Emotion work in Customer Service:

Take your emotions home with you?

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Abstract

Customer service employees often deal with emotions during a regular workday, ranging from demanding customers to difficult situations that they need to manage. Increasingly, customer service employees are working from home. However, so far there has not yet been a study on how teleworking affects customer service employees' emotion regulation. This study aimed to investigate how customer service employees cope with emotion regulation while teleworking. An interview study among service employees showed that teleworking impacted *intra*personal coping, because employees were creative to develop new coping strategies, physical and verbal coping at home in their increased feelings of autonomy. For *inter*personal coping, teleworking made the threshold higher to ask colleagues for social support and caused problems for receiving peer-initiated support. Finally, the types of microbreaks that employees took were different while teleworking, but it did not affect the effectiveness in regaining resources. This study highlights the importance of maintaining social contacts while teleworking between service employees and the need for an integrative approach for emotion work regulation in telework literature.

Keywords: Teleworking, customer service, coping strategies, perceived autonomy, social support

Introduction

Customer service can be a stressful job. Employees often have a high work pressure. On top of that, they are frequently the target of angry customers (Freshdesk, 2021), and can have days where there are only angry people calling (Van Bergeijk, 2020). This can make it hard on employees' emotions. Therefore, emotion work remains an important aspect in customer service jobs. Employees deal with negative emotions in their jobs and organizations demand employees to be able to regulate these emotions effectively (Lee & Madera, 2019). Hochschild (1983) introduced the concept of emotion work as the need to display specific emotions during service encounters. Research shows that emotion work is especially relevant for occupations that are often directly in contact with customers, since customers expect employees to display specific emotions when interacting with them (Grayson, 1998). Employees need to be able to communicate in an effective way with customers and display appropriate emotions towards clients.

Customer service is the bridge between organization and customers. They offer assistance and help with questions that customers might have (Amsler & Goss, 2021). Due to the nature of their job, customer service employees use emotion work more frequently, compared to other occupations (Opengart, 2005). Because customers usually approach organizations in case of problems and dissatisfaction, service employees are confronted daily with difficult situations of emotional nature while dealing with customers that can impact their own felt emotions. This can include positive interactions, but also scenarios with demanding, disappointed, sad, or even rude customers. Service employees increasingly experience interactions with demanding customers (Huang et al., 2019). Furthermore, service employees have to stick to a script because in all cases, customer service employees are expected to help customers with a positive attitude and thus show expected, positive expressions (Lee & Madera, 2019; Lee, 2021). Organizations often give employees guidelines on emotion expression when interacting with customers (Otiz-Bonnin et al., 2021). These display rules determine what kind of emotions employees should display in certain situations. The above-mentioned factors require emotion work from employees. According to the Conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) one's available resources determine how someone handles stressful or difficult situations. Constantly adjusting these felt emotions costs customer service employees' resources (Anaza et al., 2016) Therefore, it is important for service employees to have resources available to help customers in an effective manner in their work as service provider.

Employees have to be able to regulate their emotions both when working at the office and working from home, since organizations are increasing teleworking opportunities for customer service as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic (Ramachandran et al., 2020). Data from the USA shows that customer service is in the top 5 of jobs with the most teleworkers since the pandemic (Gaffney et al., 2021). However, not all occupations have tasks that are effectively performed remotely from home. Customer service tasks are often clerical in nature. These clerical tasks benefit from face-to-face communication and being physically present (Biron et al., 2022). Due to the remote distance, this may not be completely possible during teleworking. Thus, by teleworking, customer service employees might be impeded in their jobs due to the nature of their work (Ma, 2021), possibly impacting their ability to perform emotion work regulation. Therefore, it is important to further investigate the threats and opportunities of teleworking for jobs such as customer service. The effects of emotion work and emotion regulation have been investigated on the work floor. However, no study addressed how telework under customer service employees affects their emotion work.

According to Zapf et al. (2021) more research is needed on the role of emotion work in different work conditions. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, multiple organizations worldwide are planning to stimulate employees to work from home more in the future (Howe & Menges, 2021). That is why further research on this topic is needed, in order to investigate the effects of telework for organizations and employees and to provide possible solutions for encountered problems.

Therefore, this study will investigate the following research question: *"How do customer service employees cope with emotion work regulation while teleworking, when compared to working from the office?"*

Theoretical framework

Emotion work and service jobs

Customer service employees are the face of an organization (Jauhari et al., 2017) and are often in direct contact with customers (Wirtz & Jerger, 2016). Service employees have to manage their emotions during these service encounters, for example when dealing with demanding customers (Huang et al., 2019). The concept of emotion work was first introduced in 1983 by Hochschild. Hochschild (1983) introduced the concept of emotion work as the need to display specific emotions during service encounters. These displayed emotions should match the general expectation that customers have of an organization. Emotion work enables employees to manage customers' emotional responses and in turn, respond to these customers

in a professional way that is expected from them (Zapf et al., 2021). In order to perform emotion work, employees have to identify the emotions from the customers and display the correct emotions in response to that (Otiz-Bonnin et al., 2021). According to Hochschild (1983), jobs in frontline service positions specifically require emotion work. The term 'Emotional labor' is occasionally used to indicate jobs that demand emotion work and emotion work regulation (Lee, 2013). Emotion work benefits organizations (Hochschild, 1983), because providing satisfactory customer service gives organizations a competitive advantage (Groth et al., 2019). The search for improved customer service interactions has led to research on the interaction between customer service employees and customers (Gabriel et al., 2016). In this research, emotion work is often directly connected to customer service jobs (Bozionelos, 2016). Apart from organizational benefits, research shows that emotion work can also be beneficial for employees, such as for work-related wellbeing and need for recovery (Xanthopoulou et al., 2017).

Ones' ability to perform emotion work regulation depends on individual factors such as gender, affective traits, emotional expressivity and emotional intelligence, and organizational factors, such as job autonomy, supervisor support, co-worker support (Grandey & Melloy, 2017) and work pressure (Zapf et al., 2021). Organizations try to help employees with guidelines on emotion expression when interacting with customers (Otiz-Bonnin et al., 2021). They can set rules that determine what kind of emotions employees should display in certain situations. These display rules can hail from expectations of the organization itself, as well as cultural expectations and between employees themselves (Humphrey et al., 2008). Display rules focus on expressing positive- and suppressing negative emotions (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013). For example, organizations can have rules that require employees to keep smiling during customer encounters, no matter the situation. These rules, in combination with employees' individual characteristics and organizational factors, can affect how employees are able to regulate their emotions in customer interactions.

Emotion regulation strategies

Earlier research on emotion work identified two strategies that employees use to regulate their emotions: surface acting and deep acting (Hochschild, 1983). In surface acting, the employee modifies his or her expressed emotion, but the employee usually feels different emotions on the inside. This can cause a dissonance between the expressed and felt emotions, which might make the employee come across as insincere (Bozionelos, 2016; Zapf et al., 2021). Deep acting, on the other hand, is when the employee attempts to modify his felt

emotions, until they are in line with the expressed emotions. This can be accomplished by, for instance, cognitive reframing or by concentrating on things within a situation to make it appear more positive (Zapf et al., 2021).

