The authors identify specific customer orientation behaviors (COBs) of call center employees and show that these behaviors relate to customer evaluations of service quality. Using qualitative, inductive analyses of 166 telephone service interactions in a retail bank call center, they identify five types of COBs associated with helping customers. The COBs are (a) anticipating customer requests, (b) offering explanations/justifications, (c) educating customers, (d) providing emotional support, and (e) offering personalized information. Using deductive analyses, the authors show that customers rate the quality of service interactions higher when service providers employ COBs. The qualitative findings contribute to the understanding of the specific employee behaviors associated with service quality, and the quantitative findings validate the importance of these behaviors.

Keywords: customer orientation; helping; service quality; customer service employees; call center interactions

INTRODUCTION

To influence customer loyalty, organizations must understand the factors that contribute to service quality (Anderson and Zemke 1998; Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1996). Researchers have proposed key factors that can produce high-quality service interactions, including employees’ willingness to help customers and their knowledge and courtesy (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1985; Schneider and White 2004). However, the key employee behaviors associated with service quality are still not precisely specified and hence, often prove difficult to manage effectively.

Services are often hard to measure, count or inventory, which hampers the ability to understand how or when customers view a service as top quality. Furthermore, there may be a considerable gap between what a service firm intends to deliver and what a customer actually receives. The gap between firm intentions and customer experience is exacerbated by the inseparability of production and consumption and the active participation of...
both customer service providers and consumers in service delivery (Rodie and Klein 2000). Service delivery is a dynamic and interactive process that can be significantly influenced by the individual differences and behaviors of the service providers and customers involved in the interaction.

One approach to managing service quality has been to carefully structure interactions and conversations between employees and customers (Bain et al. 2002; Holtgrewe, Kerst, and Shire 2001; Lovelock 2002). Service delivery can be controlled through the development of scripts that are designed to guide employees in their interactions with customers (cf. Humphrey and Ashforth 1994). In telephone service centers, for example, such scripts may be a central element of the software used by employees while interacting with customers (Bain et al. 2002; Batt 2002; Holtgrewe, Kerst, and Shire 2001; Houlihan 2002). Scripts are primarily used to overcome differences in skill, ability, and attitude on the part of both employees and customers involved in particular service interactions (Lovelock 2001; Tansik and Smith 2000).

Although scripts are used in call centers, out of 470 U.S. call centers surveyed in 2004, only 15% relied heavily on scripted texts (Batt 2005). One reason for the relatively low use of scripts may be that complete and perfect scripting of customer service interactions is rarely possible. It is difficult if not impossible to identify the precise and exhaustive set of behaviors that employees should employ in each situation to ensure high-quality service. For example, although flight attendants receive precise behavioral instructions for various stages of a flight, they must still exercise discretion in their behavior when responding to idiosyncratic customer requests or behaviors (Hochschild 1983). Furthermore, employees may respond to restrictive scripts and other behavioral controls with reduced motivation and job satisfaction (Oldham 1996). In these cases, rigid scripts can jeopardize—rather than improve—the quality of service delivery (Bain et al. 2002; Bowen and Lawler 1992).

Service quality may be improved by relying on a certain degree of employee autonomy in interactions between employees and customers (Bowen and Lawler 1992; Chebat and Kollias 2000; Hartline and Ferrell 1996; Oldham 1996). Employee autonomy is generally associated with positive attitudes toward the work (Oldham 1996). Furthermore, employee autonomy may be particularly appropriate for such complex tasks as service delivery (Houlihan 2002). We expect that employees with some degree of autonomy may be better placed to read and respond effectively to idiosyncratic customer expectations and experiences. Hence, employees with autonomy should be able to provide higher service quality by better satisfying customer expectations (Lewis and Booms 1983; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1985).

Drawing on the arguments presented above, we propose that employee autonomy—in the form of employees’ use of extrarole or organizational citizenship behaviors—can be an important element in ensuring that customers’ expectations are met and that service quality is high.

**Quality Service and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors**

Research in organizational behavior suggests that organizations benefit when employees engage in constructive behaviors that go beyond the tasks formally outlined in their job descriptions. Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie (2006) proposed the concept of organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs)—discretionary behaviors of employees that promote the effective functioning of the organization but are not part of a formal job description. Research has shown a positive relation between OCBs and organizational performance (Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie 2006; Podsakoff and MacKenzie 1994, 1997).

Brief and Motowidlo (1986) described a similar concept, prosocial behaviors, defined as behaviors aimed at benefiting either a group within the organization or the organization as a whole. The concept of pro-social behaviors is broader than OCBs, encompassing both OCBs and beneficial behaviors that are part of a formal job description and so may be explicitly rewarded by the organization (George and Bettenhausen 1990). Frese et al. (1996) proposed a related concept, personal initiative (PI), defined as “an individual’s taking an active and self-starting approach to work and going beyond what is formally required in a given job” (p. 38). PI refers specifically to behaviors that are “consistent with the organization’s mission” (p. 38). The concept of PI is similar to that of OCBs, with the exception that PI refers to a stable characteristic of an individual, whereas OCB refers to behaviors that may or may not reflect stable, underlying individual differences.

The concepts introduced above—OCBs, prosocial behaviors, and PI—share important elements. All three encompass employee behaviors that are not formally required or prescribed by an organization and that promote organizational goals. Research has shown that OCBs, prosocial behaviors, and PI are positively associated with organizational effectiveness (Frese and Fay 2001; Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie 2006; Podsakoff and MacKenzie 1994, 1997).

