience. Empirical studies of CCI have, however, focused overwhelmingly on the customer perspective. There is limited empirical work investigating CCI from the perspective of the frontline employee (FLE). This is surprising given that customer recall of CCI often mentions FLE presence (Nicholls, 2010), and that FLEs are frequently identified in the literature as a key resource for CCI service recovery (e.g. McQuilken *et al.*, 2017). This paper seeks to contribute to redressing this research deficit by providing information based on the views of employees who **are regularly involved in managing CCI.**

Thirty years of CCI research has produced significant outputs (Colm *et al.*, 2017; Nicholls, 2010). The importance of studying CCI, whether negative (NCCI) or positive (PCCI), is increasingly acknowledged and it now belongs to the mainstream of services marketing (Nicholls, 2010). There are several reasons for this. First, CCI is recognised as widespread (e.g. Nicholls, 2010) and, for some services, more prevalent than customer-employee interactions (Miao and Mattila, 2013; Rowley, 1995). Second, in many service settings other customers frequently impact the customer's service experience, which can have a profound and lasting effect on value creation and the customer's overall perception of the service and its provider (Heinonen *et al.*, 2018). Third, research shows that service organisations often ineffectively manage CCI (e.g. Baker and Kim, 2018). Fourth, whilst

1  
2  
3 NCCI is usually blamed on other customers, the focal customer still expects the service  
4  
5 organisation to recover the situation (e.g. Baker and Kim, 2018). Moreover, customers  
6  
7 attribute blame to service organisations that fail to respond to NCCI (Colm *et al.*, 2017;  
8  
9 Nicholls, 2005); a study by Baker and Kim (2018) found that whilst nearly 80% of  
10  
11 respondents blamed another customer for the reported CCI incident, over 90% deemed the  
12  
13 service organisation responsible for recovering the situation. This underscores biases in the  
14  
15 attribution process as indicated by the attribution theory (Fiske and Taylor, 1984) whereby  
16  
17 customers are likely to blame the system or employees (Bitner *et al.*, 1994). These reasons  
18  
19 underscore the relevance of CCI as a critical aspect of services marketing research, hence  
20  
21 eliciting insights from the FLE perspective would extend key implications for marketers and  
22  
23 service managers.  
24  
25  
26  
27

28  
29 The investigation of service from the employee perspective is recognised as valuable  
30  
31 in services marketing research. Previous research demonstrates FLEs as an excellent source  
32  
33 of information about customers (e.g. Bitner *et al.*, 1994). Menguc *et al.* (2016, p. 65)  
34  
35 emphasise that “Customer-oriented frontline employees (FLEs) are widely regarded as  
36  
37 valuable resources who promote competitive differentiation and enhanced performance  
38  
39 outcomes”. As FLEs have boundary-spanning roles, marked by proximity to customers and  
40  
41 frequent interaction with them, they can engage with the customers involved in the CCI and  
42  
43 understand situations both from the customer and the service organisation viewpoint. A  
44  
45 recent study (Verleye *et al.*, 2016) examined the FLE perspective in determining customer  
46  
47 engagement behaviours (CEBs) as job demands and job resources, and its impact on job  
48  
49 stress-job strain relationships among FLEs. Given that acquiring a FLE perspective has been  
50  
51 found useful in similar research contexts (e.g. CEB; customer misbehaviour; customer  
52  
53 retention) it seems reasonable to assume that studying CCI and its handling from the FLE’s  
54  
55 point of view could potentially contribute to our in-depth understanding and management  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 of CCI. Moreover, there have been previous calls for research into the FLE perspective  
4 on CCI. Following a review of extant research on direct CCI Nicholls (2010) called for  
5 research into: FLE general awareness of CCI; FLE awareness of specific types of CCI;  
6 FLE perceptions regarding their responsibility for dealing with CCI; FLE accounts of  
7 their strategy and tactics in dealing with CCI; and FLE perspective on any danger and  
8 stress involved in handling negative CCI. Other researchers have reiterated this call  
9 (e.g. Colm *et al.*, 2017).  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19

20         Researching CCI from the FLE perspective offers several advantages. Firstly, FLEs can  
21 see both sides of CCI situations, whereas customers tend to focus only on their side.  
22 Accordingly, FLEs are likely to form a more inclusive and balanced view of the CCI taking  
23 place than do customers. Secondly, as FLEs (unlike customers) are responsible for handling  
24 CCI, they are in a position both to provide insights into how to deal with CCI situations (and  
25 better engage with the customers involved) and to offer reflections on how it feels to  
26 intervene in CCI situations. Thirdly, research suggests that customers are unlikely to report  
27 CCI problems to employees. For example, Dorsey *et al.* (2016) found that customers sought  
28 employee intervention in only 7% of reported CCI incidents. Accordingly, given the lack of  
29 customer reporting of CCI, it becomes important to know whether FLEs themselves are  
30 aware and alert to CCI situations.  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48

49         A key challenge that has emerged from the CCI literature is: How can employees deal  
50 with CCI? Several important questions that precede this challenge have, however, received  
51 little attention from researchers:  
52  
53

- 54         • How perceptive are FLEs of CCI?
  - 55         • To what extent do FLEs see CCI as something which needs handling?
- 56  
57  
58  
59  
60

- How do FLEs handle CCI?
- How do employees feel when dealing with CCI situations?
- What are the consequences of CCI intervention for employee satisfaction?

This exploratory study seeks to address a gap in CCI research by discussing these questions and incorporating the FLE perspective into the study of CCI management. As service managers rely mainly on FLEs to recover NCCI situations, it is important to understand what is involved for the FLE engaged in CCI-related service recovery.

**The study is grounded in the servuction system model (Eiglier and Langeard, 1977) and Martin and Pranter's conceptualisation of compatibility management in service environments based on the relationships among Customer A, Customer B and the FLE within a situational context. It expands on Solomon *et al.*'s (1985) postulation of the dyadic nature of interactions in service encounters by emphasising the triadic nature of the C2C relationships when incorporating the role and perceptions of the FLE.**

The research focuses on the direct on-site interactions occurring between service customers. It employs focus groups and in-depth interviews to explore FLE awareness, perceptions and reflections on CCI at a large library and council services hub in a UK city. Qualitative analysis leads to the identification of five main themes relating to the FLE's abilities to perceive and conceptualise CCI; FLE feelings about dealing with CCI; and FLE management of CCI.

The paper extends the discussion of CCI and the FLE to consider the capacity of FLEs to engage with CCI and the consequences of this engagement. It contributes nine testable propositions concerning the FLE's training for CCI interventions and FLE comfort with those interventions. A third contribution of the paper is providing practical managerial insights and identifying benefits to service managers of gaining a FLE perspective on CCI. These include:

1  
2  
3 assessing the extent to which FLEs comprehend how customer experience is influenced by  
4 other customer behaviour, and thus determine the extent to which FLEs require CCI training;  
5 capturing the range of responses FLEs employ to deal with CCI, especially NCCI, hence  
6 allowing effective assessment of the appropriateness of these responses and identification of  
7 good practice; and assisting service managers to understand the emotional workload that  
8 managing NCCI may place on FLEs.  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17

18 This paper starts by briefly overviewing CCI and how it has been studied. It then highlights  
19 the research gap, drawing attention to the potential usefulness of an employee perspective.  
20 Next, the paper introduces the study context and outlines the methodological approach.  
21  
22

23 Following this, themes which emerged are discussed while advancing propositions that build  
24 a conceptual framework for further conclusive research. The paper then highlights its  
25 theoretical, conceptual and managerial implications. Finally, some limitations of the study are  
26 discussed, while advancing directions for future research.  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33

## 34 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 35 Customer-to-customer Interaction

36  
37  
38 The term CCI is conceptually broad and used in several ways including word-of-mouth  
39 and interactions between owners of goods. This paper, like previous service research (e.g.  
40 Martin and Pranter, 1989; Nicholls, 2010), employs it to refer to direct on-premises verbal and  
41 non-verbal behaviours by customers which influence the service experience of other customers  
42 present in the service setting. **Non-verbal behaviours are usually occurring in real time,**  
43 **although sometimes they will have occurred previously, i.e. transtemporal CCI (Nicholls,**  
44 **2005).** Direct CCI is demonstrated conceptually in the servuction system model (Eiglier and  
45 Langeard, 1977) with its representation of the customer interacting directly with FLEs, physical  
46 surroundings and other customers.  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 The service encounter and its management are central to the customer experience and  
4 **hence** to customer satisfaction and retention (e.g. Bitner and Wang, 2014). There is increasing  
5 recognition that C2C interaction forms part of the service encounter, and that how customers  
6 perceive the behaviour of other customers contributes to their overall customer experience  
7 (Heinonen *et al.*, 2018). Research findings show that PCCI will tend to attract customers to a  
8 service, whilst NCCI will tend to encourage avoidance behaviour (e.g. Tombs and McColl-  
9 Kennedy, 2003). Accordingly, managing CCI is an important part of managing the customer  
10 experience (Verhoef *et al.*, 2009), and FLEs are recognised as having a central role here (e.g.  
11 Baker and Kim, 2018).  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22

23  
24 Service consumption frequently involves sharing the service setting with other customers.  
25 Empirical studies of CCI have found it to be a familiar facet of a wide variety of service settings  
26 from garden centres to trains (Nicholls, 2010). Several authors have suggested that in some  
27 services the impact of C2C interaction on the customer experience may be as significant as, or  
28 perhaps even more than, the impact of Employee-to-Customer (E2C) interaction (e.g. Lehtinen  
29 and Lehtinen, 1991; Miao and Mattila, 2013). Miao and Mattila (2013), for example, point out  
30 that for certain hospitality services, such as cruise trips, where the psychological distance  
31 between customers is close, other customers can be pivotal in determining whether a  
32 customer's experience is satisfactory or not.  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48

## 49 **FLE and CCI**

50  
51 **The remainder of this section considers how the CCI literature has discussed the**  
52 **FLE.** Table 1 provides an overview of the perspectives from which the FLE has been discussed  
53 in the CCI literature. Some of the more significant studies mentioned in Table 1 are also  
54 discussed below.  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

## INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

In describing the dyadic nature of interaction in service encounters, Solomon *et al.*, (1985, p. 100) emphasise the service encounter as “a psychological phenomenon that exerts a major impact upon outcomes”. They associate this with Lutz and Kakkar’s (1976) understanding of behaviour through a process model that incorporates the situation, decision processes and the social exchange. This model, a micro-formulation of the interpersonal dimension of situational influence, depicts the communication between the persons involved and their perceptions of each other’s behaviour (the FLE and the customer) within the situational context, mediated by emotional responses.

Taking this forward onto the triadic nature of CCI in service settings in the presence of customers A and B and the FLE, this encounter is a psychological situation that extends the above model and necessitates a closer exploration from the FLE’s viewpoint. CCI incidents often comprise unanticipated situations that are not role scripted for the customers or the FLE involved. They thus do not succumb to the Role and Script theory whereby customers and employees share common role expectations and a well-defined service script of the service experience (Bitner *et al.*, 1994).