Since employees must continuously monitor felt negative emotions and actively suppress their true emotions during surface acting, it causes high strain on employees (Grandey & Melloy, 2017). Over time, this may deplete resources (Yam et al., 2016). In general, surface acting is seen as more emotionally taxing than deep acting (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013; Xanthopoulou et al., 2017) and negatively affects job satisfaction (Yin et al., 2019). Deep acting is negatively related to exhaustion, when compared to surface acting (Xanthopoulou et al., 2017). Compared to no regulation, deep acting can still take effort from employees, as it requires cognitive and psychological costs (Webb et al., 2012), but it can also improve mood repair and emotional well-being (Grandey & Melloy, 2017). This can help employees regain their emotional resources (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002) Furthermore, deep acting can help increase employees' service performance (Luo et al., 2019). Therefore, employees often prefer deep acting over surface acting (Zapf et al., 2021).

Telework benefits and risks

Motives on why employees comply with emotion regulation is often linked to the workplace. Employees are instrumentally motivated to perform emotion regulation when working at the office (Von Gilsa et al., 2014). It is yet unknown if this is the case during teleworking. Telework refers to the ability for employees to work in different locations than the organization's office (Biron et al., 2022). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, companies were increasingly forced to let their employees work from home (Pant & Agarwal., 2020). This presented challenges, as well as possible benefits for both organizations and employees.

For organizations some of the telework benefits are straightforward, such as reduced costs due to less need for office space (Buomprisco et al., 2021). In general, managers have a positive attitude towards teleworking for employee performance (Criscuolo et al., 2021). However, managers note that it is more challenging to monitor and manage the performance of individual employees (Greer & Payne, 2014). It is more difficult for managers to keep an eye on their workers due to the physical distance between them. The increased difficulty in communication between employees might also disrupt knowledge flows within an organization, ultimately impacting the efficiency of employees (Criscuolo et al., 2021). Coordinating teamwork is another challenge for managers. Managers need to ensure that

workers are not distracted with non-work-related task and make required work-related resources available for workers (Greer & Payne, 2014).

Teleworking employees also experience difficulties with communication. The lack of closeness in working from a remote location, compared to the office might hinder communication and cause feelings of isolation. Telework is associated with feelings of isolation (De Macêdo et al., 2020). Remote-working individuals report less frequent mutual discussions between colleagues, when compared to employees on the workfloor (McNaughton et al., 2014). Collins et al. (2016) found that teleworking could lead to less social support under colleagues. For instance, teleworkers would not call their colleagues for support if they had not met face-to face before (Collins et al., 2016). In the same study, the researchers found that only half of the teleworkers contacted co-workers for social support, to discuss situations that happened during work.

Some of the negative impacts that employees might experience during teleworking can affect their stress. High workload, lack of involvement, low role consideration and absence of support from colleagues and managers can cause work-related stress (Buomprisco et al., 2021). These experiences of stress can have an impact on an individual's affective well-being. However, study shows that telework can also have a positive effect on individuals' well-being (Anderson et al., 2015). It allows a sense of control for workers, which can cause workers to experience a sense of autonomy and flexibility. This can have positive impacts of employees' motivation, organizational involvement, and satisfaction (Vayre, 2021). However, this increased sense of autonomy may also cause teleworkers to challenge current organizational norms because of their expected freedom when working from home and decreased feelings of managerial control (Sewell & Taskin, 2015).

Emotion work and telework effects on service jobs

The challenges and benefits of telework, along with the changing perceptions in the organization of work due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Contreras et al., 2020), may influence people's ability to perform emotion work in their jobs. Job-related stressors (Buomprisco et al., 2021) and lack of social support in service jobs (Roxana, 2013) may even endanger employees' emotion work ability (Grandey & Mellow, 2017; Zapf et al., 2021). Furthermore, Rudrum et al. (2022) suggests that managing boundaries between personal life and work can make feeling rules uncertain, creating incongruence between own feelings and expected behavior. This can result in pressure coming from performing different roles in the same place

(Rudrum et al., 2022). Thus, the above-mentioned struggles may influence customer service workers' emotion regulation (ability) while they work from home.

Method

Research design

This study aims to investigate how customer service employees' cope with their emotion regulation while teleworking, when compared to working at the office. To this end, qualitative data has been gathered through interviews with 15 customer service employees. For this approach was chosen, because there is still more data required on the effect of emotion work in different working conditions (Zapf et al., 2021). Because of the lack of data on this situation, interviews would allow customer service employees to explain their experiences on emotion work in their work situations and provide insights on this topic.

Participants

This study was conducted among participants in customer service jobs. The participants worked for at least 6 months in a customer service job at their current company. Two participants worked primarily from the office, while 13 participants worked in a hybrid setting. Another requirement was that participants had to have their primary form of communication with customers through telephone conversations. Participants were allowed to have other responsibilities in their daily work, as long as telephonic customer interactions was their key element in their daily work. Participants were selected to work in different branches of customer service, where they face demanding situations such as emotional customers or complex situations.

Participants were recruited through the professional network platform LinkedIn. Firstly, in groups aimed at customer service on LinkedIn, a general message was sent informing members of the study and asking for interest to participate. Secondly, professional customer service networks were used to contact team leaders of customer service teams in their network through a general post about the study on their LinkedIn profile. Lastly, individual customer service team leaders were approached in various groups informing them of the study and asking them to provide participants within their organization.

In total, 16 customer service employees were interviewed in this study. However, one participant did not meet the requirements set by the researcher by not having telephonic contact with customers as a key element in their daily work. Therefore, a total of 15 interviews were used in this study. The participants came from a total of 5 different

companies in 4 different customer service branches. Two companies were in the funeral care branch, one company in the leisure industry, one company in the business-to-business technology branch, and one company in the mortgage bank sector. Each company provided 1 to 5 employees to participate in this study. More details about the participants are found in Table 1. From the 15 participants of the study, eight were female (53.3%) and seven were male (46.6%). The participants had a mean age of working experience at their current company of 5.93 years (SD= 6.34), one participant having the least experience with one year and one participant with the most work experience of 22 years. 13 participants were currently working in a hybrid situation, while two participants were currently working from the office. Out of the 13 participants working in a hybrid setting, the majority (69.2%) indicated that they are working mostly from home. Only one participant (7.7%) works more from the office. Two participants (15.4%) spend equal days at the office or at home. And finally, one participant (7.7%) indicated that it varies per week. When asked about the total number of telephonic customers on an average workday, three participants stated that they could not attach a number to that. In total, the number of average customers spoken to by participants on the telephone per day lies between five and 80.