Recent work suggests that the concept of OCBs may be important in understanding service quality. More specifically, OCBs exhibited by customer service employees can be a key factor in establishing service quality and can be a potential source of competitive advantage. Brown et al. (2002) defined customer orientation as “an employee’s tendency or predisposition to meet customer needs in an
on-the-job context” (p. 111). Customer orientation is related to the concept of OCBs. It refers to a predisposition to behave in ways that promote customer goals and hence is expected to promote organizational effectiveness. Customer orientation is also related to the idea of PI because it refers to behaviors that are a product of stable individual differences in ability and motivation and not behaviors that are a product of formal job requirements. Hence, the concept of customer orientation is related to the ideas of OCB and PI, although it is restricted to service interactions. Cran (1994, p. 36) introduced a similar concept of OCBs, which was defined as a predisposition to provide service and to be courteous and helpful in dealing with customers and associates. Others have described another related concept—customer-focused work (Bettencourt and Brown 1997; Bettencourt, Gwinner, and Meuter 2001; Podsakoff and MacKenzie 1997). In contrast to the concepts of customer orientation and customer service orientation, the concept of customer-focused work refers to behaviors, not predispositions. But all three concepts describe employee behaviors (or tendencies) that serve customers’ interests and that are not a product of formal job requirements.

Customer orientation is expected to be positively related to service quality (Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie 2006; Susskind, Kacmar, and Borchgrevink 2003) and hence, organizational performance (Day 1994; Narver and Slater 1990). Brown et al. (2002) found a positive relationship between customer orientation and service worker performance. Schneider et al. (2005) found that customer-focused OCBs were positively related to organizational sales, mediated by customer satisfaction. Donavan, Brown, and Mowen (2004) found a positive relation between customer orientation and commitment and helping other employees. These outcomes associated with customer orientation are expected to have a positive impact on organizational performance.

In sum, previous research establishes the importance of discretionary employee behaviors oriented toward satisfying customers. In this article, we use the term customer orientation behaviors (COBs), which we define as “employee behaviors that indicate an interest in serving customers but are not a part of the employee’s formal job description.” Based on previous research, we propose that the display of COBs by service providers will be related to customer evaluations of the quality of service.

Although the research described above provides general support for this hypothesis, researchers have yet to examine the construct of COBs in detail. In this regard, Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie (2006, p. 221) explicitly call for research that specifies the behavioral dimensions of COBs. In this article, we address this gap by attempting to identify specific categories of behaviors that constitute COBs.

By focusing on identifying specific employee behaviors, we contribute to the understanding of COBs. For example, recent research focuses on the importance of helpful behavior without specifying the behaviors that may be “helpful” (George and Bettenhausen 1990; Schneider et al. 2005). Other research examines COBs such as “external representation,” “internal influence,” and “service delivery” without specifying the behaviors associated with external representation, internal influence, or service delivery (Bettencourt and Brown 2003). In this study, we examine the more specific, behavioral realm of COBs. This is meant to complement the more abstract conceptualization of COBs currently in use. We contribute to this research stream by identifying specific behaviors that are associated with these broad categories of COBs.

We present our two-part study in the following section. In Part I of our study, we analyzed a sample of transcripts of service encounters in a call center. Using qualitative, inductive, and exploratory methods, we identified five categories of specific COBs. In Part II, we empirically tested our hypothesis regarding the relationship between COBs and customer evaluations of service quality.

**METHODS**

**Research Context**

The research site—a large financial services provider in the northeastern United States—supplied us with three sets of data: (a) verbatim transcripts of previously taped service interactions between service providers and customers, (b) customer data for these service interactions (collected through telephone surveys following the service interactions), and (c) organizational evaluations of these service interactions.

The organization identified quality of service as a key goal, and routinely monitored customer service providers on 24 criteria (see Appendix A), for example, the representative “utilizes appropriate opening,” “utilizes appropriate voice tone and rate of speech,” “exhibits courtesy,” “demonstrates appropriate behavior,” “manages call efficiently,” and “utilizes proper hold/transfer technique.” These criteria were available to employees, but specific behaviors that should be associated with them were not formally specified. In fact, employees and supervisors reported that they regularly disagreed about whether particular behaviors met these criteria. Thus, the company clearly emphasized quality of service as a key value but did not provide specific, formal guidelines regarding the behaviors employees were expected to use to ensure high-quality service delivery.
Sample

The research sample was comprised of 166 naturally occurring service calls, conducted by different employees and involving different customers. All the employees employed in the call center (n = 712) were invited to participate in the study, and 215 (31%) agreed to participate. Because of technical limitations involving access to transcriptions or quality of performance data, only 166 employees were included in the present study (23% of the total population of customer service representatives). Participants were mostly female (69%), with an average age of 35.6 years. Their tenure at the organization ranged from 11 months to 15 years, with an average of 3.35 years, and most (79%) had graduated from high school (minimal = completed elementary school; maximal = attended graduate or professional school but did not receive a graduate or professional degree). A preliminary analysis confirmed that this sample did not significantly differ from the overall employee population in terms of demographic characteristics or average performance ratings.

Customers—also primarily female (68%)—contacted the service center for a variety of reasons. The most common requests involved account balance inquiries, account transaction inquiries, general product information inquiries, checkbook ordering, and change-of-address requests. However, there was significant variation in the clarity and precision with which requests were presented in the different calls, with some calls requiring extensive investment on the part of the employee to identify the customer’s needs. Some calls required employees to address several different customer needs, although others ended with no identifiable customer request or need being met. Interactions lasted on average 2 min and ranged from less than 1 min to more than 15 min. Service providers in this environment handle approximately 20 to 25 service requests per hour.

Data Collection

Service interactions in the call center were routinely audiotaped in a nonobtrusive fashion for performance evaluation purposes. Service providers were accustomed to having 5 to 10 of their interactions recorded and evaluated per month, with the interactions chosen randomly. Service providers did not know which of their interactions were selected for taping and evaluation until after the fact. Hence, the research protocol should not have significantly affected the providers’ sense of being monitored and evaluated. For each employee who agreed to participate in the study, one taped interaction was selected, based on our ability to obtain matching customer survey data for the interaction. These calls were professionally transcribed verbatim, and these transcripts comprise the data we used to identify the behavioral elements of customer orientation, as explained next.