*The contribution of FLEs to NCCI*

Studies have drawn attention to how service organisations may contribute to the development of NCCI situations. Nicholls (2005) found that often NCCI incidents are provoked or intensified by situational factors. These factors include perceived inefficiencies of the service organisation such as unclear queueing systems, unused capacity at busy times and booking system errors. Likewise, Dorsey *et al.* (2016), identify crowded service settings, long waits and product scarcity as indirect triggers of NCCI. Similarly, FLEs can also be perceived as causing, or contributing to, NCCI. For example, Schmidt and Sapsford (1995) describe the



1  
2  
3 experiences of women in male-dominated pubs and highlight the perception that bar staff were  
4  
5 in collusion with male customers in making female customers feel unwelcome.  
6  
7

### 8 *Customer expectations of FLE intervention in CCI situations*

9

10  
11 Customers have expectations that service organisations and their employees will intervene  
12  
13 in some NCCI situations and contexts. Failure to intervene in such circumstances can lead to  
14  
15 the allocation of blame. The likelihood of the service organisation being blamed for NCCI will  
16  
17 depend on customer perception of the frequency of such NCCI and the potential for controlling  
18  
19 it. Indeed, Nicholls (2005) proposes that CCI service failures which customers perceive as  
20  
21 controllable by the service organisation and/or recurring will be judged more severely. Support  
22  
23 for this proposition is offered by a recent study on inappropriate visitor behaviour in theme  
24  
25 parks that identified controllability and stability as significant factors (Tsang *et al.*, 2016).  
26  
27  
28

### 29 *Approaches to using FLEs to manage CCI*

30

31  
32  
33 The CCI literature recognises the potential of using FLEs to deal with CCI, and that this  
34  
35 may provide a new means of competitive advantage (Nicholls, 2005). Pranter and Martin  
36  
37 (1991) outlined ten roles a service provider can perform in managing CCI. Martin (1995)  
38  
39 provided an instrument, known as the customer compatibility scale, which can identify  
40  
41 individual sensitivity to other customer behaviour. He suggests that the scale may be useful for  
42  
43 ascertaining variation between employee and customer tolerances of other customer behaviour.  
44  
45 Grove and Fisk (1997) discuss issues such as how FLEs might educate customers about  
46  
47 appropriate behaviour and 'police' customers when necessary. The CCI literature has also  
48  
49 considered the role of employees in encouraging PCCI. For example, several studies  
50  
51 emphasise the potential for using employees as catalysts for getting conversations going  
52  
53 between customers (e.g. McGrath and Otnes, 1995).  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Whilst the notion of the FLE having a CCI role has received frequent mention in the CCI  
4 literature, it has received minimal research consideration. A limited number of CCI studies  
5 have included customer perception of employee response to CCI. Huang (2008) included four  
6 scale items relating to customer perception of FLE service recovery effort. Huang (2008) found  
7 that perceived employee CCI service recovery effort exerted a positive influence on customer  
8 satisfaction. Hoffman and Lee (2014) identified five tactics which students perceived their  
9 instructors as using to discourage disruptive student-to-student behaviour and discuss student  
10 views on the relative effectiveness of these tactics. McQuilken *et al.* (2017), using restaurant-  
11 based scenarios, found that FLE apology for delays caused by other customers overstaying  
12 table-booking times could be as effective as FLE effort to fix the problem. These studies,  
13 however, all examine the consumer perspective of the FLE in CCI situations and not the FLE's  
14 perspective. The potential value of FLE insights based on engagement with the customers in  
15 the CCI situations has been overlooked in most previous studies.

16  
17  
18 Table 2 illustrates the approaches used to gain the customer perspective on CCI. These  
19 include: studies asking customers to recall CCI as they exited a service setting (e.g. Baron *et*  
20 *al.*, 1996); studies in service settings asking customers to recall previous CCI in similar service  
21 settings (e.g. Grove and Fisk 1997); studies observing customers (e.g. McGrath and Otnes,  
22 1995); and studies asking customers to respond to scenarios (e.g. Luther *et al.*, 2016).

23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Of the twelve CCI studies contained in Table 2, only one study includes a FLE perspective. Luther *et al.* (2016), in a scenario-based study of the influence of interpersonal similarity of roommates on patients' hospital satisfaction, had a FLE component in the form of a subsequent and subsidiary qualitative study consisting of four group interviews with nurses. The minimal research into C2C interaction from the employee point of view is surprising given its frequent

1  
2  
3 use to gain insights into E2C interaction. Given the triadic nature of some C2C encounters, it  
4  
5 seemed appropriate to undertake an exploratory study with an in-depth FLE perspective on  
6  
7 CCI.  
8  
9

## 10 11 12 13 14 **STUDY CONTEXT** 15 16

17 This study was conducted in a CCI-rich service environment: The Hive – a large library  
18 in Worcester, UK. There is quite a substantial literature on libraries and how they are used,  
19 which includes coverage of CCI-related issues (e.g. Hunter and Cox, 2014; Lange *et al.*, 2016).  
20  
21 In recent years, attention has been drawn to a range of wider societal changes which are re-  
22  
23 shaping how libraries are conceived. The increasing availability of information in an electronic  
24  
25 form has fostered a debate about the role of libraries in the modern world. In the context of  
26  
27 university libraries, there have been discussions about the prevalence of group assignments and  
28  
29 the consequent need for library spaces to provide for group work without disturbing those  
30  
31 working individually (Bryant *et al.*, 2009). Another theme has been the challenge of  
32  
33 accommodating the technologies, such as mobile phones, which some desire to use in libraries  
34  
35 (Heaton and Master, 2006). The above discussion demonstrates that CCI is a relevant issue in  
36  
37 library environments. As posited by Rowley (1995, p. 8), “The changing nature of the role of  
38  
39 libraries and the activities that specific groups of users expect to engage in within the library  
40  
41 building make it useful to revisit and reflect on the service experience and the role of customer-  
42  
43 to-customer compatibility in that experience.”  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50

51 The Hive, opened in 2012 and representing the joint vision of the University of Worcester  
52 and Worcestershire County Council, is a new type of library: a public-university library where  
53  
54 diverse members of the public and students **use the service alongside one another**. The Hive  
55  
56 has some 10,000 m<sup>2</sup> of space over five open-plan floors, with varied expectations for noise  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 level on each. The open plan design carries several important implications for CCI, including  
4  
5 high visual contact and noise travelling. Each floor of The Hive is, however, zoned: Level 0 is  
6  
7 a social space for shared study targeted mainly at teens; Level 1 has a large children's area,  
8  
9 café, exhibition space and Council customer service centre; Level 2 houses the Worcestershire  
10  
11 Archive and Archaeology Service; Level 3 contains most of the book stock and has individual  
12  
13 and group working spaces; and Level 4 is intended for silent study.  
14  
15  
16  
17

18  
19 Following discussion between the researchers and senior managers at The Hive, it was  
20  
21 recognised as a service setting where CCI is relevant. With a rich diversity of behaviour and  
22  
23 perceptions, both positive and negative, from public users and university students, it offers a  
24  
25 lucrative context for this CCI study. A range of secondary data sources, including user  
26  
27 comments, complaints, local press, and employee observations, confirmed this.  
28  
29

30  
31 The relevance of CCI to The Hive is more pronounced than most libraries given its user  
32  
33 diversity and strong desire to be inclusive. The physical space at The Hive is shared by a diverse  
34  
35 group of users. This diversity has several dimensions including purpose of visit, age, social  
36  
37 background and size of party. The range of purposes of visits includes individual academic  
38  
39 research; student group project work; socialising; activities for parents and babies/children;  
40  
41 attending adult learning classes; paying council bills; and, for some, a safe place to warm up  
42  
43 or recharge a mobile phone. The Hive has an inclusive mission and aims to actively welcome  
44  
45 and serve members of the public who may be disadvantaged such as the unemployed and ethnic  
46  
47 groups.  
48  
49

50  
51 A useful academic framework on CCI underlines the relevance of CCI to The Hive. This  
52  
53 framework (Martin and Pranter, 1989) outlines seven characteristics of services which are  
54  
55 likely to increase the incidence of CCI. These characteristics are: customers being in close  
56  
57 proximity to each other; verbal interaction among customers; engagement of customers in  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 numerous and varied activities; attraction of a heterogeneous customer mix to the service  
4  
5 environment; the reliance of the core service on customer compatibility; customers waiting  
6  
7 together for service; and expectations on customers to share time, space, or service utensils  
8  
9 with each other. Services possessing at least one of these characteristics are considered as *CCI-*  
10  
11 *relevant*, and services having three or more characteristics are considered *CCI-intense*. As all  
12  
13 seven characteristics are demonstrated at The Hive, it should be considered *CCI-super intense*.  
14  
15 The relevance of CCI to The Hive is further underlined by the fact that The Hive, with more  
16  
17 than 2000 user visits per day, has many times more customers present than FLEs. High  
18  
19 customer-to-employee ratios are also common in service environments such as trains, planes,  
20  
21 hotels, leisure facilities, and large retail stores, thus demonstrating the study's relevance to  
22  
23 many service settings beyond libraries.  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32

## 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60

The study uses qualitative research given the need to explore in-depth FLE awareness, perceptions and reflections on CCI through a flexible and adaptable research approach (Hennink *et al.*, 2011). This helps to deconstruct the social and business implications of CCI incidents through the insight of subjects (FLEs) who are viewed as 'social actors'. The study does not aim at generalising its findings but rather at using them to develop propositions for examination in future studies. The use of focus groups (FGs) and in-depth interviews to delve into the underlying occurrence and meaning of CCI situations allows participants to think of and analyse situations, observations and episodes thus aiding rich data collection (Bryman, 2016), in addition to offering their own interpretations through a sense-making discourse. **Triangulation using FGs and in-depth individual interviews provided a more**

1  
2  
3 **comprehensive understanding of the issues in focus (Patton, 1999) and ensured validity**  
4  
5 **through the convergence of findings from different methods.**  
6  
7

8 Two FGs were conducted, each with six participants. The FGs started with a warm-up  
9 exercise designed to familiarise participants with the CCI concept. This was followed by  
10 brainstorming CCI situations in The Hive in pairs, then a group discussion of the types of  
11 situations identified. Participants reflected on their observations of CCI situations they have  
12 noticed without prior knowledge of the umbrella notion of CCI, and thus their experiences  
13 illuminated the discussion through opinions and exemplar incidents they recalled.  
14 Subsequently, fourteen in-depth one-to-one interviews were conducted with **Hive FLEs**  
15 **who had not been in the focus groups.** The number of interviews was determined using  
16 theoretical saturation and took into account good practice in qualitative research (Baker and  
17 Edwards, 2012; Crouch and McKenzie, 2006; Saunders and Townsend, 2016). In line with  
18 Guest *et al.* (2006), the study collected data from a fairly homogeneous population and  
19 examined a specific issue; hence, saturation was obtained after a relatively small number of  
20 in-depth interviews (ten), with very narrow variability within data obtained through  
21 conducting four more interviews thereafter. The emerging themes and data patterns were  
22 consistently reiterated as more interviews were conducted. Interviewees were in the age  
23 range 25-60, which is representative of the age range of The Hive FLEs. Participants in the  
24 interviews were all females whereas those in the FGs were mixed with more females than  
25 males, which corresponds to the gender weighting of The Hive's FLE population. The  
26 sampling frame comprised front-facing employees with presence on the library floors and  
27 direct dealings with its customers; hence all participants had frontline roles. These roles  
28 included Library Customer Advisor, Learning Services Advisor, and Academic Liaison  
29 Librarian.  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 The duration of the interviews ranged from 40-75 minutes. The interviews were semi-  
4 structured thus allowing for in-depth probing via prompting incident recall and reflection.  
5  
6 The findings of the FGs concurred with the interviews' findings, and hence all transcripts  
7  
8 were merged into one data set in the analysis. The interview questions were driven by the  
9  
10 four main objectives of the study:  
11  
12