Table 1

List of customer service employees that participated in this study

Nr	Gender	Company	Company branch	Experience at company (in years)	Current work situation	Average daily telephonic customers
1	Male	Company 1	Funeral care	1.5 years	Office (3 days)	50-70
2	Female	Company 2	Leisure industry	2 years	Hybrid (3 home, 2 office)	25-30
3	Female	Company 3	B2B technology	10 years	Hybrid (3 home, 2 office)	5-10
4	Female	Company 3	B2B technology	16 years	Hybrid (3 home, 2 office)	-
5	Female	Company 3	B2B technology	10 years	Hybrid (3 home, 2 office)	8
6	Male	Company 2	Leisure industry	2 years	Hybrid (2 home, 2 office)	-
7	Female	Company 2	Leisure industry	3 years	Hybrid (2 home, 2 office)	25-60
8	Female	Company 2	Leisure industry	1.5 years	Hybrid (2 home, 1/2 office)	20
9	Female	Company 5	Funeral care	10 years	Office	80
10	Male	Company 3	B2B technology	22 years	Hybrid (2 home, 3 office)	-
11	Female	Company 4	Mortgage bank	2 years	Hybrid (3/4 home, 1/2 office)	15-30
12	Male	Company 4	Mortgage bank	2 years	Hybrid (3/4 home, 1/2 office)	30-40
13	Male	Company 4	Mortgage bank	1 year	Hybrid (3/4 home, 1/2 office)	10-30
14	Female	Company 4	Mortgage bank	2 years	Hybrid (2 home, 1 office)	15-40
15	Male	Company 4	Mortgage bank	4 years	Hybrid (4 home, 1 office)	20-30

Procedure

Upon agreeing to participate in the study, participants were sent an information letter (Appendix A), informing them of the purpose of the study and explaining what is expected from them. The information letter also asked participants for their consent on recording the interview and explained that the recordings are only used by the researcher to transcribe the interviews and that only the researcher and supervisors would have access to the interview transcriptions. Prior to conducting the interview, participants were again verbally asked for their consent on recording the interview.

The interviews were conducted through Zoom, Microsoft Teams or by telephone, depending on participants' availability and preferences. The interviews lasted between 40

minutes and one hour. These interviews took place between 9th of May and 20th of May 2022. The interviews were semi-structured and participants were interviewed by the means of an interview guide. This interview guide was divided into separate topics. The complete interview guide is found in Appendix B. At the start of the interview, general questions were asked in order to get an insight in the participants' situation. The next themes were about their strategies in conversations with customers. Furthermore, participants were asked about their coping strategies on emotion regulation. Participants were asked to voice their own experiences on the topics and to clarify their answers when needed. The audio of the interview was recorded, and the researcher made notes throughout the interview.

Data analysis

The audio recordings of the interviews were used by the researcher to transcribe the interviews. The dictate function in Microsoft Word was used as a tool to facilitate this process. After transcribing the interviews, the researcher checked the transcriptions for grammatical errors.

For coding the data, grounded in data coding was performed. From the first transcribed interviews, potential codes were written down. These were then converted into a coding scheme. After this, all transcriptions were imported in the computer software Atlas.TI and the coding scheme was applied to the interviews. The coding scheme was then refined whenever new recurring categories emerged from the data. The results were then grouped into themes. From the data, 2 main themes were found. The first theme included work experiences, which had categories including: customer interaction experiences, home experiences, and office experiences (all with subcategories). The second theme was coping strategies, including categories that indicated the different types of coping such as: intrapersonal, interpersonal service provider and customers, interpersonal home service provider and peers, interpersonal office service provider and peers, interpersonal service provider and leader support, and microbreaks. As with the first theme, each category has subcategories. The complete coding scheme can be found in Appendix C. The data was then analyzed through an inductive thematic analysis, where the main findings were reported based on the themes that emerged from the data.

Results

The data analysis resulted in two themes that are related to the research question. The first theme is work experience. This first theme gives context on how customer service employees experience their work both from home and from the office. This information is needed to understand how and why employees cope with emotions at home and at work. The second theme, coping strategies, will answer the research question by reporting how employees cope with their emotions and how their work situation impacts these coping strategies. The identified coping strategies are *intra*personal, *inter*personal, and microbreaks. These help employees to regain resources after a demanding situation.

Sentiment in customer conversations

Overall, the participants claim to usually have positive customer conversations in their daily work. This is especially true for participants working at company 2, in the leisure industry. All four participants working for company 2 experienced these positive customer interactions.

> The fun thing about the sector that we work in, is that it is a fun topic… So usually when a customer calls it is always about something fun, unless something goes wrong of course… Customers feel members of our company and you notice that very much in the conversations. (participant 2, company 2, female)

In other branches, participants suggested that it is not necessarily the topic that can make customer conversations pleasant, but also other aspects that can lead to positive conversations.

> Most customers I have known for years. Of course, I get new customers over the years, but by mailing and having telephonic conversations, you build a personal relation with them. (participant 3, company 3, female)

> If I look at death notices, in 8 of the 10 cases you get people that are a bit further away from the situation. A son-in law or daughter-in law that calls or a granddaughter that calls because grandma passed away. Or they call a bit later… So often, the heated side has cooled down before the conversation. (participant 9, female)

However, all 15 participants have experienced negative conversations at least once in the last years. Negative conversations could come from the customer side, for instance if they were angry, made a situation personal to the employee or brought in a sad topic. The attitude of the customer service employee could also influence this, if they empathized with the customer or not and how much they seemed to care about the situation. Lastly, the organization also played a role, for instance when they made a fault that impacted customers and service employees had to solve this.

Sometimes you have that someone's 15-year-old son passes away. Cardiac arrest, so completely unexpected. Totally random. Then you have a father on the phone, without intonation, without something of emotions because he has to do a death notice while being crushed with remorse. (participant 1, company 1, male)

Differences in work experience at home when compared to the office

Participants who work at home felt freer to organize their own time during work. 13 participants expressed that they enjoyed this benefit of teleworking. Particularly, they felt that they managed their own time around work better. This lied in the lack of travel time to work and them being able to use that time in a way that they saw fit, for instance going to the gym before work instead of traveling to the office. This gave participants more relaxed feelings when they were able to start the day at their own pace. However, nine participants experienced more freedom during worktime as well. As in Mehrabian and Russell (1974), participants felt not as restricted when working from home to partake in activities that they would not usually partake in, such as home chores, grocery shopping, private phone calls, and care activities. Participants appreciated this flexibility, with one participant who stated that it also gave her tranquility in her work. There was one participant who appreciated the fact that she could find her own preferred rhythm at home by selecting her own work hours for the extra tasks that she has in her work.

It does not matter if I work from 7 to 4 or from 10 to later. I can always log in during the evening. I often do that… You work more and be more focused, at least I can say that for myself when I work from home. Because of your own classification of time, you are more in a flow so to say. (participant 5, company 3, female)

Furthermore, while working from home, participants felt more informal and able to be their true self more. The participants felt more familiar, since they were at their own desk with their own items in sight. Furthermore, two participants indicated that their more casual clothing style when working from home impacts these feelings of informality. Three participants noticed that they felt that they could be less formal at home because other than at the office, they did not have the feeling that they were being watched by fellow colleagues during their work. While on the work floor, people often follow behavior and norms set by other peers within their social group, according to the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977).

Two participants felt more comfortable to change to a less formal tone that they preferred within customer conversations, because they felt freer while working at home. These differences were in the tone of voice that participants used to address customers or end the service encounter.