PART I: EXPLORATORY INDUCIVE ANALYSIS

Data Analysis

We followed the process of open coding suggested by Strauss and colleagues (Strauss 1987; Strauss and Corbin 1990) for exploratory inductive analysis of qualitative data to identify core categories of behavioral patterns. The process included three stages: identifying instances in the calls that represented manifestations of COBs, identifying categories into which we could group these behaviors, and coding the data according to the identified categories.

Identifying Instances of COBs

Three judges—students in an MBA program—started with a thorough review of the 166 transcripts, noting any instance they thought could be considered a COB. COBs were defined to coders as “strings of speech in which employees offered customers assistance that was not explicitly requested by the customer but that could promote resolution of customer needs.” This refers to behaviors that, following our formal definition of COBs, indicate an interest in serving customers. As mentioned previously, the organization from which we drew our data did not provide specific behavioral guidelines in this area; hence, any behaviors coded are assumed to be at least somewhat discretionary and not part of the employees’ formal job description. MBA students were intentionally selected for this stage to obtain a managerial perspective on customer orientation.

For Part I of our study, the unit of analysis was “strings of speech in the call transcript that represent a statement made by either the employee or the customer” (Jaffe and Feldstein 1970). Later, in Part II of our study, we aggregate these data to a different unit of analysis—the service interaction. The focus was primarily on employees’ speech, because our interest was in employee behaviors. However, coders were instructed to review strings of speech emitted by both employees and customers to fully understand the context of each employee behavior and to determine whether the employee behavior was an instance of COB or a response to an explicit request. A response to an explicit request was not coded as an instance of COB because we consider such behavior to be less discretionary than behavior that stems completely from the employee’s own initiative.

Judges completed several iterations of a three-step process to identify COBs. First, judges independently
reviewed a random sample of transcripts and tried to identify instances of COB, as described above. They then met and discussed these suggestions, considering the logic of coding a particular behavior as a COB and the conceptual nature of this COB. Following these meetings, they returned to the transcripts for additional review. This process was continued until the coders felt they could agree on whether a specific employee string of speech was an instance of COB.

Instances of COB were identified in 55% of the calls (90 calls). The following is an example of a call that included a string of speech identified as a COB. In this example, a customer called to inquire about the mailing address of a branch to mail a check; the employee provided the requested address and then further guided the customer:

Employee: Good afternoon, Financial Institution, Mrs. XXX1 speaking. How can I help you?
Customer: Yes, I would just like to have some information.
Employee: Uh hmm.
Customer: I’d like to know if I, if have the checking there with the savings, could I make a, a check uh from the check uh from my check to put in the checking account through the mail?
Employee: I don’t understand what you just said, ma’am.
Customer: I want . . .
Employee: You have a checking or savings? Can you do what?
Customer: I want to make the check and mail it to, you know, the, the bank.
Employee: OK . . . no problem.
(Pause)
Employee: You’ll mail it to XXX.
Customer: Wait a minute. Mail XXX; how would you?
(Employee reads the address slowly.)
Employee: That’s where you can mail it to, ma’am.
Customer: Uh huh, and, uh, I just put the checks with the um . . .
Employee: Deposit slip.
Customer: Deposit slip. OK.
Employee: And put your account number on the back of the check and put “for deposit only.”

In this call, the customer’s request is unclear at first. The employee provides the mailing address and then further guides the customer about the proper way to mail a check: “Put your account number on the back of the check and put ‘for deposit only.’” This information was not specifically requested by the customer and was initiated by the employee as a way to further help the customer. The added information clearly relies on the employee’s knowledge of organizational processes and is indicative of COB because the customer did not ask for it, and the employee’s formal job description does not specifically require this behavior.

In this stage of the analysis, 275 instances of COBs were identified across the 166 service interactions in the sample. One or more COBs were identified in 91 (55%) of the 166 service interactions. Examples of these behaviors are reported in Appendix B.

Identifying Conceptual Categories of COBs

The second stage was to identify conceptual families or core categories of COBs. We began by trying to place the employee behaviors that we had identified into the existing categories we described previously, including OCBs (e.g., Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie 2006; Schneider et al. 2005), prosocial behavior (George and Bettenhausen 1990) and customer orientation (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; Brown et al. 2002). However, this attempt was not fruitful because the available categories were too general. Most of the behaviors that we identified would be categorized into what George and Bettenhausen (1990, p. 703) identified as “being helpful to customers,” what Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie (2006, p. 297) identified as “helping,” and what Schneider et al. (2005) referred to as an employee going out of his or her way to help a customer. Thus, using existing categories would have led to coding all the behaviors into one category suggested by previous research, which would not promote the goal of identifying the behavioral elements of these categories.

Consequently, we viewed our analysis as an attempt to identify core behavioral categories of helping or being helpful. To identify the different behavioral forms that helping a customer can take, we applied the process of axial coding to our qualitative data (Strauss and Corbin 1998). In this process, the COBs identified in the first stage were grouped into categories that shared a common theme. Continuous discussion by members of the research team, including the researchers and the judges who had coded the data, was essential to this process. The process also involved repeated scanning of the COBs identified in the first stage and consideration of alternative categories (Strauss and Corbin 1998). As part of the process, we required that the set of categories we identified would cover each of the COBs from the first stage.
TABLE 1
Categories of Customer Orientation Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anticipating customer requests</td>
<td>“If you want, I can give you that mailing address.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Ah, if you want I can take a look to see if there was [sic] any withdrawals on it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering explanations/justifications</td>
<td>“In order to change your account over the phone, we require a triple verification process.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“OK, it takes about 3 business days. It could take 3 to 5 business days.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“...OK, what I’ve done is I’ve just generated on your checking account number XXX a request for a, a replacement card on the worn card. You do have the card in your possession.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating the customer</td>
<td>“OK, so you put in an ATM short claim request, right?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“And don’t forget to sign the checks... put your account number on the back of the check and put ‘for deposit only.’”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing emotional support</td>
<td>“Good luck with the move.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“...enjoy your, ah, your summer.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering personalized information</td>
<td>“By the way, since you’re a select customer, are you aware that we have a toll-free select banking phone number that you can use?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“And if you hold on now, I’ll send a form so that your wife can add her social security number.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After extensive debate we decided that five categories provide the most parsimonious and informative structure for coding all the data. These five categories are (a) anticipating customer requests, (b) offering explanations/justifications, (c) educating the customer, (d) providing emotional support, and (e) offering personalized information to the customer. See Table 1 for examples of COBs for each of the five categories.