- 13 1) To explore the extent to which FLEs are aware of the CCI occurring in The Hive;
- 14
- 15 2) To gain insights into how FLEs make sense of the CCI they encounter;
- 16
- 17
- 18 3) To develop understanding of how FLEs approach and experience dealing with NCCI;
- 19
- 20
- 21 4) To extend implications for management based on FLE insights.
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25
- 26
- 27

28 An interview guide with semi-structured questions was followed, and the following  
29 core questions were included in every interview:  
30

- 31 • During your work at The Hive how aware are you of users of The Hive having  
32 interactions with other users of The Hive?
- 33
- 34 • Could you please describe one or two such interactions?
- 35
- 36 • In what ways have you responded to CCI situations?
- 37
- 38 • To what extent do you feel that you are able to handle C2C situations?
- 39
- 40
- 41
- 42
- 43
- 44

45 This approach allowed for flexibility, with the course of the discussion being influenced by  
46 interviewee responses and their natural flow. Indeed, several 'off the cuff' remarks by  
47 respondents led to fresh questions not anticipated prior to the interviews.  
48  
49

50  
51 The FGs and interviews were transcribed, coded and analysed using thematic analysis  
52 (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In the coding process, the researchers first collected the data and  
53 only when exploring the data decided which themes to focus on. There was no theoretical  
54 framework at the outset, but rather theory emerging from data collection and analysis  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Such an approach was appropriate as little was known about the  
4  
5 phenomenon being studied within the chosen context of The Hive.  
6

7  
8 Data validity was undertaken through respondent validation by summarising findings  
9  
10 to participants and asking them to corroborate samples of the transcripts and the emerging  
11  
12 themes. A 90% inter-rater reliability was achieved, established through multiple coding,  
13  
14 whereby coding frames and samples of data interpretation were cross-checked by an  
15  
16 independent researcher (Barbour, 2001).  
17  
18

19  
20 The FGs and interviews were transcribed verbatim. Analysis involved moving back and  
21  
22 forth recursively within the data set, constantly reviewing the codes under analysis as well  
23  
24 as the emerging themes; along these lines, six stages of thematic analysis were followed  
25  
26 (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The first comprised familiarization with the data to enable  
27  
28 immersion and engagement at a ground level; verbal data was thus transcribed into written  
29  
30 form. Secondly, initial codes/patterns were generated which were close to the raw data  
31  
32 without over-interpretation. Thirdly, the researchers sorted the codes into potential themes  
33  
34 using thematic mapping; codes were conceptualized through scrutinizing and choosing the  
35  
36 most significant ones based on frequency and conviction, in line with the study's objectives.  
37  
38 Phase four involved actively reviewing emergent themes to refine them and illuminate final  
39  
40 categories that are distinct but coherent based on evolving meanings and interpretations; in  
41  
42 this sense, the researchers ensured the categories demonstrate 'internal homogeneity and  
43  
44 external heterogeneity' (Patton, 1990). In phase five, the final themes were named and  
45  
46 defined in context based on the analysis purposes. Phase six concluded the analysis process  
47  
48 whereby a report was produced explaining the patterns identified, the content of the  
49  
50 emergent key themes and the ensuing propositions.  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60



## FINDINGS

The data generated useful and deep insights into the CCI environment at The Hive. Five main themes emerged under three key categories: FLE engagement with CCI and the ability to identify antecedent customer perceptions and conceptualise CCI levels of variability and complexity; FLE feelings about dealing with CCI; and FLE management of CCI. The themes are discussed below, and Figure 1 depicts the analysis results via a thematic mapping of the codes and initial themes that subsequently led to the emergence of **the main themes and propositions, summarised in Table 3**. The themes are discussed by reporting the range of views related to each, evidencing these with paraphrased and verbatim quotes, and comparing findings to previous studies. Care was taken to achieve a balance between revealing the data and interpreting the data (Pratt, 2009).

### INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

#### *Theme 1: FLE Engagement with CCI and its Context*

In both the FGs and the interviews, FLEs readily identified with the notion of interactions between customers, even if not with the specific expression (i.e. CCI). As the employees interviewed had different frontline roles within The Hive, they tended to vary in their exposure to CCI and in the type and balance of CCI they engaged with. They also varied in their views of the relevance of CCI to The Hive, with some describing it as ‘relevant but secondary’, whilst most considered it a ‘regular, daily feature’ and ‘a big part of interaction’.

Some respondents strongly emphasised the **significance** of CCI to The Hive. One respondent stated that they were very aware of CCI in The Hive:

*“it happens so often and so frequently, it becomes so normal, you do not notice it unless it is very positive or very negative... the normal just passes by”.*

1  
2  
3 All participants managed to provide illustrations of both PCCI and NCCI occurring in The  
4 Hive. They stressed that there was a fair amount of positive interaction going on, such as:  
5  
6 showing another customer how to use a system; helping others to find books; handing back  
7  
8 a lost item; and shared interests at events. This FLE impression regarding the presence of a  
9  
10 range of PCCI is consistent with the findings of many CCI studies **based on the customer**  
11  
12 **perspective (e.g. Grove and Fisk, 1997; McGrath and Otnes, 1995; Rosenbaum and**  
13  
14 **Massiah, 2007; Yin and Poon, 2016).**

15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20 Some employees felt that they were more likely to remember NCCI situations because  
21  
22 it was their responsibility to spot such situations. **Better recall of NCCI is consistent with**  
23  
24 **previous research findings regarding evidence of a negativity bias in remembrance**  
25  
26 **(e.g. Baumeister *et al.*, 2001).** Incidents mentioned included: concern about what another  
27  
28 customer was viewing on his/her computer screen; others taking shoes off in hot weather;  
29  
30 groups chatting next to an individual trying to work; noise in silent areas; irritation by the  
31  
32 smell of another customer's food; and various PDA (public display of affection) behaviours.  
33  
34 In some of the incidents described, age differences between the customers involved were  
35  
36 relevant, **and this is consistent with the literature on customer age-difference related**  
37  
38 **CCI (Nicholls and Gad Mohsen, 2015).**

39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44 Whilst the current study is exploratory and focuses on the general employees'  
45  
46 perspective on CCI rather than a classification of the specific CCI they recalled, the CCI  
47  
48 situations **mentioned in the study are consistent with the findings of research into**  
49  
50 **library user satisfaction (e.g. Bryant *et al.*, 2009; Ellison, 2016; Lange *et al.*, 2016).**  
51  
52 Thus, they support the notion that employees can identify analogous CCI to that noticed by  
53  
54 customers themselves.  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 However, several examples of NCCI provided by FLEs were particularly interesting  
4 because they referred to customer actions which other customers would not perceive as  
5 caused by another customer **but rather attribute it to failure on the part of the service**  
6 **provider**; i.e. some customer behaviour impacted other customers but was not visible to  
7 them as a ‘customer-linked’ behaviour. For example:  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12

- 13 • Another customer takes out multiple copies of the same book to ensure that colleagues  
14 on his course cannot get access;
- 15 • Another customer hides a book to use later.

16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22 Whilst considered relatively rare by the employees reporting it, this type of CCI, labelled  
23 ‘customer-concealed CCI’ by the authors, is conceptually of great interest (see discussion  
24 of theoretical contributions below). Moreover, conceptually similar ‘concealed CCI’ occurs  
25 in other service settings. For example, in clothes stores some customers hide clothing items  
26 in less-obvious racks so they may return to buy them later after browsing in other **stores**.  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35 **Another customer searching for these clothing items (e.g. a certain size) and finding**  
36 **them unavailable may attribute this to poor stock-keeping by the retailer.**  
37  
38  
39

40 Accordingly, this research puts forward:

41  
42  
43 Proposition 1: The more (less) NCCI occurs in a service setting, the more (less) the  
44 likelihood that FLEs will recognise its **significance to the customer experience and**  
45 **impact on customer satisfaction (P1).**  
46  
47  
48

49  
50 Proposition 2: While customers and FLEs may both observe analogous incidents associated  
51 with NCCI, perception and ascription may differ in relation to ‘Customer-concealed CCI’  
52 situations (P2).  
53  
54  
55  
56

57  
58 *Theme 2: FLE Discernment of CCI Antecedents and Variation in its Complexity*  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Generally, FLEs demonstrated a clear ability to discuss CCI in detail and with an  
4 impressive appreciation of the level (or potential level) of complexity of some CCI  
5 situations and of background factors influencing customer perceptions of them. For  
6 example, FLEs were aware that user perception of noise could vary with context; i.e. what  
7 constituted an acceptable noise level might depend on the time of day or the user density  
8 level. This contrast is captured in one interviewee's view:  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17

18 *“On a Sunday evening, when there is only a handful of people in there, noise travels very*  
19 *quickly and then you feel you need to intervene and say ‘can you keep the noise down’.*  
20 *But when it was busy across that floor in the day you wouldn't actually notice the range*  
21 *of different noises.”*  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27

28 **The finding regarding the ability of FLEs to provide detailed and nuanced insights into**  
29 **CCI situations has not previously been evidenced in the CCI literature. The literature**  
30 **has only reported the ability of customers to provide such detail (e.g. Yin and Poon,**  
31 **2016; Zhang *et al.*, 2010). Role-taking theory, which involves the ability to enter the**  
32 **perspective of another (Schwalbe, 1988), may be useful in explaining the ability of**  
33 **FLEs to understand the customer's perspective on CCI situations.**  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41

42 Furthermore, there was plenty of FLE reflection on the ‘purpose of being at The Hive’  
43 varying for different users and weighing heavily on perceptions of ‘other-customer’  
44 interactions. **In one employee's words The Hive has “a large range of customers there**  
45 **for many reasons”.** For example: some users are studying for exams; some are working on  
46 team assignments; some are gaming; some are enjoying family time/children events, and  
47 some are ‘**hanging out**’ with friends. This entails varying expectations and psychological  
48 preparedness in perceiving and interacting with others, and possibly a variable subjective  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 awareness of the space and environment in context; **such CCI antecedents can vary the**  
4  
5 **complexity of CCI situations.**  
6

7  
8 Likewise, FLEs were aware that the original cause of a tense CCI situation might not  
9  
10 **at times** be apparent to them. This can be labelled ‘employee-concealed CCI’. For example,  
11  
12 one respondent pointed out that, unknown to staff, a hostile CCI situation could be  
13  
14 developing live on social media between users in The Hive; this could **later** result in visible  
15  
16 NCCI **without its original causes being apparent** to the FLE present at the scene. It is thus  
17  
18 proposed in this study that:  
19  
20

21  
22  
23 **Proposition 3: Varying CCI antecedents, such as situational factors and ‘employee-**  
24  
25 **concealed NCCI’, can delay FLE intervention resulting in customer dissatisfaction (P3).**  
26

27  
28 The main source of awareness of CCI reported by FLEs was via observation of what  
29  
30 was going on around them. The opportunity to observe is enhanced by using the roaming  
31  
32 service model whereby many FLEs roam the service setting. Further, awareness of CCI  
33  
34 resulted from conversations with colleagues, especially at shift changeovers. One  
35  
36 respondent emphasised:  
37  
38

39  
40 *“If there is an issue, for instance I had mentioned to somebody they needed to talk more*  
41  
42 *quietly, then I pass that information on to another member of staff so that we can monitor*  
43  
44 *it between us”.*  
45  
46