I know how I should handle conversations, but I do it my own way because I prefer it or because I feel in a conversation that the other person would prefer that as well. Or at least displays such a tone, a bit more informal. And then would find it pleasant if you do not respond too businesslike. I think that I can feel that very well in a conversation. And I feel more free at home to apply that. (participant 6, company 2, male)

Two participants experienced a higher workload when they were working from home, because they expected to be busy when working from the office and did not have that feeling while working from home. This difference in workload anticipation could impact employees' emotional strain as anticipating workload beforehand could make employees motivated to conserve their resources (DiStaso & Shoss, 2020). However, other participants noted that because of the nature of their work, they could manage the workload the same from home as from the office. After all, participants suggested that they can only answer one phone call at the same time and when the lines closed at the end of the day, their work was usually finished.

Differences between home and office in social interactions

All 15 participants appreciated contact with colleagues. At home they missed for example, chatting with them, getting coffee in breaks or lunch together. Whenever they contacted colleagues from home, it was usually work-related and not for social small talk. They had to be pro-active themselves to facilitate this need for social contact when working from home, such as participants from company 2, who admitted that they would call or connect though Microsoft Teams with colleagues from time to time.

When it is not busy, we look at who is in the phone line and try to call each other. And when you see that you get an incoming call, we hang up and take that call. (participant 7, company 2, female)

However, not all participants did this, even when they had the opportunity. Overall, participants noted that, when teleworking, they had less social contact with colleagues. Especially with colleagues that they did not know well. This also caused feelings of being less connected to the organization as a whole. While working from the office, the barrier to chat with others was less present. Phoning a colleague for a social chat was seen as a barrier by two participants. While teleworking, companies tried to facilitate social contact in several ways. Such as company 2 which had a daily group chat with everyone who worked that day. And company 4 which had day starts with the team.

Office experience differences when compared to teleworking

11 participants explained that working from the office could be quite noisy, when there were many colleagues present at the same time. Participants from company 1, 2, 3 and 4 had similar experiences in this. Only the participant from company 5 praised her office workspace, by saying that she could focus well there. Company 5 keeps 1.5-meter distance between workspaces and has screens in between them to manage the acoustics. Because of the external stimuli present at the office, participants thought that it could be harder to focus on conversations with customers when compared to their quieter home work space. Especially when many colleagues were present at the same day. Although one participant thought that this could also be a result of being used to working from home for a long time because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

> What I notice, and that is because you are all sitting in the same workspace here… maybe that has to do with being isolated for two years. The noisy workspace. That is something I sometimes find difficult, but that is perhaps also a matter of getting used to it again by going more to the office. That I decide because of that to just work from home, where I can work focused in all quietness. (participant 15, company 4, male)

Experienced emotions during work

The majority of participants claimed that they manage emotional conversations at home in the same way as in the office. They see their conversations as independent from their work setting.

> I think you perform your job always at a certain way. And if your laptop is home, at the office or in a quiet room in the car shop whenever it needs a periodic inspection, does not matter for me. I do not really see a difference in where I perform my job. Or that I would handle customers in a different way. (participant 10, company 3, male)

14 participants regularly encounter emotions during their customer service jobs and gave several reasons for this. Participants mostly experienced angry or frustrated feelings towards unreasonable or angry customers.

> I notice for myself that I can get frustrated by customers who are in an annoying situation and try to make it personal. So that they try to blame me or someone else… I get the idea that they create a problem that I cannot solve for them. That makes me irritated as well. (participant 11, company 4, female)

Other emotions that participants named were sadness, nervousness, and disappointment. The main reason why they felt these emotions was because of the attitude from the customer within the conversation, difficult topics discussed during customer interactions, including mistakes from the company that employees might also felt ownership for. Employees

generally try to suppress their own feelings during these difficult conversations, expressing surface acting which costs a high strain (Grandey & Melloy, 2017) that might drain employees resources (Yam et al., 2016).

Participants overall did not experience the emotions during conversations with customers in a different way at home than at the office. But what they did notice is that they experienced these emotions more frequently at the end of a day or when they had multiple (negative) conversations beforehand. Experiencing a form of resource depletion that affected subsequent encounters (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000).

Coping strategies

Service employees used various coping strategies whenever they had a difficult conversation with a customer or experienced emotions by themselves. These coping strategies are divided in this report between strategies that participants did among themselves personally (intrapersonal coping, including mental-, physical- and verbal coping), strategies that require the presence of other individuals, such as peers or leaders (interpersonal coping) and strategies based on distancing oneself from the location that the event took place (microbreaks). In each strategy will be discussed if and how teleworking impacted the use of these strategies.

Intrapersonal coping

Mental coping

All participants mentioned using some form of mental coping, which are activities performed in the mind that lower the mental strain of felt emotions (Folkman, 2013). In general, this study found four mental coping strategies among participants, as displayed in Table 2. Participants used these mental coping strategies as often during teleworking as in the office.

Table 2

Mental coping strategies among customer service employees

Mental coping strategies	No. of participants displaying the strategy
Reframing	8
Detachment	9
Mental exercises	5
Cognitive reappraisal	3

The first mental coping strategy is a reframing strategy. For this strategy, participants thought about other things or could think back positively on the events that happened, to focus again on the new conversation. The most frequently mentioned experience by participants is that whenever they dealt with a demanding situation, in their next service encounter it is likely to be a pleasant interaction again. Or two participants who would take a minute to boost themselves up and put a smile on their face before they pick up the next phone. Participants suggested that it helps them deal with their emotions, because they were always busy with a new service encounter.

> If I notice that things don't go the way I want, I boost myself before the next conversation. Let's make this conversation a pleasant one. And 9 out of 10 times that works. (participant 14, company 4, female)

The next identified mental coping strategy was detachment (Erickson, 2004). This strategy was focused on creating mental distance between the situation and the participants themselves during situations. For instance, participants when confronted with an angry customer would not take criticism during a conversation personally. Additionally, after conversations, participants thought to themselves that they did everything they could. That helped them to put their own emotions about the situation at ease. By not getting too much personally involved in these situations, they protected themselves from experiencing further emotions and were able to continue in their work.

> I remember that it is not about me, because I cannot do anything about what happened… So, I usually try to think that the problem is not on my side. That the customer is not angry at me, but at the fact that they cannot get a mortgage for example. (participant 12, company 4, male)

However, not all participants were able to detach themselves from the situation effectively. One participant found it difficult to let go of a situation whenever it happened and explained that she experienced that more when working from home than at the office. This caused her tiredness whenever she could not succeed in detaching herself at the end of the day.

> I find it difficult. And that makes me tired whenever I cannot let go of it and put things to rest at the end of the day. Tomorrow another day, but I still keep thinking about what I still can do or should have done differently. And I have that more at home than at the office, that I stay in those thoughts longer. (participant 4, company 3, female)

The third mental coping strategy were mental exercises that participants would perform at the end of conversations to clear their thoughts and calm themselves down. These could be exercises that participants themselves came up with. For instance, two participants who would count to 10 whenever they would feel angry emotions coming up within

themselves. One participant admitted meditating to clear her thoughts. Two other participants referred to workshops that they received from their respective company (company 3) with mindfulness training that they could use to relieve the emotions. These participants found it an added benefit to have this coping mechanism in their toolbox.