Data Coding

In the final stage of analysis, all COBs from Part I were coded using the categories identified in the previous stage (see Table 1). Elements of a call that were identified as COBs in the previous stage were now coded according to the specific category that they represented. For example, in the following exchange the emphasized portion was recognized as an instance of COB in the first stage:

Employee: All right, Mr. XXX, how can I help you?
Customer: Uh, I, I had a, I had a complaint, ahhh, regarding my, regarding my, you know, ATM withdrawal.
Employee: Yes.
Customer: So I want to know about that one.
Employee: OK, just one second, please. OK, you put in an ATM short claim request, right?

In the second (coding) stage, this COB was coded as an example of educating the customer. Each COB identified in Part I was similarly coded into one of the five categories. At the end of this stage, two variables were available for our analysis: (a) whether a given service interaction included any COBs and (b) if so, which category or categories of COBs were present. Hence, in the end, the unit of analysis for this stage is the service interaction. Although we started by coding instances of COBs, we aggregated these codes into variables pertaining to the overall service interaction.

The reliability of the coding process was verified with two coders who independently reviewed the same 20 transcripts using the above process. We compared their coding, discussed initial difficulties, and clarified differences of opinion and interpretation and then coded a new set of transcripts. Interrater reliabilities were acceptable—.96 for identification of COBs and .77 for identification of the specific categories of COBs.

FINDINGS OF PART I

Overall, 275 instances of COB were found in the 166 transcripts. Each of these, considered separately, represents an instance of helping the customer or offering quality customer service. We identified five categories of COBs—(a) anticipating customer requests, (b) offering explanations/justifications, (c) educating the customer, (d) providing emotional support, and (e) offering personalized information to the customer—which are expected to influence service quality. Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for these categories.

Next, we elaborate on the nature of these categories, describing the types of behaviors comprising each category. Then, we report an empirical test of the relationship
between employees’ display of COBs and customer evaluations of service quality.

**Types of COBs**

The first category of COB—anticipating customer requests—involves providing customers with information that directly relates to a problem for which they sought assistance without the customer explicitly requesting the information. This is the most subtle kind of initiative, in which employees try to anticipate what a customer wants or needs and provide it before it is explicitly requested. Included in this category, for example, is the case of a customer who asked if her son could use his ATM card while traveling in Europe. The employee responded with “Yes, he can use it throughout Europe,” then added, “He would have to have a four-digit pass code.” This sentence is not a direct response to the customer’s inquiry but rather gives the customer information she will need without waiting for her to ask for it. In another example, a customer who called to report a lost credit card wanted assurance that once the card was canceled, it could not be used to withdraw money. The employee concurred and further offered, “Ah, if you want, I can take a look to see if there [were] any withdrawals on it.” Again, the employee made this offer of her own initiative, without being prompted by a specific customer request. This form of COB can also be viewed a specific type of “generalized compliance,” which Smith, Organ, and Near (1983, p. 657) identified as behaviors that constitute what a “good employee ought to do.”

A second category of COB—offering explanations or justifications for a procedure—applies especially when an employee cannot immediately fulfill a request. For example, when a customer calls to change his account address, the employee manifests COB by explaining what the procedure requires.

**Employee:** Good morning, Mr. XXX speaking; how may I help you, please?

**Customer:** Hi, I’d like to change my address on my account, please.

**Employee:** And your account number is?

**Customer:** XXX.

**Employee:** Your social security number, please.

**Customer:** XXX.

**Employee:** OK, Mr. XXX.

**Customer:** Yes.

**Employee:** OK, just one moment, please. You’re no longer living on XXX?

**Customer:** No, I’m not.

**Employee:** OK, fine. To change your account over the phone, which we’ll gladly do for you, it does require a triple verification process.

**Customer:** OK.

**Employee:** You’ve given me your social security number. Can I have your date of birth, please?

**Customer:** XXX.

**Employee:** All right, very good. Now, from your checking or savings account, I just have to verify an activity, so would you be kind enough to give me the date and the amount of a recent deposit or withdrawal? Or

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**TABLE 2**

Frequencies of Customer Orientation Behaviors (COBs) per Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COB Category</th>
<th>Number of Instances of Category (% of total COB instances)a</th>
<th>Number of Different Calls with Category (% of total calls)b</th>
<th>Number of Calls with Category as only COB (% of total calls)c</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>75 (45%)</td>
<td>13 (8%)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipating customer requests</td>
<td>66 (24%)</td>
<td>43 (26%)</td>
<td>14 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering explanations/justifications</td>
<td>80 (29%)</td>
<td>53 (32%)</td>
<td>6 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating the customer</td>
<td>49 (18%)</td>
<td>28 (17%)</td>
<td>5 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing emotional support</td>
<td>53 (19%)</td>
<td>32 (19%)</td>
<td>6 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering personalized information</td>
<td>27 (10%)</td>
<td>13 (8%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. This column displays the number of instances in each of the categories and the percentage of the total number of COBs this figure represents. For example, 66 instances of COBs were categorized as “anticipating customer requests,” and this represented 24% of all instances of COBs identified (N = 275). A call could contain more than one instance of COB.

b. This column displays the number of calls in which COBs in each category appeared and the percentage of calls represented by this figure. For example, “anticipating customer requests” appeared in 43 different calls or 26% of all calls (N = 166). A call could contain more than one category of COB.

c. This column displays the number of calls in which only one category occurred and the percentage of all calls this represents. For example, “anticipating customer requests” appeared in 43 different calls, as noted in column 2, but in only 13 calls was it the only COB category that appeared. Only 39 calls fall into this group. The low figures in this column indicate that employees engaging in COB tended to display more than one type, which is one reason that the influence of individual categories on customer evaluations of service quality was difficult to assess.
from your checking account, I can alternatively select a check number at random . . .
Customer: Uh hmm.
Employee: . . . and ask you to give me the dollar amount. Whichever process you wanna use.
Customer: Yeah, well, I can tell you yesterday I made a balance transfer from checking to savings in the amount of $XXX.
Employee: OK. One moment, please.
Customer: Uh hmm.
Employee: From checking to savings $XXX.
Customer: Uh hmm.
Employee: Very good. OK. I’ve got that. Hold on one second; we’ll change your address for you.
Customer: OK.
Employee: And your new address is?
Customer: XXX.