47  
48 The ability of Hive employees to reflect in detail on service interactions they have observed  
49  
50 is consistent with previous FLE research (Harris and Reynolds, 2004; Karlsson and Skålen,  
51  
52 2015). Moreover, service research has found FLEs to be accurate at assessing customers’  
53  
54 perceptions of service (e.g. Chung-Herrera *et al.*, 2004). **Within a CCI context, this**  
55  
56 **finding in The Hive study is consistent with Luther *et al.* (2016) who show nurses reflect**  
57  
58 **in detail on patient-to-patient interaction.**  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 *Theme 3: FLE Perception of NCCI Severity and the Appropriate Response*  
4

5  
6 Employees were aware that CCI situations had different levels of seriousness and  
7  
8 severity, and that customers could vary greatly in their sensitivity to CCI. **This finding is**  
9  
10 **consistent with previous CCI research that adopted a customer perspective (Grove and**  
11  
12 **Fisk, 1997; Martin, 1995; Small and Harris, 2014).** FLEs identified that some users try to  
13  
14 influence others and draw their attention to stop an unacceptable behaviour via small cues,  
15  
16 instead of calling it to the attention of the FLE; this is in some instances associated with  
17  
18 customer sensitivity to making a bigger situation out of an incident by **drawing attention**  
19  
20 **to it. For example, one respondent described a situation of a female user getting**  
21  
22 **unwanted male attention and “trying to handle it herself by just being polite and later**  
23  
24 **moving elsewhere”.** Accordingly, FLEs must be perceptive in sensing the necessity and  
25  
26 appropriateness of intervening in such situations. Employee descriptions of handling CCI  
27  
28 covered a wide spectrum of intervention strengths: from a soft “*can you just keep your chat*  
29  
30 *down, guys*” approach to a hard-line “*you need to leave now*” approach and offer evidence  
31  
32 of employee adaptiveness.  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37

38  
39 An important distinction that emerged from the employee perception of NCCI  
40  
41 situations was between gradual and sudden CCI situations. Gradual situations are situations  
42  
43 where a customer (or group) is behaving in a potentially disturbing way but which can be  
44  
45 tolerated, or at least given longer to see if the behaviour ceases or settles down. For example,  
46  
47 **one respondent described situations where**  
48

49  
50 *“A group come in and say a few words to somebody they know, before hopefully*  
51  
52 *moving on and sitting down to do their own thing”.*  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 In such situations, an employee can ask a colleague for advice on whether and how to  
4  
5 intervene. At The Hive, the gradual nature of the majority of NCCI situations means that  
6  
7 employees can usually consult colleagues if unsure what to do.  
8  
9

10  
11 Sudden situations, on the other hand, are situations where a customer is behaving in a  
12  
13 way that is disturbing, cannot be tolerated, and requires immediate intervention. For  
14  
15 example, a user purposely kicks over a chair. In such situations, there is no time to consult  
16  
17 a colleague, and comprehensive prior training becomes essential (see discussion of  
18  
19 managerial implications below). Gradual and sudden CCI situations are likely to be present  
20  
21 in most service settings where CCI is relevant, and they involve differing stress levels for  
22  
23 the FLE in charge. For example, in a hotel there will be gradual situations such as a large  
24  
25 party increasingly congesting the lobby, and more sudden situations such as two guests  
26  
27 having an **argument. Whilst these findings regarding gradual and sudden situations are**  
28  
29 **consistent with some service literature on interaction predictability, employee**  
30  
31 **adaptiveness and training needs (e.g. Sony and Mekoth, 2016), the gradual and sudden**  
32  
33 **CCI response distinction has not previously been discussed in the CCI literature.**  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38

39 Hence, this research advances:  
40  
41

42 **Proposition 4: In service contexts where NCCI requiring an immediate response is**  
43  
44 **anticipated, prior CCI-specific training becomes more crucial (P4).**

45  
46  
47 **Proposition 5: The more (less) immediately NCCI situations require intervention, the**  
48  
49 **more (less) stressful they are for FLEs in the absence of CCI-specific skills (P5).**

50  
51  
52 *Theme 4: FLE Comfort in Handling NCCI Situations*  
53  
54

55  
56 Just as employees vary in their comfort in dealing with negative employee-customer  
57  
58 interaction (Harris, 2013), they also vary in their comfort in dealing with NCCI.  
59  
60 Respondents referred to the stress associated with the unpredictable reaction from customers

1  
2  
3 being cautioned, and the stress from having to respond live to such reactions. One  
4  
5 respondent reflected:

6  
7  
8 *“You never know what the customer reaction is going to be when you intervene. Nine*  
9  
10 *times out of ten, if you handle it right, if you just say ‘can you keep the noise down, guys’,*  
11  
12 *that’ll be fine, but on the tenth occasion you will get a ‘urgh?’ reaction or worse”.*

13  
14  
15  
16 Customers who are asked to stop or to modify their behaviour will react to that request  
17  
18 in different ways. Some employee remarks showed that they engaged in contemplation and  
19  
20 reflections after difficult CCI interventions. For example, one respondent spoke at length  
21  
22 about her after-thoughts on a noise-related CCI situation that escalated in an unpredicted  
23  
24 way. Her many reflections included whether she should have intervened earlier and  
25  
26 differently, and how the situation had kept playing itself through her mind for weeks  
27  
28 afterwards. Such reflection is consistent with the findings of other researchers into employee  
29  
30 post-incident behaviour (e.g. Harris and Reynolds, 2004), **and may be explained in terms**  
31  
32 **of conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). COR theory holds that**  
33  
34 **individuals attempt to maintain and protect their current resources and acquire new**  
35  
36 **resources. Accordingly, FLEs may desire to invest resources through emotional job**  
37  
38 **engagement to maintain emotional energy by, for example, reflecting on how they**  
39  
40 **might handle a NCCI situation differently in the future.**

41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46 Moreover, when asked to provide CCI incidents, descriptions of situations included  
47  
48 emotional reactions from FLEs, which shows empathy towards users and **a sense of**  
49  
50 **responsibility in** wanting to make things right for them. **A typical FLE response was**

51  
52  
53  
54 *“I am happy to intervene to avert calamity or an incident and ensure other users of the*  
55  
56 *library aren’t disturbed”.*

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60



1  
2  
3 Some discussions related to the judgement, and sometimes stress, of deciding whether to  
4  
5 intervene. This judgement seemed to be quite challenging, especially considering The  
6  
7 Hive’s inclusive philosophy that, unlike traditional academic libraries, seeks to avoid having  
8  
9 extensive user regulation. As one respondent said:  
10

11  
12  
13 *“... because The Hive is a space for many different types of people, it is difficult to know*  
14  
15 *when and how to intervene ... you don’t want anyone to feel excluded.”*  
16

17  
18 Accordingly, this research advances:  
19

20  
21 Proposition 6: Feelings of empathy, stress and sense of responsibility may variably influence  
22  
23 a FLE’s ability and willingness to intervene following a NCCI incident (P6).  
24

25  
26 FLEs mentioned that staff intervention styles varied with personality. Some staff considered  
27  
28 the implications of intervening more deeply than others. For example, one interviewee  
29  
30 mentioned that she was always aware that intervening may lead to a customer feeling not  
31  
32 wanted at The Hive, and this went against The Hive’s inclusivity mission; these thoughts  
33  
34 illuminate some decision-making influences and challenges in employees’ handling of CCI  
35  
36 situations. It was also suggested that new workers, especially younger ones, may have  
37  
38 difficulties in intervening, particularly in the absence of a clear script or written rules on  
39  
40 how to deal with NCCI. **One respondent reflected:**  
41  
42

43  
44  
45 *“when I first started, I felt uncomfortable intervening in certain (C2C) situations, but*  
46  
47 *I feel confident now because I know the rules about what is expected of customers”.*  
48  
49

50  
51 Thus, findings raised the clear possibility that dealing with NCCI or its fallout can be a  
52  
53 source of work stress and possibly an employee retention issue.  
54

55  
56 Accordingly, this research postulates:  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Proposition 7: The less (more) experienced in handling NCCI the FLE is, the more (less)  
4  
5 likely to feel apprehensive/hesitant in intervening in NCCI situations (P7).  
6  
7

8         Some of the CCI situations described **can be analysed in terms of Nicholls' (2005)**  
9  
10 **concept of 'echo-CCI'**. This term refers to the CCI which occurs when one customer reacts  
11  
12 to actions by another customer, i.e. it concerns follow-up CCI about the original CCI.  
13  
14 **Accordingly, echo-CCI is always part of a reaction to a CCI incident.** An exemplar  
15  
16 incident narrated by one participant stated that just by the library's Children's section, some  
17  
18 children aged around 10-12 years had been swearing, and a mother with some young kids  
19  
20 told these 'tweens' not to swear in front of her kids. So, the original CCI (which upset the  
21  
22 mother) was the swearing and the echo-CCI was the mother telling them not to swear. A  
23  
24 further echo was the 'tweens' response of ignoring what the mother was saying as they just  
25  
26 giggled among themselves, leading to the employee's intervention.  
27  
28  
29

30  
31  
32         Echo-CCI becomes further complicated if an employee has to caution customer A  
33  
34 (the victim of the original CCI) for abusive **or excessive** behaviour in their intervention.  
35  
36 FLEs mentioned several incidents where they received sharp comments from customers  
37  
38 who they had spoken to about their harsh reactions to an original NCCI situation. Some CCI  
39  
40 situations can have several ricochets of interaction. As such, they are more complex than  
41  
42 the typically contained dyad of employee-customer interaction. It is thus advanced that:  
43  
44  
45

46 Proposition 8: Echo-CCI is more challenging to manage and thus requires a different level  
47  
48 of FLE skill to anticipate and handle its complexity (P8).  
49  
50

51 **The services literature has not previously discussed echo-CCI in terms of the FLE. It**  
52  
53 **is an interesting area for future research and includes the sensitive issue of how the**  
54  
55 **FLE 'disciplines' a customer who was originally the victim of another customer's**  
56  
57 **behaviour.**  
58  
59  
60

*Theme 5: CCI as an Area for Strategic Human Resource Development (HRD) Focus*

Employees generally managed CCI by drawing on skills imparted in an employee-customer interaction context but felt they would benefit from developing skills and experience in a CCI-training specific context. The study detected a willingness amongst FLEs to develop their skills in terms of handling CCI; FLEs perceived it as something specific to manage and as potentially their responsibility. One focus group comment emphasised that it had been:

*“Very useful to raise issues and share experiences. Many common themes. Positive to have time to meet as a group and discuss”.*

Some employees expressed the desire for more guidance on handling CCI, including greater clarification of when intervention should occur and in what form. This response is consistent with Schmidt’s (2007) finding of a positive relationship between job training satisfaction and overall job satisfaction. Some interviewees felt that they were intervening appropriately but would find it reassuring if a staff development event confirmed this. As one interviewee stated:

*“I am happy to deal with certain situations, but I would like training to ensure that I’m dealing with situations the way that my employer would like me to”.*

Generally, participants felt that an HRD focus on CCI issues would contribute to the development of a more consistent and less stressful approach to handling CCI.

Accordingly, this research puts forward:

**Proposition 9: Developing tailored HRD efforts that provide FLEs with CCI-specific training supports consistent handling of NCCI and effective CCI management (P9).**

The above themes and propositions are summarised in Table 3.