> Those are things that you need to remember and use. Because many of those exercises only take 5 minutes. Come on, no one is going to miss you in those 5 minutes. And you can do them behind your desk as long as you close your eyes. (participant 4, company 3, female)

The final mental coping strategy was a cognitive reappraisal strategy, as discussed by Gross (2002). In this strategy, participants themselves would look back on the conversation and use it as a learning opportunity to see how they could improve for themselves in subsequent encounters. Sometimes they listened back to the conversation afterwards. This helped them to understand themselves on what caused the conversation to go in a bad direction, and if it was caused by the customer being unreasonable or something the participant themselves misjudged. This helped the participants in letting the unpleasant experience and felt emotions rest.

> We can listen back to all conversations, so often times I listen back to them. That you can see if it was on me, or the customer, or neither because it was just a bad conversation. Then I take care to listen back to it and check with myself if I could have done something differently. But when a customer is unreasonable, you can jump high or low, but you cannot change anything about it. But it is quite educational. (participant 2, company 2, female)

Physical coping

For one participant, physical body movements in her workplace helped her to cope with the emotions. She specifically mentioned shaking out her body to deal with emotions or even dancing in her workplace. She only used this type of coping at home and not in the office.

> I sometimes take a 5-minute break and just dance. You know, get those emotions out. And that is not possible at the office. Or you could, but I do not know (laughs) how others would react to that. So, I find it easier to do at home. (participant 5, company 3, female)

Verbal coping

One participant used verbal coping. As with physical coping, this was mostly used at home by the participant. In this coping strategy, the participant would loudly curse after a demanding conversation has ended.

When the conversation is over, you can throw out what you want from the conversation. You sometimes get frustrated… At home I could more easily throw it out. I would not do that soon when I am at the office. (participant 3, company 3, female)

Interpersonal coping

Interpersonal service employee and peers

For interpersonal coping strategies, the most mentioned strategy was social support from peers. Social support includes feelings that someone is being cared for and can receive help whenever needed (Taylor, 2011). There are numerous differences between working from home and working from the office in this coping strategy, both in how employees could receive the social support (actively sought out support or support initiated from peers) and the effectiveness of the support.

Sought out support. All 15 participants indicated that in their work, they sometimes sought out support from peers. At the office, this support usually came from colleagues, while at home participants also named spouses or friends as potential sources for seeking social support. At the office, participants experienced asking for social support as an easy thing to do. They could either walk physically to the person that they wanted support from, or discussed it with colleagues who were working near them. The benefit of being physically present together at the same place was that participants could contact others directly and got the support that they were looking for instantly. This could be in between conversations, or during conversations.

Working at the office is fun, and it is a bit easier. If you have, for example, a question or you have a difficult conversation and you don't really know what to do with it, you can say: "Can I put you on hold for a second? I will ask a colleague." That is much easier to do at the office, because you can physically see who are in a conversation and who are not. (participant 1, company 1, male)

Participants noted that they asked for social support among peers more when they were working from the office. Because the threshold to ask something was lower, they did it more often. Both for informational support as for emotional support.

For sought support while teleworking, because of the physical distance between employees, participants used tools such as calling with their telephone, using Microsoft Teams or WhatsApp to get support from colleagues. Thus, participants had to show more initiative to get social support from peers when working from home. 6 participants admitted that they felt a threshold to contact colleagues while teleworking. At least one participant

from each of the partially teleworking companies experienced this. These feelings of threshold came from various sources while teleworking. Participants found it difficult to call someone, because they experienced it as having to do an extra action. While at the office they could just quickly interact with a nearby-seated colleague. However, employees who had good relationships between them found it easier to call colleagues. For instance, multiple participants from company 2 indicated having good relationships with coworkers and found it easier to call them for support. Furthermore, participants did not want to interrupt colleagues in their work and found it harder to judge for themselves if their call for support was suited in their coworkers' schedule while teleworking. That came from not being able to see what their colleagues were doing at the time.

> That is a threshold that I need to cross. When I walk around at the office, I can see who is calling and who is not. Then I can just walk towards them and do not have to interrupt their activities. (participant 14, company 4, female)

Participants also experienced that it could take longer to get the support that they needed when working from home. The person that they were trying to reach could be shortly away from their workplace or would not pick up immediately. While at the office, they could chat with coworkers near them and get the information or emotional support that they needed. However, participants explained that this could also take place when they were working from the office together, if colleagues were on a break for example.

6 participants mentioned that they noticed that they sought less social support from peers when working from home when compared to the office. At home they would only contact employees whenever they experienced that their emotions were running very high after an unpleasant customer interaction. One participant also thought her personality influenced this.

> If you want, you always have the possibility to call each other. So, in that regard it is arranged well. But maybe that is because I am also a loner in that regard. (employee 7, company 2, female)

Peer initiated support. When working from home, all participants noticed that there was no initiated social support from colleagues. In the office, whenever participants had a difficult conversation, they mentioned that other employees who sat near them would notice that and afterwards start a conversation about the situation. Or that participants could send out non-verbal signs during a difficult conversation that coworkers could pick up to support them. At home, because of the distance, this type of initiated support was not possible and could cause employees to be stuck in their emotions longer. Only the participants' personal network

at home, if they happened to be home as well, could take over this role and provide initiated support. Participants had mixed feelings about support from peers other than their colleagues, with one participant who explained that after she had discussed a situation with her boyfriend, she would also discuss it later with a colleague because they would understand the situation better.

Effectiveness peer support. Peers gave two types of support (Schaefer, Coyne & Lazarus, 1981): emotional support and informational support. For emotional support, participants vented their emotions to peers about a situation that occurred. They could tell their story to others and receive recognition from their peers. This took away the emotions that the participants felt and helped them continue in their job duties. Overall, participants experienced this emotional support as pleasant whenever they needed it. Informational support included practical information about for instance, the systems that participants had questions about. Another dimension of the informational support was asking for feedback by peers whenever they encountered a demanding situation, to receive input on how they could improve for next encounters. These feedback moments with peers also helped putting their emotions to rest and give them self-confidence as one participant described to prepare for the next encounters.

Being at the office benefitted how participants experienced the effectiveness of these social support types. Participants appreciated that they could have face-to face contact here, making it more personal. Because peers were able to see their emotions during the conversation, it was easier to discuss their feelings, as one participant experienced.

> Face-to-face has of course more impact, because you can see someone, and they can see my emotion… I think face-to-face makes that easier to discuss my feelings…. That gives me a better feeling and usually I can process it then. (participant 13, company 4, male)

At home, two participants tried to get the same personal contact by using the camera on Microsoft Teams during peer social support. That made the support more effective for them, when compared to chatting or calling on the phone. Using chat functions within Microsoft Teams or WhatsApp while teleworking did not help the participants as much to cope with their emotions. Even if colleagues replied on the message in a compassionate way, it was not effective for participants, when compared to the face-to face contact that they could get at the office. Also not having peers immediately available while teleworking to provide support

caused participants to sometimes keep hanging in their emotions longer after a demanding situation.

