The Role of Managers in Helping Frontline Staff Manage Deviant Customers

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INTRODUCTION
Statement of the Problem

Research on workplace incivility has concentrated on incivility sources within the organization with little focus on outside incivility sources, such as customers. Evidence clearly indicates that incivility is more prevalent among those outside the organization than those within thit. Moreover, the majority of employees often intermingle with customers more than they do with their colleagues and supervisors. An important observation is that external sources of workplace incivility contribute to stress among employees and has been linked to numerous negative outcomes for employees as well as the organization. In the service sector, it is common for employees to encounter rude and abusive customers since they have to adhere to the emotion expression guidelines that service-oriented organizations have established. Rude and abusive customers pose various problems for all organizations, and particularly service ones.

Evidence exists to illustrate the deleterious effect of rude and abusive customers. Harris and Daunt show that discourteous customers can negatively affect how other customers enjoy the service being offered, which can subsequently imact the organization in terms of the reduced sales. Customer incivility also has diverse effects on employees. According to Walker et al., customer incivility events can generate employee incivility because of the employees' general amassed impression of the incivility during their interactions with customers.

Employees' incivility is especially triggered among those who view customers to be less civil. Similar findings are documented by Harris and Daunt, who provided data on how customer misconduct affects managerial strategies, managers, and frontline employees. Harris and Daunt indicate that the impacts of customer misconduct during employee-customer interactions are attitudinal, cognitive, and physiological, which are associated with the key management challenges, including time expenditure, motivation and counselling, employee retention and recruitment, and conflicting pressures.

In another research, Hur, Moon, and Han highlight the negative outcomes associated with customer incivility on customer-oriented behaviors of service employees, which they attributed to emotional exhaustion and surface acting that makes them reduce their loyalty and effort to customers as a means of preventing them from losing additional emotional resources. Handling abusive customers is emotionally exhausting and demoralizing and can negatively affect the confidence and self-esteem of employees. Furthermore, the customers who abuse employees might also prompt employees to get revenge. The researchers also indicate service employees might be drawn to sabotaging abusive customers, such as placing customers on hold, providing slow service, or refusing to help them altogether. Similarly, Jin-Han, Bonn, and Cho provide evidence to show that customer incivility is positively linked to job burnout among frontline employees in the service sector. Their research also shows that customer rudeness is positively linked with turnover intention. In addition, Wilson reports significant relationships existing between customer incivility and overall psychological strain, job-related strain, turnover intentions, and job dissatisfaction. From these findings in the existing literature, it is evident that customer civility can worsen organizational outcomes.

Despite the negative effects of incivility, it is a problem that can be solved. Customer incivility is not an issue that an organization has to cope with. Walker et al argue that organizations do not have to wait until employees quit or become cynical. Instead, the management can intervene. Due to the pivotal role played by employees in ensuring that customers receive excellent service and contributing to the success of the organization, managers should help employees in recovering from the damage stemming for dysfunctional customer behavior. In this respect, the aim of this study is to investigate the role of supervisors in dysfunctional service encounters, and particularly how they intervene when customers display dysfunctional behaviors against the frontline staff in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Significance of the Problem

Customer incivility is a prevalent problem in service organizations, which negatively affects the organization, customers, and employees. Various authors have emphasized the need for the organizations' management to understand and devise ways of dealing with customer incivility. For instance, Walker et al. highlight the need for understanding customer civility by studying the incivility encounters, including their social contexts. Harris and Daunt also recommend that managers should perform an audit of customer misbehavior that focuses on the degree of customer misconduct and the procedures, systems, and mechanisms that the organization can use to identify, record and minimize the impacts of customer incivility. As a result, it is essential not only to have an understanding of the negative impacts of customer incivility but also the potential ways that are aimed at preventing these negative impacts. Organizations that do not effectively intervene in customer dysfunctional behaviors risk hurting their relationships with other customers they want to

retain Therefore, it is prudent for service organizations to develop suitable strategies aimed at lessening the exposure of employees to external sources of incivility.

The managerial significance of this research is evident. In this regard, the contribution of this research relates to how frontline employees and managers cope with and are affected by customer dysfunctional behavior. The insights provided in this research are valuable for supervisors whose employees encounter customer incivility, as well as management academicians who have an interest in contemporary customer-employee interactions. Therefore, this research will provide valuable insights regarding customer incivility and how managers can mitigate its occurrence and reduce the severity of incivility episodes by managing frontline employees. This research will also highlight the role that supervisors can intervene during customer incivility encounters.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this research:

1. How does experience in customer contact positions relate to employees' outcomes from an encounter with dysfunctional customers?

2. How does incident severity relate to employees' outcomes from an encounter with dysfunctional customers?

3. How does dysfunctional customer behavior relate to employees' outcomes from an encounter with dysfunctional customers?

4. What is the impact of different types of supervisor's intervention (non-monetary reward x public display versus non-monetary reward x private display) on the frontline staff who encounter dysfunctional customers?