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32

### INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

The five themes discussed above augment the existing stream of literature on CCI management. To the limited extent that the CCI literature has considered the management of CCI and the role of the FLE, it has focused on what that role could or should be. This literature stream has been strongly influenced by Pranter and Martin's (1991) identification of 10 CCI roles. The current paper, however, makes an original contribution by extending the discussion of CCI and the FLE to consider the capacity of FLEs to engage with CCI and the consequences for FLEs of this engagement. The paper also extends the existing literature by introducing a new discussion regarding how the level of immediacy of employee response to NCCI and the severity and complexity of the NCCI situation may influence the HRD approach to developing CCI-management skills.

### DISCUSSION

33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Rowley (1995) explained that it might be instinctive for service providers to assume that customer-to-customer interactions is something beyond their control. But in many leisure and educational environments customers often spend several hours, so "the significance of customer-to-customer interaction is greater, and perhaps, more significant than the customer-to-service agent interact" (Rowley, 1995, p. 8). The implication is that those interactions not only need be attentively observed, but also proactively managed by the FLE. If FLEs are actively engage with such interactions and are mindful in managing them, they may be able to find innovative means of transforming the service experience for the customers involved, thus **raising** satisfaction and loyalty.

The aim of this research was to explore the insights of FLEs in their engagement with CCI. This is important as FLEs have a direct role in managing CCI, which stems from their

1  
2  
3 crucial part in driving a satisfactory customer experience. There is however, very little CCI  
4  
5 research conducted from the FLE perspective. The present research demonstrates the value  
6  
7 of investigating CCI from the FLE's standpoint. The primary contribution of this study has  
8  
9 been to provide a deeper understanding of how FLEs perceive and engage with CCI, and  
10  
11 how they conceptualise their role and ability in dealing with it given also the various  
12  
13 intricacies of NCCI situations. This has led to the identification of a range of theoretical  
14  
15 contributions and managerial implications as discussed next.  
16  
17  
18

### 19 20 **Theoretical and Conceptual Contributions**

21  
22  
23 This study extends the CCI literature in four important ways. Firstly, it demonstrates  
24  
25 how an employee-focused approach can bring out insights into antecedents of CCI in  
26  
27 relation to customer perceptions, expectations and situational influences which cannot be  
28  
29 elicited from customer-focused data. One example is the recognition of 'customer-  
30  
31 concealed CCI' behaviours that impact customers, but which customers themselves would  
32  
33 not attribute to CCI.  
34  
35

36  
37 Secondly, the study reveals a crucial distinction between two types of NCCI situations:  
38  
39 those that transpire gradually and do not require immediate intervention, and others that are  
40  
41 sudden and demand immediate attention and action. The complexity and type of situation  
42  
43 faced have an impact on FLE comfort in handling it and can lead to stress and emotional  
44  
45 reactions, which has implications for HRD.  
46  
47

48  
49 Thirdly, based on aspects of the themes identified in the qualitative analysis, the study  
50  
51 advances a set of testable propositions about FLEs and CCI. The propositions highlight three  
52  
53 key domains: FLE engagement with CCI and its relevance from the FLE's point of view  
54  
55 and perceptions of its more intricate typologies; the complexity of certain CCI situations  
56  
57 and the effect of the FLE's experience, willingness and ability to intervene, and ambivalence  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 about their role in handling it; and the need for formal and specialised training that  
4 empowers FLEs, thus confirming their consistent alignment with the employer's  
5 expectations towards effective NCCI management. Fourthly, by examining a multifaceted,  
6 non-traditional and inclusive service, the study contributes to widening the body of CCI  
7 research. The key themes highlighted by the study will now be discussed in turn.  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13

14  
15 *Importance of employee perspective:* Firstly, the study demonstrates the capacity of  
16 FLEs to directly offer insights into CCI and its effective management. The study is grounded  
17 in employee perceptions rather than customers or the researcher's own observations, or  
18 student responses to abstract scenarios. Examining CCI from this perspective contributes to  
19 the current literature on CCI by exploring how CCI is perceived, managed and coped with  
20 by FLEs in boundary-spanning positions.  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28

29  
30 *'Concealed CCI' behaviours:* Some of the incidents mentioned by employees show  
31 that relying exclusively on customer perceptions of CCI might provide an incomplete  
32 picture of other customer behaviours (see Findings: theme 1). Employee interviews revealed  
33 actions undertaken by some customers that had negative consequences for other customers  
34 but would not be apparent as CCI to those other customers (i.e. 'customer-concealed CCI').  
35 For example, some library users hide books to use later, staff find such books and realise  
36 what is going on, but customers would not fathom that a missing book was the result of  
37 another customer's intentional misbehaviour. Whilst such behaviour was considered  
38 infrequent in this specific setting, it may be more common in some settings. Moreover, from  
39 a theoretical point of view, it is interesting because it demonstrates that employees can detect  
40 C2C matters that, whilst customers cannot perceive as rooted in C2C, do affect their service  
41 satisfaction and engagement. Accordingly, from a managerial perspective, it may mean that  
42 some actual customer misbehaviour is not observed as such by other customers, but rather  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 is incorrectly perceived as organisational inefficiency hence making the organisation look  
4  
5 bad.

6  
7  
8 This finding is very interesting from a theoretical point of view because CCI studies are  
9  
10 overwhelmingly customer-based, and therefore may not be as comprehensive as they claim.  
11  
12 It suggests that previous classifications of CCI derived from customers may require revision  
13  
14 to accommodate types of CCI that are imperceptible as CCI to customers. The findings also  
15  
16 contribute a new concept, namely ‘concealed CCI’, to the CCI literature. A second type of  
17  
18 ‘concealed CCI’, discussed in Findings (theme 2), is ‘employee-concealed CCI’. This type  
19  
20 is interesting from a CCI management perspective because it demonstrates that FLEs, faced  
21  
22 with NCCI situations, may be unaware of the roots of the situation they face. **To the**  
23  
24 **authors’ knowledge, the concept of ‘concealed CCI’ has not previously been discussed**  
25  
26 **in the service literature.**

27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32 *Distinction between gradual and sudden CCI:* Another important finding of this  
33  
34 research is proposing a new way of classifying CCI based on the degree of urgency of  
35  
36 response, and the distinction between gradual and sudden NCCI situations. This distinction  
37  
38 has implications for how service employees should intervene, and consequently for CCI  
39  
40 training needs (see discussion below).

41  
42  
43  
44 *Widening the body of CCI research:* The present study, by researching a complex,  
45  
46 non-traditional and inclusive servicescape, also contributes to broadening the scope of CCI  
47  
48 research and developing the transformative service research (TSR) paradigm. Most CCI  
49  
50 research occurs in for-profit contexts such as hospitality, retail and tourism. This study has  
51  
52 examined a community resource with a clear inclusivity agenda, a context with minimal  
53  
54 CCI research contribution. By examining CCI issues in a service environment which  
55  
56 embraces the whole community and enables those without a higher education background  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 to experience that world, this research provides insights for organisations aiming to improve  
4 the lives of disadvantaged/vulnerable individuals. Furthermore, by revealing some of the  
5 challenges FLEs face in handling NCCI, the study offers findings relevant to improving  
6 employee well-being. Accordingly, the study will be of interest to those conducting CCI  
7 research in similar non-profit service environments.  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17

### 18 *Contribution to triadic interaction service literature*

19  
20  
21 The findings of this study include useful insights into how FLEs sometimes interact  
22 with two customer parties simultaneously. For example, when intervening to sort out a  
23 disagreement or misunderstanding between two customers. As such, the study offers an  
24 extension to the service literature studying triadic interactions. Service research into  
25 interactions has had a strong emphasis on dyadic interactions. A wide range of dyadic issues,  
26 including customer satisfaction, service recovery, interpersonal persuasion, loyalty and job  
27 satisfaction, have been examined (Bitner and Wang, 2014; Lutz and Kakkar, 1976). But  
28 service encounters can also involve triadic interaction. Most triadic literature is based  
29 around care interactions (e.g. Cordella, 2011), B2B interactions (e.g. Holma, 2012), group  
30 service encounters (e.g. Finsterwalder and Tuzovic, 2010) and customer/FLE/manager  
31 triads (e.g. Fallon and Schofield, 2000). **The present study has emphasised the relevance**  
32 **of triadic encounters in some CCI contexts involving Customer A, Customer B and the**  
33 **FLE.** It has highlighted the potential complexity and stress for FLEs involved in encounters  
34 with two customer parties who are in dispute with one another. By examining C2C  
35 interactions involving employees the present study contributes to our understanding of  
36 triadic interactions.  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

### **Managerial Implications**



1  
2  
3 Whilst the study's specific context is a library, the issues examined potentially go  
4 beyond the world of libraries. The Hive represents a CCI-rich service setting, where  
5 proximity levels to other customers exceed those to employees. As such, the context studied  
6 has strong similarities with many other service settings such as passenger transport, hotels,  
7 and leisure facilities. These other service settings have much in common with public  
8 libraries in terms of core aspects of CCI such as close customer contiguity; sharing  
9 space/facilities/equipment; and waiting for service together. Accordingly, the study's  
10 findings may have wider application. This needs to be confirmed by further research in other  
11 service settings as the findings presented here are qualitative and not generalisable.  
12 Likewise, the propositions put forward in this paper can be tested in other service settings  
13 to establish generalisability.  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29

30 The research identifies several important implications for service managers and  
31 **marketing** strategists. The first concerns the distinction between gradual and sudden CCI  
32 situations discussed above. This distinction has major managerial implications; namely,  
33 whilst gradual situations can be prepared for with 'on the job' training, sudden situations  
34 **require** prior formal training and confidence (see **Proposition 4**). **This distinction has not**  
35 **been made before in a CCI training context, but it can find support in the employee**  
36 **training literature for extreme service encounters. For example, Kokko and Mäki**  
37 **(2009) emphasise the importance of prior FLE training for dealing with difficult**  
38 **customer situations.** Moreover, sudden CCI situations are far more demanding on staff  
39 emotionally **than gradual ones** (see **Proposition 5**) and may require internal service  
40 recovery effort (Bowen and Johnston, 1999). Service managers need to assess the relative  
41 balance of gradual and sudden CCI situations which their FLEs face and align their CCI  
42 training strategy accordingly. They may also need to counsel FLEs after experiencing  
43 stressful incidents and determine how these situations can be used for wider learning  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 purposes. Furthermore, equipping FLEs with CCI-specific training could support  
4 them in making informed judgements about the severity of NCCI situation and a  
5 better recognition of customer cues regarding the need to intervene. It can also lessen  
6 FLE apprehension in handling NCCI through guiding his/her sense of responsibility  
7 and empathy towards a more consistent way of managing CCI (see Propositions 6, 7,  
8 and 9).  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20