Interpersonal support between service employee and leader

Participants indicated that they usually did not need this type of support in their daily work, because they would rather go to colleagues and that they experienced no differences when working from home or at the office for this. Only one participant indicated that she found it easier to contact her supervisor at the office rather than having to call him from home. Eight participants said that they would contact their supervisor if a situation would go out of control. For instance, whenever something is going on in the participants' personal life that affects their emotional state. Or whenever a customer conversation caused heavy emotions to arise, they could contact their direct supervisor. Another type of leader support was receiving feedback. Company 1 and company 4 had special feedback moments where either conversations were listened back with the participants or periodical conversations were planned to check how employees within the organization were doing emotionally.

Microbreaks

The third coping strategy was employees taking microbreaks from their job to create some form of distance between themselves and the workspace. These microbreaks can have short-term effects on the well-being of employees and help them regain resources (Zacher et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2018). Participants used this strategy both at home and at the office. In total, 14 participants took regular microbreaks in their work.

Most types of microbreaks were the same in both situations, such as going to get a drink, smoking a cigarette, or going for a walk. The exclusive microbreaks at home were usually home chores, such as cleaning up, doing laundry. On the other hand, exclusive office microbreaks were focused on colleagues. For instance, chatting with each other, going for a walk together or going to the coffee machine. Participants mentioned no differences in effectiveness between office microbreaks and home microbreaks. However, two participants indicated that they did take more microbreaks at home. They felt more flexible to take those breaks than at the office. On the other hand, two participants felt the opposite. They did not take as many micro breaks at home when compared to the office.

> I want to let others know that I am working all the time. I feel guilty when I shortly run upstairs to do laundry… But turning on the washing machine does not take a long time. And still a feel a bit guilty. (participant 4, company 3, female)

Another coping strategy that helped participants to create a distance between their usual work and themselves was task variety. Here, participants would switch between different responsibilities in their jobs, other than telephone services. This variety can help facilitate microbreaks and let employees recover resources (Meijer, 2022). For task variety, no differences were found in the data between teleworking and working from the office.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to investigate how customer service employees cope with emotion work regulation while teleworking, when compared to the office. The present study contributes to the literature on customer service work by investigating how teleworking affects the work experiences of customer service employees, and their emotion regulation in particular. The results showed that participants had positive experiences of teleworking and overall, experienced no differences in the conversations themselves while teleworking. However, telework differs from office work in at least two ways. First, increased autonomy impacted *intra*personal coping and microbreaks, such that employees used physical and verbal coping as new *intra*personal coping strategies while teleworking and that they felt freer to take microbreaks at home, when compared to the office. Second, less contact with peers during teleworking impacted *inter*personal coping and microbreaks. Participants experienced a threshold to ask for support at home, and peer-initiated support was hindered because of the physical distance. The physical distance between employees also changed the types of microbreaks that employees took, which in the office was focused on colleagues and at home on household chores.

Although the literature suggests that negative service interactions are increasing (Huang et al., 2019; Baker & Kim, 2018), the sample in this study shows that participants in general had positive interactions in their work. There were negative interactions that were emotionally taxing for employees. These came from customers who were angry, sad, brought in a difficult topic, or tried to make the problem personal. Furthermore, the attitude of the customer service employee had an impact on how much they cared about the situation or empathized with the customer. Lastly, the organization played a role, such as when service employees had to solve a fault from the organization that impacted customers. Where negative customer interactions costs service employees' emotional resources, which may lead to the depletion of resources (Groth & Grandey, 2012), positive interactions appeared to have a positive effect on employees' resources. This can be explained with the job demands-resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001). Positive interactions gave employees new energy or

motivation to look forward to new situations and this helped them compensate their resources whenever a difficult situation came up.

Benefits that participants experienced during teleworking, such as reduced commuting and less distractions when working from home, have been identified in general telework literature (Laumer & Maier, 2021), along with a greater perceived autonomy (Anderson et al., 2015; Laumer & Maier, 2021). These teleworking benefits influenced how customer service employees experienced their work situation and feelings in their job. Because of the physical distance, teleworkers are more independent in their work (Vayre, 2021), and employees can use this freedom to reshape traditional workspace norms with their own personal norms. It may impact their conversations with customers, by switching to a more informal tone when working from home. This has the potential danger of threatening the overall consistent service delivery, with teleworkers who are behaving more informal, compared to employees who work from the office.

For coping strategies, the increased perceived autonomy had a positive impact on fostering new coping strategies while teleworking, drawing on previous studies that teleworking can favor creativity because it helps employees to think independently (Vega et al., 2015). For instance, the intrapersonal coping strategies of physical coping and verbal coping that were identified under participants while teleworking, showed that the experienced freedom gave service employees new ways to craft their own preferred coping strategies whenever faced with a challenging situation. Such as dancing around the home office with music after an angry customer. This shows that employees can be resilient in finding ways to cope, even while teleworking. The increased freedom in teleworking may also have a negative effect on employees' coping. For participants, it proved to be a danger to their emotional resources while teleworking, because they found it harder to detach themselves from a negative encounter and continue thinking about what they could do to fix a situation. For instance, when employees feel responsible for a situation, they might decide to use their resources to provide a pleasant service for the customer (Kim et al., 2012). During teleworking, employees have the danger to demand too many of their resources to provide this pleasant service, which hinders them in future conversations because they have drained their resources. At the office, colleagues can step in to provide social support by talking about the situation with the employee to help them get closure. This can help the employee to manage their resources (Jolly et al., 2021).

The results also showed that social contact with colleagues impacted how employees experienced their work and influenced their coping strategies. The current study is consistent

with previous research that teleworking causes employees to have less mutual discussions and contact moments with colleagues (McNaughton et al., 2014), and that this hurts social support among employees (Collins et al., 2016). This social support was especially important for employees who had an emotional conversation. Furthermore, this study showed that customer service employees were affected in their coping strategies that involved interpersonal peer support in different ways. Participants experienced a threshold to contact colleagues when working from home. Employees asking for help is often linked to the costs someone associates with seeking help (Lee, 2002). During teleworking, these costs are higher, because employees lack the information if their call for help is appreciated (Golden & Schoenleber., 2014). For instance, they find it difficult to judge if they would interrupt colleagues. The expected benefits for help seeking could also be lower, since according to the media richness theory (Daft & Lengel., 1984) other media might be considered lean when compared to the rich face-to-face communication that employees are used to in the office.

Furthermore, peer-initiated support from colleagues was in most cases not possible because of the physical distance between employees. In the office, non-verbal cues activated colleagues to provide support. At home, employees' personal network of spouses, friends or family could take over this role to give emotional support. However, for informational support, they might not be equipped to provide this need, because they do not have the right information at their disposal when compared to colleagues. Since social support could ease the feelings of stress and negative emotions that employees might experience (Jolly et al., 2021) and refill employees' resources (Ten Brummelhuis et al., 2012), these difficulties could affect service employees' resources and ability to perform emotion regulation while teleworking. Customer service employees are more reliant on themselves to facilitate their need for social support among peers, compared to the office.