In this statement, the employee explains a company policy with which the customer may or may not be familiar. The employee could have asked the three verification questions without explanation (i.e., your social security number, please; your date of birth, please; please give me the date and the amount of a recent deposit or withdrawal). This category is related to the concept of contextual performance, whereby effective behavior requires endorsing organizational rules and procedures as well as adhering to them (cf. Borman and Motowidlo 1993, p. 82; Borman and Mowday 1997). This category is also related to the concept of making constructive suggestions, which refers to voluntary and creative acts on the part of the employee to explain rules and procedures to the customer (George and Jones 1997). The focus is on the employee’s initiative to offer specific information that can help justify what might appear as an invasion of privacy. This type of behavior is expected to often exceed customer expectations.

A third type of COB—educating the customer—refers to teaching the customer terminology used by the organization (often by rephrasing the customer’s words into the organization’s terminology) and its procedures, so that the customer will be able to better handle similar problems in the future. Recall the customer who had filed a complaint regarding an ATM withdrawal problem:

Customer: Uh, I had a complaint, ahhh, regarding my, you know, ATM withdrawal.
Employee: OK. So you put in an ATM short claim request, right?

The employee uses a COB—educating the customer—by teaching the customer the proper technical term for the specific action taken—submitting an ATM short claim request. Here as well, the employee displays compliance with and endorsement of organizational practices and policies (Borman and Motowidlo 1993; Borman and Mowday 1997). However, the employee’s COB does not end here but rather extends to making the customer more familiar with the company’s rules, policies, and terminology, allowing for more efficient transactions in future interactions.

A fourth type of COB—offering emotional support—involves the expression of positive or supportive emotional statements toward the customer. For example, the employee dealing with the change-of-address request discussed above ended the conversation by wishing the customer “good luck in the move.” In another case, a customer called to check on a social security direct deposit made to his father, who had recently passed away. The employee immediately offered his condolences, responding with, “Oh, I’m sorry to hear that,” before going on to deal with the request. This type of COB helps maintain harmonious interpersonal relations with customers.

A fifth and final type of COB—personalization of information—refers to providing customer-specific information that might be of use to the caller and that is not necessarily suggested by the original problem. This type of behavior enables the employee to treat the customer as an individual. For example, when a customer called to make a transfer from a savings to a checking account, the employee explained how to perform the transaction and then displayed a COB:

OK, uh, also by the way, since you’re a select customer, are you aware that we have a toll-free select banking phone number that you can use?

This information does not relate to the problem for which the customer sought help but rather is offered as an extra benefit. The information gives the customer the opportunity for better service in the future (a proprietary number for select customers), while at the same time improving the customer’s overall perception of the current service encounter. This category is also related to the concept of making constructive suggestions (George and Jones 1997) but refers more specifically to suggestions that are tailored to the specific characteristics of the customer.

Having now elaborated on the nature of the five categories of COB identified in Part I, we next report our empirical test of the relationship between the occurrences of COBs in each call and customer evaluations of the quality of service provided by the employee who handled the call.

**PART II: HYPOTHESIS TESTING**

To empirically test the research hypothesis, we compiled several additional variables for the service interactions in our data set.
Additional Study Variables

1. **Occurrence of COBs** was a dichotomous variable identifying whether the employee had displayed any type of COB during a call. These data were available from Part I, as summarized in Table 2.

2. **Duration of call** was measured in seconds. Calls ranged from 26 s to 972 s (16 min), with an average of 131 s.

3. **Text length of call** was defined as the number of characters in the complete set of strings of speech that comprised the call. These ranged from 268 to 9,520 characters, with an average of 1895 characters.

4. **Text length of employee speech identified as an instance of COB** was defined as the number of characters in a string of speech identified as an instance of customer orientation. This ranged from 5 to 793 characters, with an average of 96 characters.

5. **COBs as a proportion of call** was a ratio of variable 4. to variable 3. above—text length of COB divided by text length of complete call. Ratios ranged from 0.01 to 0.48 of a call, with an average of 0.12 (SD = .09).

6. **Customer evaluation of quality of the service encounter** was assessed by phone within 48 hr of the service interaction. Organizational representatives contacted customers and asked them to respond to 9 items using a 1-5 scale, where 1 = poor and 5 = excellent. Sample items in this survey include “Thinking about the service representative you spoke with, please rate the overall quality of the service provided by this individual,” and “Based on your experience during this call, please rate the representative’s ability to make you feel like a valued customer.” (Appendix C includes the full set of items; a factor analysis with a varimax rotation and Eigenvalues > 1 confirmed that all items loaded on one factor; Cronbach’s alpha =.87; mean = 4.24; median = 4.44).

**FINDINGS OF PART II**

**COBs and Customer Evaluations of Service Quality**

The median and mean level of customer evaluations of service quality were extremely high in our sample (4.44 and 4.24), and the variance was too small to allow any linear analysis. We therefore followed the logic of separating customers who reported “extremely good service” from those reporting merely “good service.” We defined “extremely good service” as a service evaluation score above the median (4.44). We used the median (rather than the mean) as the cutoff because it was higher, thus clearly identifying “extremely good service.”