21 Secondly, the newly introduced ‘customer-concealed CCI’ concept is of relevance to  
22 managers as some customers may attribute blame to the service organisation for some of  
23 this behaviour. Customers perceiving the service provider poorly due to NCCI has been  
24 discussed previously in the CCI literature (Nicholls, 2005; Huang, 2008), but such research  
25 has been in the context of the organisation’s failing to respond to situations, especially  
26 recurring incidents. The present study goes further and suggests that a different blame  
27 attribution mechanism may also exist: service organisations may receive blame for other  
28 customer behaviours that are not perceived as resulting from other customers (see  
29 **Proposition 2**). Also, ‘employee-concealed CCI’ may mean that in some instances FLEs’  
30 awareness of a developing NCCI situation is too late for effective intervention (see  
31 **Proposition 3**). Accordingly, service managers need to be aware of both the extent and the  
32 impact of ‘concealed CCI’. They also need to consider how they can create systems which  
33 proactively detect, prevent and recover from ‘concealed NCCI’. In the context of such  
34 customer misbehaviour, this might include: anticipating likely incidents through recording  
35 and analysis of recurrence; monitoring the scale on which this activity is occurring;  
36 analysing which product/service aspects are most affected; and ensuring there are  
37 mechanisms that thwart or swiftly rectify these occurrences.  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Thirdly, the finding that FLEs engage with CCI at a mindful level that enables its  
4 detection, an understanding of its antecedents and analysis of their comfort level in handling  
5 it has important managerial implications (see **Proposition 7**). It highlights the potential for  
6 employee involvement and empowerment in the creative management of CCI. Managers  
7 need to consider ways of effectively capturing FLE service wisdom regarding CCI,  
8 especially given the usefulness of reading customer needs towards service improvement.  
9 Managers also need to devise strategies for involving frontline staff in the human-centred  
10 design, innovative development and implementation of CCI management approaches (see  
11 **Proposition 9**). However, prior to this, managers should explicitly communicate the concept  
12 and application of CCI so employees can see its relevance and impact on the customer  
13 experience and satisfaction, and their crucial role in managing it.  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29

30 Finally, service organisations may need to develop guidelines concerning CCI. These  
31 guidelines could depict the types of CCI situations that are often problematic, **such as ‘echo-**  
32 **CCI’ (Proposition 8)**; explain how customers perceive these situations; and suggest  
33 appropriate employee responses. Customer service workshops should be considered as one  
34 avenue for communicating and further developing such guidelines; these workshops can  
35 make use of gamification/simulation methods that involve practical role playing and  
36 scenario analysis, allowing employees to sense situations from various perspectives.  
37 Encouraging FLEs to record CCI incidents and observations and ensuring a forum for  
38 sharing these experiences would help develop a CCI learning organisation. Research is  
39 drawing more attention to how individual FLEs actually function in work groups and that a  
40 co-worker’s level of customer orientation can impact individual FLE’s attitudes,  
41 engagement and performance (Menguc *et al.*, 2016).  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56

57 CCI has been shown to impact customer satisfaction and loyalty (Nicholls, 2010).  
58 Effectively managing CCI can assist managers in meeting some of the goals set for their  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 business. These goals can vary between profit and non-profit contexts but may include  
4  
5 **improving the customer experience and increasing retention**; increasing the usage of a  
6  
7 facility; supporting employees perform their work and protecting employees and customers  
8  
9 from physical and/or psychological harm.  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14

## 15 16 **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

17  
18  
19 This study has several limitations. Based on exploratory research, it focuses on a single  
20  
21 organisation using FGs and in-depth interviews. The study identifies new themes in the field  
22  
23 of CCI, paving the way for a larger scale study that further examines them for relevance.  
24  
25 The number of interviews conducted are acceptable for an exploratory study and follow the  
26  
27 rule of data saturation and checking for variability till the latter diminishes (Guest *et al.*,  
28  
29 2006; Saunders and Townsend, 2016).  
30  
31  
32

33  
34 The service organisation studied has a very customer-centric culture. As a pioneering  
35  
36 experiment in how libraries can operate in the contemporary world, The Hive is a major  
37  
38 investment and a high-profile project. Accordingly, its employees are particularly skilled at  
39  
40 delivering customer service and highly motivated to manage the customer experience. Some  
41  
42 of the findings reported in this study may have been different in a more mediocre service  
43  
44 culture. Accordingly, it would be fruitful for a future study of the FLE perspective on CCI  
45  
46 to be undertaken in an organisation with a less dynamic and customer-driven culture. In  
47  
48 terms of national culture, the study was based in the UK, which may have specific social  
49  
50 behaviours. Accordingly, the study's findings should be investigated further in other  
51  
52 countries. Likewise, it would be interesting to explore cross-cultural CCI. Some Hive  
53  
54 customers are from cultural backgrounds with different rules and norms, but this did not  
55  
56 emerge as a theme in this study.  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Besides providing a set of propositions for future testing which include key moderators  
4 that shape perception, intervention and the need for focused training in relation to NCCI for  
5 FLEs, the study extends a range of topics for further research on the theme of CCI and the  
6 FLE. These include: comparison of employee-generated and customer-generated CCI  
7 critical incidents; FLE stress associated with dealing with difficult CCI situations; how FLEs  
8 share their experiences of interventions in problematic CCI situations and provide peer-  
9 support to one another; and the exploration of the role of the FLE in dealing with NCCI as  
10 constituting a form of skilled work. These topics will now be briefly outlined.  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20

21  
22 Comparing employee-generated CCI critical incidents with customer-generated ones  
23 would provide a useful dual perspective on CCI in a service organisation. Such a study  
24 would offer insights into the extent that specific CCI incidents identified by customers and  
25 employees overlap; the scale and significance of FLE-only CCI and customer-only CCI  
26 perspectives; and the capacity of FLEs to gauge the degree of seriousness with which  
27 customers perceive various types of CCI. Previous service research (e.g. Chung-Herrera *et*  
28 *al.*, 2004; Harris and Reynolds, 2004) has successfully employed the CIT to gain both  
29 customer and employee insights.  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40

41 Furthermore, research should investigate the FLE stress associated with dealing with  
42 difficult CCI situations. Such research has the potential to contribute to raising employee  
43 satisfaction and retention in service organisations. It would usefully augment the customer  
44 misbehaviour literature on employee stress and coping (Harris and Reynolds, 2004; Li and  
45 Zhou, 2013) to a specific focus on employee stress and coping following exposure to CCI  
46 tensions. It would also complement Miao's (2014) work on the emotion-focused coping of  
47 other customers. Additional studies can investigate: the types of CCI situations more likely  
48 to cause FLE stress; individual employee personality traits and stress perception; and  
49 strategies used by FLEs to cope with CCI-induced stress.  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Another interesting area of future research is studying the employee skills required for effectively dealing with problematic CCI encounters. Such research would be valuable for HRD purposes and could include addressing the issue of the relative complexity of the employee interaction skills required to dealing with triadic interactions (FLE + Customer A + Customer B) as opposed to dyadic interactions (FLE + Customer A). This would make an original contribution to the extensive literature on the service employee.

This paper illuminates a discussion of CCI from an employee perspective using a CCI-intensive context. Through in-depth exploration, it extends theoretical contributions as well as managerial implications that can assist a better acknowledgment of FLE perspectives. The paper has added its voice to calls for CCI research to broaden its focus from studying CCI to studying the effective management of CCI.

## References

- Anaya, G.J., Miao, L., Mattila, A.S. and Almanza, B. (2016), "Consumer envy during service encounters", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 30 No. 3, pp. 359-372.
- Baker, S. E. and Edwards, R. (2012), "How many qualitative interviews are enough?" National Centre for Research Methods Review Discussion Paper.
- Baker, M.A. and Kim, K. (2018), "Other customer service failure: Emotions, impacts, and attributions", *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, Vol. 42 No. 7, pp. 1067-1085.
- Barbour, R.S. (2001), "Checklists for improving rigour in qualitative research: a case of the tail wagging the dog?" *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 322 No. 7294, pp. 1115-1117.
- Baron, S., Harris, K. and Davies, B.J. (1996), "Oral participation in retail service delivery: a comparison of the roles of contact personnel and customers", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 30 No. 9, pp. 75-90.
- Baumeister, R. F., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C., and Vohs, K. D. (2001). "Bad is Stronger Than Good", *Review of General Psychology*, Vol. 5 No. 4, pp. 323-370.
- Bitner, M.J., Booms, B.H. and Mohr, L.A. (1994), "Critical service encounters: the employee's viewpoint", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 58, October, pp. 95-106.

- 1  
2  
3 Bitner, M. J. and Wang, H. S. (2014), "Service encounters in service marketing research",  
4 in Rust, R.T. & Huang, M.H. (Eds.), *Handbook of Service Marketing Research*,  
5 Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, UK, pp. 221-243.  
6  
7  
8 Boo, H. C., Mattila, A., and Tan, C. Y. (2013), "Effectiveness of recovery actions on  
9 deviant customer behaviour: The moderating role of gender", *International*  
10 *Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 35, pp. 180-192.  
11  
12 Bowen, D.E. and Johnston, R. (1999), "Internal service recovery: developing a new  
13 construct", *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, Vol. 10 No. 2,  
14 pp. 118-131.  
15  
16 Braun, V and Clarke, V. (2006), "Using thematic analysis in psychology", *Qualitative*  
17 *Research in Psychology*. Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 77-101.  
18  
19 Bryant, J., Matthews, G., and Walton, G. (2009), "Academic libraries and social and  
20 learning space: A case study of Loughborough University Library, UK", *Journal of*  
21 *Librarianship and Information Science*, Vol. 41 No. 1, pp. 7-18.  
22  
23  
24 Bryman, A. (2016), *Social Research Methods*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., Oxford, Oxford University Press.  
25  
26 Chung-Herrera, B.G., Goldschmidt, N. and Hoffman, D.K. (2004), "Customer and  
27 employee views of critical service incidents", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol.  
28 18 No. 4, pp. 241-254.  
29  
30 Colm, L., Ordanini, A. and Parasuraman, A. (2017), "When service customers do not  
31 consume in isolation: A typology of customer copresence influence modes  
32 (CCIMs)", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol 20 No. 3, pp. 223 – 239.  
33  
34 Corbin, J. and Strauss, A. (2015), *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and*  
35 *Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 4th edition, Thousand Oaks, CA:  
36 Sage.  
37  
38  
39 Cordella, M. (2011), "A triangle that works well: Looking through the angles of a three-  
40 way exchange in cancer medical encounters", *Discourse & Communication*, Vol 5  
41 No. 4, pp. 337-353.  
42  
43  
44 Crouch, M. and McKenzie, H. (2006), "The logic of small samples in interview based  
45 qualitative research", *Social Science Information*, Vol. 45 No. 4, pp. 483-499.  
46  
47 Dorsey, J.D., Ashley, C. and Oliver, J.D. (2016), "Triggers and outcomes of customer-to-  
48 customer Aisle rage", *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 32, pp.67-  
49 77.  
50  
51 Eiglier, P. and Langeard, E. (1977), "Services as systems: marketing implications", in  
52 Eiglier, P. (Ed.), *Marketing Consumer Services: New Insights*, *Marketing Science*,  
53 Cambridge, MA, pp. 83-103.  
54  
55  
56 Ellison, W. (2016), "Designing the learning spaces of a university library", *New Library*  
57 *World*, Vol. 17 No. 5/6, pp. 294-307.  
58  
59  
60