The difference in social contact among colleagues while teleworking, along with the increased autonomy also impacted the final identified coping strategy in the data, microbreaks. However, interestingly, this did not impact the perceived effectiveness of employees' microbreaks. The only described difference was in the types of microbreaks that employees took, which in the office was focused on colleagues and at home on household chores. Employees who feel not as restricted as in the office (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) might find it easier to take these microbreaks during teleworking. In contrast, teleworking employees who feel more surveilled are less inclined to take breaks (Fonner & Stache, 2012).

Strengths, limitations, and suggestions

This study has several strengths, as well as a few limitations. Firstly, this is a qualitative study aimed at customer service employees. It shows that there are new insights to discover within the context of this target group. Especially, since this study shows that teleworking among customer service jobs, as far as employees are concerned, is here to stay, which makes gathering insights in the differences between the work conditions important. Another strength is that this study included participants from multiple different organizations and branches in customer service, although there can be customer service employees in other organizations who might have even more demanding issues in their daily work. Generally, this study had a diverse sample of participants who dealt with a wide range of customers and topics within the customer interactions.

For limitations, when recruiting participants, team leaders were contacted to invite employees for the interviews. The team leaders were informed of the inclusion criteria and asked employees within their teams to participate. It is possible that team leaders preselected employees who, for instance, already had a positive attitude towards the company and their jobs. This could have had an influence on the results of the study. Furthermore, it is possible that participants gave socially desirable answers during the interviews. Social desirability bias is more present in studies that investigate sensitive or controversial situations where there might be widely accepted norms in the behavior (Grimm, 2010). Participants could have downplayed their experiences during the interviews if they believed that experiencing emotions in their jobs is behavior that is not in line with the norms set by colleagues. Another factor that facilitates social desirability bias is the perceived risk of disclosing sensitive information (Krumpal, 2013). To counter this, in the information letter and before the interviews were conducted, the researcher explained to the participants that the data will be processed anonymously and that their names, as well as the names of their companies, will not be mentioned in the report.

Scholars should keep these limitations in mind for future research by for instance, using different qualitative methods of research such as diary studies. This type of study can provide a more detailed understanding how customer service employees cope with a demanding situation directly after it happened, instead of employees having to recall these cases. Furthermore, research could test how perceived freedom among teleworking customer service employees impacts coping in a larger sample. For instance, would obliging employees to come to the office together on certain days be beneficial for social support and how would this threaten the perceived autonomy of employees? It could be interesting to investigate this

among employees within one company in different working conditions (from office, teleworking and in a hybrid setting). Future research should also investigate the role of social support and perceived social contact with fellow employees, as the results showed that this is important in how service employees experience their emotions and emotions regulation. Finally, future research could also draw on the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), to investigate if customer service employees deplete their emotional resources differently between the different work conditions. In the job demands-resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001), the distinction is made between workplace resources and personal resources. However, as this study shows, the unique home situation can have an effect on employees' demands and resources. It can provide resources that service employees can use for their emotion regulation during work or give extra demands that employees' need to handle. That is why scholars should look at how the home situation can influence the demands and resources of individuals in an integrative approach for emotion work regulation when employees work from home. This would enable valuable insights in how customer service employees' emotional resources could best be managed when teleworking.

Implications

The goal of this study was to see how teleworking affects service employees, specifically in their emotion regulation. This study addressed the gap in the literature, by showing that teleworking affects customer service employees in their coping strategies, giving them increased feelings of autonomy and causing them to experience social contact among colleagues in a different way. While this study showed that customer service employees could be resilient when teleworking to come up with new alternative ways of coping to regain resources, this perceived autonomy could also be a potential danger when employees behave too independent. This could be solved by not letting employees work completely from home, so that they stay close to the organizational norms that exist in the office.

The organization could help employees who indicate that they lack the skills to develop their emotional intelligence, because it can be a skill to learn (Slaski & Cartwright, 2002), as long as employees are intrinsically motivated to develop their emotional intelligence skills (Serrat, 2017). The organization can provide training in intrapersonal coping. This would give employees tools to help them cope in any work situation. These training opportunities could also be provided in group form with colleagues, to strengthen mutual bonds and stimulate social contact among employees. Organizations can also consider emotional intelligence as an important aspect in the recruitment process (Kim, Yoo, et al.,

2012), as individuals who possess a high emotional intelligence are more capable to manage their emotions and they might be able to learn other employees to cope with their emotions more effectively. These employees who display a high emotional intelligence could lead regular intervisions in small groups, in which demanding situations are explored which can help employees receive closure.

Social support is one of the most valuable resources that individuals process at work (Jolly et al., 2021). However, teleworking could make interpersonal peer support more difficult among colleagues. Therefore, it is important that employees keep a strong connection to their colleagues while teleworking, to keep the threshold to ask for assistance low. This is especially important for new employees, who are still unfamiliar with their colleagues. These new employees should only be allowed to telework, after an initial period where they worked from the office completely and when they are familiar with their colleagues and the organizational norms. The organization can assist in this process by motivating all employees to come to the office together at least on certain days. During teleworking, the organization could also provide employees with a (virtual) room on the preferred communication platform (for instance Microsoft Teams). Employees could use this room for easy access to support and to have a standard meeting room where they can go to for social chats during breaks, or in between service calls.

Employees themselves also play a role in this. If they experienced a demanding situation and struggle to cope with their emotions afterwards, they should actively search for support. Especially during teleworking they are more reliant on themselves, because the peer-initiated support is not available at home from colleagues. Colleagues can help to make the threshold for employees to ask for support lower, by making clear when they are available for social support or questions in their work. They can, for instance, do this by actively using the status function in Microsoft Teams. The organization can help this process, by making protocols on how this status function can best be optimized, so that it is clear for all employees. Lastly, the role of the manager is important during teleworking because it helps employees when they know that their manager is easily approachable for support whenever their need is high.

Thus, this study shows that teleworking does not have to be seen as a potential danger to employees' emotion regulation ability, as long as they can manage the received freedom of working from home and experience social contact with colleagues as pleasant. The organization should keep an eye out to make sure that employees feel no threshold to ask for

social support when working from home. If this is well managed, teleworking could prove to be a decent option for customer service employees.

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Appendix A

Information letter for participants

Bedankt voor uw interesse in mijn scriptie onderzoek en dat u hieraan wil meewerken. In deze tekst leg ik uit wat u kan verwachten en wat er met de data wordt gedaan.

Uiteraard is deelname aan het onderzoek volledig vrijwillig. U kunt uw medewerking op elk moment opzeggen zonder problemen. Het interview duurt een halfuur tot maximaal 1 uur totaal. Deze zal plaatsvinden in een 1 op 1 setting, telefonisch of via Zoom. In het onderzoek proberen we de ervaringen van mensen in customer service banen tussen thuiswerken en op kantoor te vergelijken, met name op het gebied van emoties. De vragen zullen daarom vooral gaan over uw ervaringen. Er zijn geen foute antwoorden en u bent vrij om over uw ervaringen te praten. Met uw toestemming wordt het interview opgenomen. Buiten de onderzoeker om zal niemand deze audio recordings te horen krijgen. De recordings zijn alleen bedoeld als hulpmiddel voor de onderzoeker om de data uit te werken.