**TABLE 3**

Means and Standard Deviations of the Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customer evaluation of service quality</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of call</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>134.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text length of call</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>1618.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of string of speech identified as an instance of COB</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>85.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COBs as a proportion of call</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>8.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE**: COB = customer orientation behavior; SD = standard deviation.

| a. This variable is the total length of time (in seconds) of the call.
| b. This variable is the number of characters in the complete set of strings of speech comprising the call.
| c. This variable is the number of characters in a string of speech identified as an instance of customer orientation.
| d. Because of technical problems, data on duration were available only for 145 calls.

**TABLE 4**

Customer Orientation Behaviors and Service Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customer Orientation Behaviors</th>
<th>Displayed</th>
<th>Not Displayed</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good service quality</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely good service quality</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE**: Numbers in cells represent number of service interactions.

Table 3 summarizes the means and standard deviations of all study variables, including our coding of COB displays and data regarding customer evaluations of service quality. An initial test included customer and employee gender but found no significant gender effects on any of the variables or results.

Our research hypothesis had predicted a positive relationship between the occurrence of COBs and customer evaluations of the quality of a service encounter, suggesting that customers receiving service from an employee who displayed COBs would report higher service scores than customers who did not experience any COBs at all. We first tested this hypothesis with respect to an employee’s display of any type of COB, regardless of the particular category. A chi-square test confirmed this prediction ($\chi^2 = 3.88; p < .05$; see Table 4 and Figure 1).

We conducted additional analyses to address potential limitations of the analyses reported above. First, it is possible that the association between COBs and service quality may be primarily a function of the time spent with the customer. The use of COBs increased the time spent
with customers, and customers may react positively to the time spent rather than to the nature of the behavior used. To address this possibility, we analyzed the relationship between COBs and service quality, controlling for the time spent with customers. Based on information about the average duration of calls in the industry (http://www.callcentermagazine.com), we grouped calls into two categories: long calls (more than 3 min) and short calls (less than 3 min). We performed an analysis of variance, which confirmed the independent effects of COBs on service quality with marginal significance ($F(3,141) = 2.39; p = .07$).

We also explored the possibility that the length of the service encounter moderated the relationship between COBs and service quality. It is possible that customers become more sensitive to COBs as service encounters lengthen in duration. Customers in longer service encounters may be sensitive to the time the call has required and hence, may be more frustrated when their needs are not met or more pleased when their needs are finally met. Using an analysis of variance, we found a significant interaction effect of call duration and COBs on consumer evaluations of service quality ($F(1,141) = 4.96; p < .05$; see Figure 2). More specifically, we found a significant association between COBs and service quality for service encounters that lasted more than 3 min but no such association for service interactions that lasted 3 min or less.

A third challenge that we explored is whether COBs may need to comprise a large proportion of a call to have an effect—a challenge that would suggest COBs to be an expensive and inefficient process that cannot be practiced with all customers. To rule out this challenge, we examined the proportion of each call dedicated to COBs. The index of “COBs as a proportion of call” ranged from 0.1% to 41.8%, with an average of 11.6% (SD = 8.81). In 87% of the calls, COBs comprised less than 20% of the text of the call, and in only three calls did they make up more than 30%. Displaying COBs, therefore, does not add significant overhead to a call and can be widely used as a means to increase customer evaluations of service quality.

A final question regards the effects of each of the specific five categories of COB on service quality. Our analysis thus far documented the positive relationship between the presence of any type of customer orientation behavior and customer evaluations of service quality. An open issue is which of the five categories, if any, are most important as drivers of service quality. As a first step, we calculated the chi-square relationship between the occurrence of each category of COB and customer evaluations of service quality (recoded into “good” or “extremely good”). The results of this analysis, as evident in the top row of Table 5, found only one category of COB—offering personalized information—to have a significant independent effect on reported service quality ($\chi^2 = 3.398; p < .01$). With the other four categories, the appearance of the specific type of COB in the call did not have a separate significant relationship with customer evaluations of service quality.
In another analysis, we created dummy variables for each type of COB and then regressed the binary dependent variable of "extremely good service quality" and "good service quality" against the five independent dummy variables in a logistic regression procedure. The goal of this analysis was to see whether and which of these dummy variables would differentiate between high and low service quality. This analysis, as evident in the second row of Table 5, also found one category of COB—offering personalized information—to have a significant independent effect on reported service quality ($\chi^2 = 1.178$, $p < .01$). As a third step, we conducted another logistic regression that included a count of the number of times each category of COB appeared in a call as a predictor of the customer’s evaluation of the quality of the call. As evident in the last (bottom) row of Table 5, this analysis did not find any significant relationships.

Thus, as shown earlier, inclusion in a call of any of the categories of COB did significantly relate to higher quality assessments. And only one category of COB—offering personalized information—was found to have a unique individual relationship to customer evaluations of service quality. In our data, the occurrence of other individual categories of COB was not significantly related to customer assessments of service quality.

The inability to identify significant effects of the other COB categories could be due to the complicated nature of our real-life data. Most important, in our data, particular types of COB rarely appeared alone; only a very small subset of calls (39) featured only one of the COB types. Most calls included multiple types of COBs, with wide variation in the profile of categories displayed. At the same time, our dependent variable—customer evaluations of service quality—was available only per call and per customer. Our test therefore could not separate out the effects of one category of COB from that of other categories present in the same call. To examine the extent to which this co-occurrence of categories was a problem, we calculated the degree to which the different types of COBs appeared together. The correlations between the dummy codes representing the co-appearance of specific types of COBs were generally not very high but nonetheless were all highly significant, as summarized in Table 6.

The high frequency of displays of multiple COB types suggests that personality or attitudinal qualities of employees may be an antecedent of whether an employee engages in COB. This is consistent with suggestions that organizational citizenship and service orientation stem in part from employee personality (Borman et al. 2001; Brown et al. 2002; Cran 1994; Organ and Ryan 1995) or PI (Frese and Fay 2001) and limits our ability to identify a unique effect for displays of individual COBs.