- 1  
2  
3 Fallon, P. and Schofield, P. (2000), "Service Quality Measurement and Triadic  
4 Interaction", *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism*, Vol. 1 No.3,  
5 pp. 29-47.  
6  
7
- 8 Finsterwalder, J. and Tuzovic, S. (2010). "Quality in group service encounters: A  
9 theoretical exploration of the concept of a simultaneous multi-customer co-creation  
10 process", *Managing Service Quality: An International Journal*, Vol. 20 No. 2, pp.  
11 109-122.  
12
- 13 Fiske, S. T. and Taylor, S. E. (1984), *Social Cognition*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.  
14
- 15 Grove, S.J. and Fisk, R.P. (1997), "The impact of other customers on service experiences:  
16 a critical incident examination of 'getting along'", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 73  
17 No. 1, pp. 63-85.  
18
- 19 Guest, G., Bunce, A., and Johnson, L. (2006), "How Many Interviews are Enough? An  
20 Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability", *Field Methods*, Vol. 18, pp. 59-  
21 82.  
22  
23
- 24 Gursoy, D., Cai, R. and Anaya, G.J. (2017), "Developing a typology of disruptive  
25 customer behaviors: Influence of customer misbehavior on service experience of  
26 by-standing customers", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality*  
27 *Management*, Vol. 29 No. 9, pp. 2341-2360.  
28
- 29 Harris, L.C. (2013), "Service employees and customer phone rage: an empirical analysis",  
30 *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 47 No. (3/4), pp. 463-484.  
31  
32
- 33 Harris, K. and Baron, S. (2004), "Consumer-to-consumer conversations in service  
34 settings", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 6 No. 3, pp. 287-303.  
35
- 36 Harris, L.C. and Reynolds, K.L. (2004), "Jaycustomer behavior: an exploration of types  
37 and motives in the hospitality industry", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 18  
38 No. 5, pp. 339-357.  
39
- 40 Heaton, S. and Master, N. (2006), "No phone zone: Controlling cell phone use in  
41 academic libraries", *Public Services Quarterly*, Vol. 2, pp. 69-80.  
42
- 43 Heinonen, K., Jaakkola, E. and Neganova, I. (2018), "Drivers, types and value outcomes  
44 of customer-to-customer interaction: An integrative review and research agenda",  
45 *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, Vol. 28 No. 6, pp. 710-732.  
46  
47
- 48 Hennink, M., Hutter, I. and Bailey, A. (2011), *Qualitative Research Methods*, Sage,  
49 London, UK.  
50
- 51 **Hobfoll, S. E. (1989), "Conservation of resources. A new attempt at conceptualizing**  
52 **stress", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 44 No. 3, pp. 513-24.**  
53
- 54 Hoffman, D.K. and Lee, S.H. (2014), "A CIT investigation of disruptive student  
55 behaviors: the students' perspective", *Marketing Education Review*, Vol. 24 No. 2,  
56 pp. 115-126.  
57  
58  
59  
60



- 1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60
- Holma, A.M. (2012), “Interpersonal interaction in business triads—Case studies in corporate travel purchasing”, *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 101-112.
- Huang, W.H. (2008), “The impact of other-customer failure on service satisfaction”, *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, Vol. 19 No. 4, pp. 521-536.
- Hunter, J. and Cox, A. (2014), “Learning over tea! Studying in informal learning spaces”, *New Library World*, Vol. 115 No 1/2, pp. 34-50.
- Karlsson, J. and Skålén, P. (2015), “Exploring front-line employee contributions to service innovation”, *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 49 No. 9/10, pp. 1346-1365.
- Kokko, T. and Mäki, M. (2009), “The Verbal Judo Approach in Demanding Customer Encounters”, *Services Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 30, pp. 212-233.**
- Lange, J., Miller-Nesbitt, A. and Severson, S. (2016), “Reducing noise in the academic library: the effectiveness of installing noise meters”, *Library Hi Tech*, Vol. 34 No. 1, pp.45-63.
- Lehtinen, U. and Lehtinen, J.R., (1991), “Two Approaches to Service Quality”, *The Services Industry Journal*, Vol. 11, July, pp. 287-303.
- Li, X. and Zhou, E. (2013), “Influence of customer verbal aggression on employee turnover intention”, *Management Decision*, Vol. 51 No. 4, pp. 890-912.
- Luther, L., Benkenstein, M. and Rummelhagen, K. (2016), “Enhancing patients' hospital satisfaction by taking advantage of interpersonal similarity”, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 30, pp. 50-58.
- Lutz, R.J. and Kakkar, P. (1976), “Situational Influence in Interpersonal Persuasion”, in Anderson, B. (ed.) *NA - Advances in Consumer Research* Vol. 3, Association for Consumer Research, Cincinnati, OH, pp. 370-378.
- Martin, C.L. (1995), “The customer compatibility scale: measuring service customers’ perceptions of fellow customers”, *Journal of Consumer Studies and Home Economics*, Vol. 19 No. 3, pp. 299-311.
- Martin, C.L. and Pranter, C.A. (1989), “Compatibility management: customer-to-customer relationships in service environments”, *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 3 No. 3, pp. 5-15.
- McGrath, M.A. and Otnes, C. (1995), “Unacquainted influencers: when strangers interact in the retail setting”, *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 32, pp. 261-272.
- McQuilken, L., Robertson, N. and Polonsky, M. (2017), “Recovering from Other-Customer-Caused Failure: The Effect on Focal Customer Complaining”, *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 83-104.
- Menguc, B., Auh, S., Katsikeas, C. S. and Jung, Y. S. (2016), “When Does (Mis)Fit in Customer Orientation Matter for Frontline Employees’ Job Satisfaction and Performance?”, *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 80 No. 1, pp. 65–83.

- 1  
2  
3 Miao, L. (2014), "Emotion regulation at service encounters: coping with the behaviour of  
4 other customers", *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, Vol. 23, pp.  
5 49-76.  
6  
7 Miao, L and Mattila, A. (2013), "Psychological Distance and Other Customers", *Journal*  
8 *of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 51-77.  
9  
10 Nicholls, R. (2005), *Interactions between Service Customers*, Poznan, Poznan University  
11 of Economics Publishing House.  
12  
13 Nicholls, R. (2010), "New directions for customer-to-customer interaction research",  
14 *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 87-97.  
15  
16 Nicholls, R. and Gad Mohsen, M. (2015), "Other customer age – Exploring customer age-  
17 difference related CCI", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 29 No. 4, pp. 255-  
18 267.  
19  
20 Parker, C. and Ward, P. (2000), "An analysis of role adoptions and scripts during  
21 customer-to-customer encounters," *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 34 No.  
22 3/4, pp. 341-358.  
23  
24 Patton, M.Q. (1990), *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd Ed.). Newbury  
25 Park, CA: Sage.  
26  
27 **Patton, M.Q. (1999), "Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis",**  
28 ***Health Sciences Research*, Vol. 34, pp. 1189-1208.**  
29  
30 Pranter, C.A. and Martin, C.L. (1991), "Compatibility management: roles in service  
31 performances", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 5 No. 2, pp. 43-53.  
32  
33 Pratt, M. (2009), "For the Lack of a Boilerplate: Tips on Writing Up (and Reviewing)  
34 Qualitative Research", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 52 No. 5, pp. 856-  
35 862.  
36  
37 **Rosenbaum, M. S. and Massiah, C. A. (2007) "When Customers Receive Support**  
38 **from Other Customers: Exploring the Influence of Intercustomer Social**  
39 **Support on Customer Voluntary Performance", *Journal of Service Research*,**  
40 **Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 257-270.**  
41  
42 Rowley, J. E. (1995), "Customer compatibility management, or revisiting the silence rule",  
43 *Library Review*, Vol. 44 No.4, pp. 7-12.  
44  
45 Saunders, M.N.K. and Townsend, K. (2016), "Reporting and Justifying the Number of  
46 Interview Participants in Organization and Workplace Research", *British Journal*  
47 *of Management*, Vol.27, pp. 836-852.  
48  
49 Schmidt, S.W. (2007), "The relationship between satisfaction with workplace training and  
50 overall job satisfaction", *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, Vol. 18 No. 4,  
51 pp. 481-498.  
52  
53 Schmidt, R. and Sapsford, R. (1995), "Issues of gender and servicescape: marketing UK  
54 public houses to women", *International Journal of Retail & Distribution*  
55 *Management*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 34-40.  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

- 1  
2  
3 **Schwalbe, M.L. (1988), “Role Taking Reconsidered: Linking Competence and**  
4 **Performance to Social Structure”, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior,***  
5 **Vol. 18 (December), pp. 411-436.**  
6  
7  
8 Small, J. and Harris, C. (2014), “Crying babies on planes: Aeromobility and parenting”.  
9 *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 48, pp.27-41.  
10  
11 Solomon, M. R., Surprenant, C., Czepiel, J. A., and Gutman, E. G. (1985), “A role theory  
12 perspective on dyadic interactions: the service encounter”, *Journal of Marketing,*  
13 Vol. 49 No. 1, pp. 99-111.  
14  
15 **Sony, M. and Mekoth, N. (2016), “The relationship between emotional intelligence,**  
16 **frontline employee adaptability, job satisfaction and job performance”,**  
17 ***Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 30, pp. 20-32.**  
18  
19 Tombs, A.G. and McColl-Kennedy, J.R. (2003), “Social servicescape conceptual model”,  
20 *Marketing Theory*, Vol. 3 No. 4, pp. 37-65.  
21  
22  
23 Tsang, N.K.F., Prideaux, B. and Lee, L. (2016), “Attribution of inappropriate visitor  
24 behaviour in a theme park setting – a conceptual model”, *Journal of Travel &*  
25 *Tourism Marketing*, Vol. 33, pp.1088-1105.  
26  
27 Verhoef, P.C., Lemon, K.N., Parasuraman, A., Roggeveen, A., Tsiros, M. and Schlesinger,  
28 L.A., (2009), “Customer Experience Creation: Determinants, Dynamics and  
29 Management Strategies”, *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 85, No. 1, pp. 31-41.  
30  
31 Verleye, K., Gemmel, P. and Rangarajan, D. (2016), “Engaged customers as job resources  
32 or demands for frontline employees?”, *Journal of Service Theory and Practice,*  
33 Vol. 26 No. 3, pp. 363-383.  
34  
35  
36 Yin, C.Y. and Poon, P. (2016), “The impact of other group members on tourists’ travel  
37 experiences”, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management,*  
38 Vol. 28 No. 3, pp. 640-658.  
39  
40  
41 Zhang, J., Beatty, S.E. and Mothersbaugh, D. (2010), “A CIT investigation of other  
42 customers' influence in services”, *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 24 No. 5,  
43 pp. 389-399.  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Theme	Studies	Finding/contribution
FLE as a contributor to NCCI	Schmidt and Sapsford (1995)	'Silent collusion' of bar staff with drunk customers harassing female customers.
	Anaya <i>et al.</i> (2016)	FLEs giving special treatment to selected customers causes discontent.
Customer expectations of FLE intervention in NCCI situations	Boo <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Customers unlikely to complain about NCCI but expect FLE action (and not merely apology).
	Tsang <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Customers expect FLE intervention for controllable and predictable NCCI.
	Baker and Kim (2018)	Customers look to FLE to recover NCCI.
FLEs as a resource for managing CCI	Pranter and Martin (1991)	Identify 10 roles for managing CCI – most of them involving FLEs.
	Grove and Fisk (1997)	Makes several suggestions for FLE policing of NCCI.
	Nicholls (2005)	Provides illustrations of good practice in preventing and recovering NCCI.
	McQuilken <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Outlines ways of preparing FLEs to deliver effective displays of empathy and apology in NCCI situations.
Customer views on FLE response to CCI	Nicholls (2005)	Lists acceptable and unacceptable FLE responses to NCCI.
	Huang (2008)	Positive correlation between perception of FLE NCCI recovery effort and customer satisfaction.
	Hoffman and Lee (2014)	Identifies FLE tactics used to discourage disruptive student behaviour.
	McQuilken <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Found FLE apologies for delays caused by other customers to be effective.
FLE/employee perspective on CCI	Luther <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Used group interviews to gain insights from nurses about NCCI and PCCI amongst hospital inpatients.
	Colm <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Outline a range of CCI phenomena occurring at Italian service stations and report a similarity between customer and manager/supervisor perceptions.

**Table 1: CCI and the employee**

CCI Typology	Context of typology	Perspective	FLE view included	Method	Key finding
McGrath and Otnes (1995)	CCI in retail setting (midwestern USA)	Consumer (in a live service situation; as interpreted by researchers)	No	In-store observation (60 hours; 73 encounters), in-depth interviews (8 shoppers) and shopping with consumers (5 shoppers)	Identifies 11 shopper CCI roles: help-seeker; proactive helper; reactive helper; admirer, competitor, complainer, follower, observer, judge, accused, and spoiler.
Baron <i>et al.</i> (1996)	CCI in a large self-service format retail setting (UK)	Consumer (recall of current visit CCI on exiting a service setting)	No	Exit interviews (1,101) at IKEA asking respondents to report any spoken-interaction with other shoppers (OOP2).	Identifies five categories of oral-based CCI: Product-related; directions; procedures; physical assistance; and others.
Grove and Fisk (1997)	Theme parks (USA)	Consumer (in a service setting, but recalling past CCI experiences)	No	CIT (330 incidents)	Identifies two broad groupings of CCI incident: protocol incidents and sociability incidents.
Parker and Ward (2000)	Helping behaviours between customers in garden centres (UK)	Consumer (exiting a service setting, but recalling past CCI experiences)	No	Exit questionnaire survey at a garden centre (467 questionnaires); In-depth telephone interviews (10)	Identifies four helping roles: Reactive help-seeker; proactive help-seeker; reactive helpers; and proactive helpers.
Harris and Baron (2004)	C2C conversations during train travel (UK)	Consumer (in a live service situation; as interpreted by researchers)	No	Observations (some 200 hours over 65 train journeys) and interviews (28 – conducted on station platforms)	Identifies 10 activities that passengers engage in during train travel, several of which may involve CCI. Proposes that conversations between train passengers can serve to improve the service experience.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Zhang <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Based on a range of services. (USA)	Consumers (recall of past CCI experiences; not in service setting)	CIT (142 incidents)	Identifies the following types of CCI: conversation/getting along; helping; good atmosphere/nice crowd; observing/overhearing; 'fighting'; other negative direct incidents; loudness; rudeness; and other negative indirect incidents.
9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 Dorsey <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Examines outcomes of extreme NCCI (rage); also considers triggers of rage in restaurants, retail stores, etc. (USA)	Consumer (interview location not stated; recall of a CCI rage incident requested)	CIT (329 incidents)	Identifies other customer behaviours contributing to rage: Negative sociability; verbal; going slower than expected; other protocol; children misbehaving; physical; mistreating employee; racial slur; stealing item/spot; intentional violence.
17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 Luther <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Investigates the influence of other patients in shared hospital rooms (Germany)	Consumer-like (undergraduates, in class, responding to CCI scenarios)  Employees (nurses sharing their experiences of patient room sharing)	Used image-supported scenarios of hospital roommates to assess the influence of similarity on satisfaction (143 questionnaires – student respondents) Group interviews (4) with nurses.	Roommates who are perceived as similar are viewed more positively. Roommate similarity improves overall evaluation of the service provider. Nurses could identify relevant similarity factors and operational constraints on implementing a similarity
27 28 29 30 31 32 Yin and Poon (2016)	Examines impact of other group members on a domestic package tour (China)	Consumer (intercept interviews as people left travel agents)	CIT (253 incidents)	Identifies three main categories of CCI incident: Appearance; behaviours; and language.
33 34 35 36 37 38 Colm <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Examines the direct and indirect influence of other customers present at a motorway service station. (Italy)	Consumer (interview location not stated)  Managerial & supervisorial	22 in-depth interviews (6 managers; 2 supervisors, 14 customers). 2 observations (½ day)	Identifies seven categories of CCI. Four relate to on-site CCI: proactive instrumental interactions, proactive social interactions, reactive

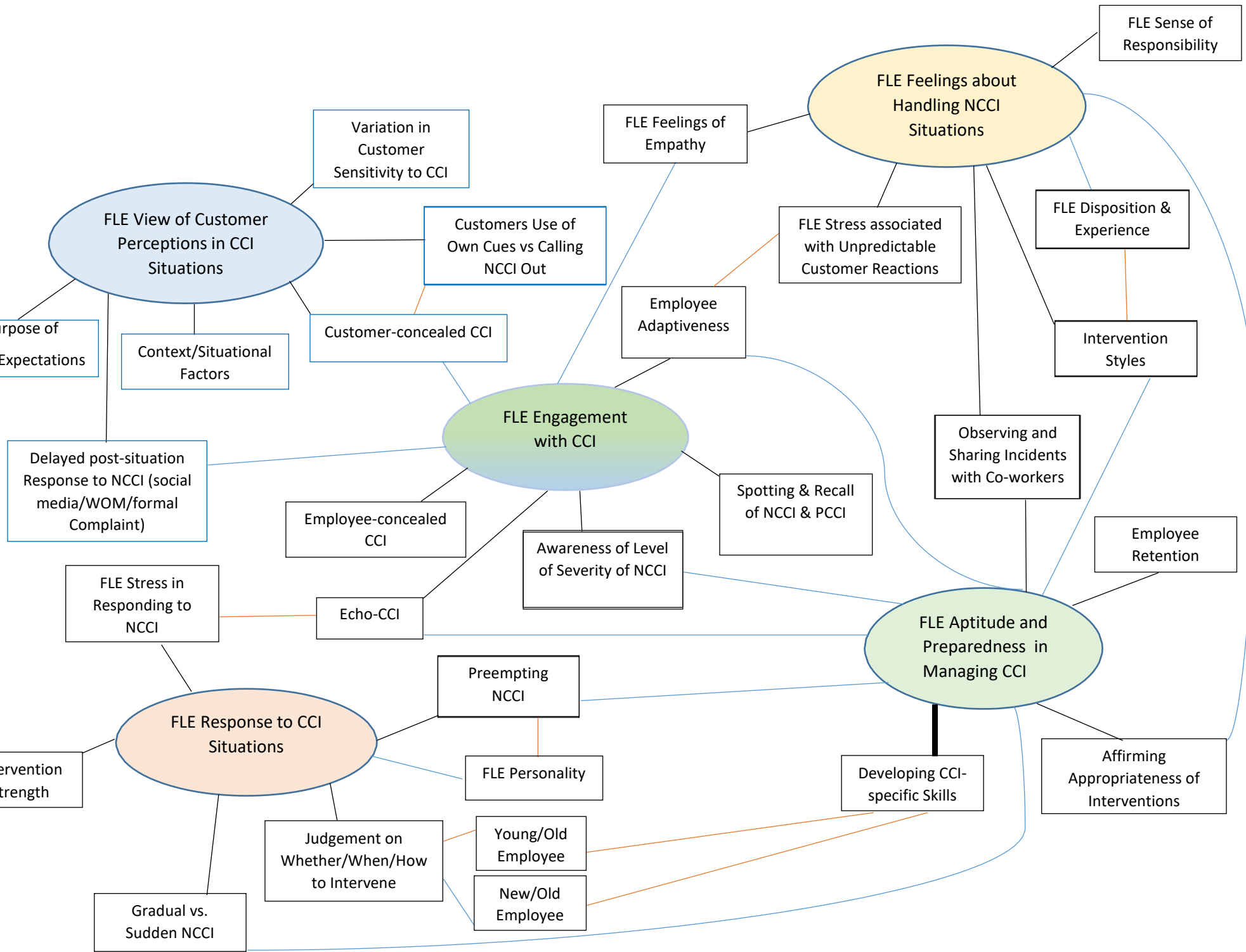
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46

					interactions and behavioural 'spillovers'.
Gursoy <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Examines disruptive customer behaviour which impacts other customers in hospitality industry contexts.	Consumer (consumer NCCI anecdotes posted on customer review websites)	No	Netnography based on reviews on websites such as tripadvisor.com (219 customer anecdotes)	Identifies seven categories of disruptive customer behaviour: Inattentive parents with naughty kids; oral abusers; outlandish requesters; hysterical shouters; poor hygiene manners; service rule breakers; and ignorant customers.
Baker and Kim (2018)	Other customer failure in restaurants, transportation, theatres, retail & hotels. (USA)	Consumer (an online marketing panel)	No	CIT (234 incidents)	Identifies five types of CCI incident: Rudeness; proximity; loudness; child misbehaviour; and waiting for others.

**Table 2** Selected CCI studies and their source perspectives

**Figure 1: Thematic Mapping of the Codes and Emergent Themes**

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47





Themes	Supporting Codes	Propositions (P1 - P9)
<b>1. FLE Engagement with CCI &amp; its Context</b>	<i>CCI frequency: Spot &amp; recall</i>	<p><b>P1:</b> The more (less) NCCI occurs in a service setting, the more (less) the likelihood that FLEs will recognise its significance to the customer experience and impact on customer satisfaction.</p> <p><b>P2:</b> While customers and FLEs may both observe analogous incidents associated with NCCI, perception and ascription may differ in relation to ‘Customer-concealed CCI’ situations.</p>
	<i>CCI relevance to the customer experience</i>	
	<i>Customer-concealed CCI</i>	
	<i>Customer vs FLE perception of CCI situations</i>	
<b>2. FLE Discernment of CCI Antecedents &amp; Variation in its Complexity</b>	<i>Customer sensitivity to CCI: Situational influences</i>	<p><b>P3:</b> Varying CCI antecedents, such as situational factors and ‘employee-concealed NCCI’, can delay FLE intervention resulting in customer dissatisfaction.</p>
	<i>FLE service wisdom: Observe &amp; share</i>	
	<i>Employee-concealed CCI</i>	
<b>3. FLE Perception of NCCI Severity &amp; the Appropriate Response</b>	<i>NCCI immediacy (Gradual vs Sudden)</i>	<p><b>P4:</b> In service contexts where NCCI requiring an immediate response is anticipated, prior CCI-specific training becomes more crucial</p>
	<i>FLE judgement on severity &amp; intervention strength</i>	
	<i>Customer disposition to report NCCI for FLE intervention</i>	<p><b>P5:</b> The more (less) immediately NCCI situations require intervention, the more (less) stressful they are for FLEs in the absence of CCI-specific skills.</p>
	<i>FLE stress in responding to NCCI</i>	
<b>4. FLE Comfort in Handling NCCI Situations</b>	<i>FLE feelings about handling NCCI</i>	<p><b>P6:</b> Feelings of empathy, stress and sense of responsibility may variably influence a FLE’s ability and willingness to intervene following a NCCI incident.</p>
	<i>FLE CCI experience level</i>	
	<i>FLE stress from unpredictable customer reactions</i>	<p><b>P7:</b> The less (more) experienced in handling NCCI the FLE is, the more (less) likely to feel apprehensive/hesitant in intervening in NCCI situations.</p>
	<i>Echo-CCI</i>	
<b>5. CCI as an Area for Strategic HRD Focus</b>	<i>Consistent handling of CCI &amp; management expectations</i>	<p><b>P9:</b> Developing tailored HRD efforts that provide FLEs with CCI-specific training supports consistent handling of NCCI and effective CCI management.</p>
	<i>FLE disposition and CCI skills</i>	
	<i>CCI significance to the customer experience</i>	
	<i>CCI-specific training</i>	

**Table 3: Final Themes, Supporting Codes and Research Propositions**