In general, the problem with searching for the unique effects of individual COBs is twofold: Individual types cannot be observed alone because they rarely appear alone, and each different combination creates its own unique stamp or pattern that cannot be separated out. Nonetheless, our data do show that one type of behavior—offering personalized information—had a significant independent effect on customer evaluations of service quality. This category of COB, regardless of whether it appeared alone or with others and in what combinations, was associated with a high level of service quality. This finding is consistent with George and Jones’s (1997)

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**TABLE 5**

Relationship between Categories of Customer Orientation and Customer Assessments of Service Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Customer Orientation in Call</th>
<th>Anticipating Customer Requests</th>
<th>Offering Explanations/Justifications</th>
<th>Educating the Customer</th>
<th>Providing Emotional Support</th>
<th>Offering Personalized Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship between occurrence of category and service quality$^a$</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>.549</td>
<td>.303</td>
<td>.234</td>
<td>3.398*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistic regression of occurrence of category as predictor of service quality$^b$</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.154</td>
<td>–.074</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>1.178*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistic regression of frequency of COBs in call as predictor of service quality$^c$</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>.276</td>
<td>.456</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a. Entries in this row are chi-square values testing the relationship between whether a particular category appeared in a call and the customer’s evaluation of the quality of the call. 
b. Entries in this row are the beta parameters obtained in a logistic regression that included a dummy code of whether each category of customer orientation behavior (COB) appeared in a call as a predictor of the customer’s evaluation of the quality of the call. 
c. Entries in this row are the beta parameters obtained in a logistic regression that included a count of the number of times each category of COB appeared in a call as a predictor of the customer’s evaluation of the quality of the call. 

*p < .01
assertions that making constructive suggestions to customers can improve service quality. But the finding emphasizes the value of tailoring suggestions to the specific customer being assisted. The finding highlights the merit of a customer orientation that looks beyond the resolution of specific problems and that considers the customer a holistic entity having a long-term relationship with the service organization (Gutek 2000).

**DISCUSSION**

The provision of quality service is critical for service organizations (Lovelock and Wirtz 2004; Schneider and White 2004) and can increase organizational sales (Cronin and Taylor 1992) and profitability (Rogelberg, Barnes-Farrell, and Creamer 1999). This study identifies five specific customer service behaviors associated with high service quality, via an inductive analysis of 166 telephone service interactions: (a) anticipating customer requests, (b) offering explanations/justifications, (c) educating the customer, (d) providing emotional support, and (e) offering personalized information. We find a statistically significant association between manifestations of these behaviors and customer ratings of service quality. More specifically, we show that when employees display COBs, customers tend to rate the quality of a service encounter higher than when COBs are not displayed.

Additionally, we show that the association between COBs and service quality may be limited to service interactions of long as opposed to short duration. We found an association between COBs and service quality for service interactions lasting longer than 3 min but no such association for service interactions lasting less than 3 min. This finding illustrates the importance of recognizing the service context when specifying the relation between COBs and service quality. Research in organizational behavior all too often ignores the critical role of context when examining the association between employee behaviors and organizational outcomes (Duffy et al. 2006; Johns 2006; Morgeson et al. 2006). Our research contributes in this area by identifying an important contextual variable—the length of the service interaction—for understanding the relationship between customer orientation and service quality.

Finally, we show that COBs are more common in longer than in shorter service encounters. In our study, calls involving COBs lasted an average of 174 s, whereas calls with no COBs lasted an average of 78 s. The causality of this relationship is not clear, however. On one hand, the use of COBs may lengthen a service interaction simply because the additional behaviors require additional time (when present, COBs typically comprise 11.6% of call time). In this case, the use of COBs would contribute to the length of the call. On the other hand, the complexity or difficulty of the service interaction may be an external variable that is positively associated with both the length of the call and the likelihood of COBs. Very complex calls are more likely to give employees the opportunity to engage in a variety of helping behaviors as a way to effectively sort through the service issue. Simple calls may provide little or no opportunity for engaging in COBs. In this case, the association between COBs and length of call would be explained by the relation of both COBs and call time to complexity.
Limitations and Future Research

Our data were limited by a severe restriction of range in the customer scores of service quality, with 75% of the customers reporting scores between 4 and 5. This restriction may be due to the use of a 5-point scale as opposed to a 7-point or larger scale. The use of fewer response alternatives is known to produce lower differentiation in responses and to be associated with lower scale reliability (Komorita and Graham 1965; Lissitz and Green 1975). Our restriction of range may also be a result of the time lag (up to 48 hr) between the service encounter and the customer rating of the quality of the service encounter. As time passes between a service encounter and the rating of service quality, customers may remember fewer details, which may reduce differentiation in ratings of service quality.

Despite the restriction in range, however, we found a statistically significant association between the appearance of COBs and service quality. Given this, we can consider our findings to be a conservative estimate of the association between COBs and service quality. Hence, we expect that using better measures of service quality would only strengthen the findings we present here.

Another limitation of our study is that it is restricted to the service interactions of one bank. We cannot know if these findings can be generalized beyond this particular context. However, the COBs we identified appear to be relevant to other types of services. For example, employees can anticipate customer requests, offer additional information, educate the customer, or offer personalized information to customers in a wide range of services, including, for example, tourism, airline reservations, or various communication services. Ultimately, it is important to continue this line of research by examining COBs in a wide array of service contexts. Future research may identify additional COBs that are relevant in other service contexts but not in banking.

Our study also did not account for the characteristics of the service interactions studied other than the length of the interaction. Service interactions can vary in terms of the nature of the problems raised and the complexity of handling these problems. As we noted, we could not quantify these aspects of the calls in our data, but they are likely to influence the association between COBs and service quality. Future research should focus on identifying these characteristics and their role in the relationship between COBs and service quality.

Future research should also explore the effects of COBs on different dimensions of service quality. Certain types of COBs may be more relevant to particular aspects of service quality, and this relationship may also depend on the type or context of service. For example, dimensions of service quality such as reliability and assurance may be more critical in some service industries (e.g., banking) than in others. It would be important to examine the association between COBs and such specific dimensions of service quality in particular industries. A factor analysis of our data yielded a single factor solution. This indicates that our measurement of service quality did not capture any multidimensional aspects of the construct. Hence, our data are not appropriate for examining the association between COBs and different dimensions of service quality. Future research should focus on measuring the multiple dimensions of service quality and examining how each one is influenced by COBs.

Managerial Implications

The managerial implications of this study are quite important. First, our findings should help managers understand specific employee behaviors associated with high service quality. If managers understand the exact nature of COBs and their positive association with service quality, they will be better placed to improve service quality in their organizations. Managers can use a variety of tactics to encourage COBs, including training, coaching, and incentives. For instance, employees can be trained to anticipate a customer’s requests, based on organizational knowledge of the various questions that are likely to arise in different situations. Employees can also be trained to offer explanations or justifications for various organizational actions or to educate customers about organization policies or practices, once the organization has identified areas where customers are typically not aware of the logic behind particular procedures.

We believe managers must proceed with caution in this area. Management can easily err by tightly scripting and monitoring the behavior of customer service employees (Bain et al. 2002; Batt 2002; Holman, Chissick, and Totterdell 2002; Holtgrewe et al. 2001; Houlihan 2002; Tansik and Smith 2000). It is important to note that the COBs measured in our study were discretionary behaviors, not formally identified or managed by the organization in our study. Hence, attempting to formally control such behaviors may reduce their effectiveness or employee motivation to engage in such behaviors. Managers must take care to constantly monitor the effectiveness of any attempts to formally control COBs.

Another managerial implication of our study relates to attempts by call centers to minimize the average length of a service interaction. If managers wish to improve service quality by increasing COBs, they may need to allow for an increase in the length of the service interaction. If managers place top priority on decreasing the length of service interactions, COBs may be sacrificed, possibly reducing service quality.
Managers may be able to increase COBs with relatively little cost as compared to other changes aimed at improving service quality. Encouraging COBs through training, feedback, and incentives is likely to require much less investment, for example, than modifying technologies associated with service delivery or than handling frustrated or angry customers.

APPENDIX A
Quality Control Data Used by the Organization

Item 1: Representative utilizes appropriate opening.
Item 2: Representative utilizes appropriate voice tone and rate of speech.
Item 3: Representative exhibits courtesy.
Item 4: Representative demonstrates appropriate behavior.
Item 5: Representative utilizes proper hold/transfer technique.
Item 6: Representative uses customer’s name.
Item 7: Representative gives caller full attention.
Item 8: Representative assures customer/exhibits empathy.
Item 9: Representative communicates clearly.
Item 10: Representative determines issue/inquiry.
Item 11: Representative demonstrates passive listening/paraphrasing.
Item 12: Representative presents organization in a positive manner.
Item 13: Representative adheres to critical procedures.
Item 14: Representative verifies caller.
Item 15: Representative offers options for service resolution.
Item 16: Representative takes ownership of the situation.
Item 17: Representative takes appropriate steps.
Item 18: Representative processes action items.
Item 19: Representative provides correct information.
Item 20: Representative manages call efficiently.
Item 21: Representative summarizes actions to be taken.
Item 22: Representative acts on all service/sales opportunities.
Item 23: Representative offers further assistance.
Item 24: Representative utilizes appropriate closing.

APPENDIX B
Examples of Strings of Speech Identified as Customer Orientation Behaviors in the Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Call Number</th>
<th>Instance of COB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“... and if you hold on now, I’ll send a form so that your wife can add her social security number . . .”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“... OK, I’m not seeing that but I can process a request to reimburse it $20 for you . . .”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“... you should see it going back no later than May 16, and I’ll give you a reference number for this request; it’s 9880 . . .”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“... I’m not seeing the uh umm credit to the account, but what I’ll do is that I’ll make a request to credit the account for you . . .”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“... OK, what I need to do for you is send you a form so that XXX could add her social security number; I’m not showing that it is here on our system . . .”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>“... ma’am, even if you find it, you can’t use it anymore . . .”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>“... if you want, I can take a look to see if there was [sic] any withdrawals on it . . .”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>“... if you want, I can send you a form so we can put yours, your number on the file . . .”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>“... you should get the new card in about six business days, and the one that was lost will be canceled permanently . . .”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>“... they’ll send you that form; you’ll get that in approximately five business days; fill it out uh, and then sign it; mail it back . . .”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>“... we just have his, but I can send you a form so you can add yours, so that way you don’t have any problems in the future . . .”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NOTES

1. To retain confidentiality, all identifying information such as customers’ names, addresses, and account numbers were eliminated and replaced with XXX. However, this information was included in the measurements and analyses.

2. To retain authenticity, all quotes are reported verbatim from the transcripts of the calls, including repetitions, deliberations, and gaps in speech.

3. The emphasized text represents a string of speech coded as a customer orientation behavior.

4. A similar concept of interpersonal harmony was described by Farh, Zhong, and Organ (2004), but this work dealt with a somewhat different situation of relations among coworkers in the People’s Republic of China.

5. Call duration and text length were not completely correlated (i.e., the call with the most characters was not the longest call in terms of time), requiring the inclusion of both these measures separately.

6. The type of problem that motivated each call would be a natural control variable for this analysis. In the early stages of coding the data, we did attempt to code for the problems that motivated the customer to make the call. However, this task proved too complex to be handled within the scope of the present study. In part, this was because the organization lacked a clear typology of problems, and our search of the literature failed to identify guidelines for categorizing the different requests into distinct groups. In addition, as noted in the method section, there was great variation in the degree to which customers clearly expressed or even understood what they needed, with the issues ultimately resolved often diverging from the questions articulated by the callers. Coding this complexity would have required a separate and dedicated effort and would also have introduced a large number of variables into our analysis, more than could be handled, given our sample size.

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