De data uit de interviews zal anoniem verwerkt worden. Buiten de onderzoeker en supervisors vanuit Tilburg University zal niemand de ruwe data van de interviews kunnen inzien. Uw naam en de bedrijfsnaam worden niet verwerkt en antwoorden zullen niet te herleiden zijn tot u. Indien u toestemming geeft om de interviews via een audiorecording op te nemen, zullen deze direct na uitwerking verwijderd worden. De data uit de interviews wordt alleen voor academische doeleinden gebruikt.

Ik hoop u zo voldoende te hebben geïnformeerd over het onderzoek en de verwerking van de data. Indien u verder vragen heeft over het onderzoek of de procedure, kunt u contact opnemen via het volgende e-mailadres: m.h.j.stas@tilburguniversity.edu

Alvast bedankt voor uw medewerking,

Mari Stas
Student Tilburg University
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Appendix B

Interview guide emotion work in customer service**.**

Introductie
Bij dit onderzoek proberen we de ervaringen van mensen in customer service banen met thuiswerken en op kantoor werken te vergelijken.

Ik zal u wat vragen stellen over uw huidige werksituatie, uw werkervaringen en de emoties die u hierbij ervaart. Er zijn geen goede of foute antwoorden en u bent vrij om over uw ervaringen te praten. Ik ben geïnteresseerd in uw perspectief. Alle gegevens zullen anoniem blijven. De antwoorden die u geeft zullen niet te herleiden zijn tot u en deze wordt ook niet opgenomen in het rapport.

Ik wil u graag om uw toestemming vragen om dit interview op te mogen nemen. De opnamen zullen direct nadat ik ze heb kunnen uitschrijven verwijderd worden. Niemand anders buiten mij zal ze daarom te horen krijgen. Vind u het goed als ik dit interview opneem?

Als u nog vragen heeft, dan kunt u deze nu nog stellen. Anders stel ik voor om te beginnen.

Algemene vragen
- Kunt u het bedrijf waar u werkzaam bent beschrijven?
    - o Hoe lang werkt u ongeveer in een customer service functie?

- Waar bestaan uw werkzaamheden uit?

- Hoe ziet uw gemiddelde werkdag eruit?
    - o Hoeveel klanten staat u per dag ongeveer te woord?

- Kunt u iets vertellen over uw werkplek?
    - o Hoe ziet die eruit?
    - o Is uw werkplek veranderd? (sinds covid en thuiswerken)
    - o Hoe vaak werkt u thuis of op kantoor?
        - ▪ Hoe ervaart u dit?
    - o Wat vind u van uw werkplek/werksituatie?
        - ▪ Wat vind u voor- en nadelen?
    - o Hoe ervaart u het werken vanuit deze werksituatie?

Gesprekstrategieën
De volgende vragen gaan over uw ervaringen in telefonische gesprekken met klanten

- Wat voor gesprekken voert u in uw werk?
    - o Hoe gaan die gesprekken? (Waar krijgt u mee te maken?)

- Wat is uw aanpak in gesprekken met klanten?
    - o Hoe ervaart u dit?
    - o Waarom doet u het zo? Heeft u deze aanpak zelf ontwikkeld of is dit u aangeleerd?
    - o Heeft uw werkplek/werksituatie invloed op uw aanpak?
        - ▪ Is deze anders thuis dan op kantoor?
        - ▪ Zo ja, waarom? Zo nee, waarom niet?
- Verlangt de organisatie een houding van u naar de klant toe/ zijn er verwachtingen over hoe u zich opstelt naar klanten toe?

- o Wat betekent dit voor uw gedrag naar klanten toe?

- o Leeft u mee met de situaties of houdt u het voornamelijk op afstand?
  - ▪ Welke gevallen leeft u in het bijzonder mee?
  - ▪ Kunt u uitleggen waarom?
  - ▪ Speelt u in gesprekken een rol, of kunt u uzelf zijn?
    - • Wat is de rol van uw werksituatie (thuis/ kantoor) daarin?

- Krijgt u hulp vanuit de organisatie voor gesprek strategieën?
  - o Waar bestaat die hulp uit?
  - o Wat zou u nog graag hierin willen zien/ wat denkt u dat u verder zou helpen?
    - ▪ Ook voor als u zou thuiswerken?

Gesprek coping
De volgende vragen gaan over UW gevoelens en emoties tijdens gesprekken

- Hoe voelt u uzelf tijdens (moeilijke) gesprekken? Wordt u zelf wel eens emotioneel?

- Hoe makkelijk is het voor u om om te gaan met emoties tijdens (moeilijke) gesprekken?
  - o Kunt u dat verder uitleggen?
  - o Welke factoren hebben invloed op hoe u voor uw gevoel kan omgaan met emoties in gesprekken
    - ▪ Wat is de invloed van uw werkplek/ werksituatie hierop?
  - o Helpen display rules vanuit de organisatie u hiermee?

- Wanneer u emotioneel bent geworden of te maken hebt gehad met een moeilijk gesprek (gevoelig, boos, verdrietig etc), wat doet u dan achteraf?
  - o Lukt het om de emoties van u af te zetten?
    - ▪ Indien u thuis werkt: hoe zorgt u voor afstand tussen werk en leefplaats?
  - o Verschilt uw manier van coping afhankelijk van of u op kantoor zit of thuis?
    - ▪ Wat is het verschil hierin?
  - o Helpt dit voor uw gevoel om makkelijker om te kunnen gaan met uw eigen emoties tijdens vervolggesprekken (en deze beter te kunnen reguleren tegenover klanten)?

- Hoe ervaart u de werkdruk?
  - o Wat voor invloed heeft uw werksituatie (thuis of kantoor) daarop denkt u?
    - ▪ Waar ligt dat volgens u aan?

- Kunt u een voorbeeld geven van een moeilijke situatie met een klant? Hoe ging u daarin om betreft emotieregulatie?
  - o Had u toen iets gemist wat had kunnen helpen in het omgaan met uw emoties?
  - o Had op dat moment de organisatie iets kunnen betekenen voor u?
    - ▪ Zo ja, wat dan, Zo nee, waarom niet?
  - o Hoe had uw werksituatie (thuis of op kantoor) invloed hierop?

- Wie helpt u als u emotioneel wordt? Met wie kan u praten?
  - o Wat doet deze persoon dan voor u?
  - o Wat voor effect heeft dit op u?

- Hoe ervaart u het contact met uw collega's?

- o Heeft u het gevoel dat u uw collega's in uw werksituatie (kantoor of thuis?) gemakkelijk kunt benaderen als u dat nodig vindt?
- o Hoe ervaart u hulp (social support) vanuit collega's?
  - ▪ Wat doet dit met het vermogen om uw emoties te kunnen reguleren?
- o Zou u daar verbeteringen in zien en zo ja, waar moet ik aan denken?

- Kunt u iets vertellen over de rol van uw supervisor/ manager?
  - o Heeft u het gevoel dat u uw supervisor gemakkelijk kunt benaderen in uw werksituatie (kantoor of thuis?) als u dat nodig vindt?
  - o Wat kan uw supervisor hierin voor u betekenen?
    - ▪ Hoe ervaart u deze hulp?
    - ▪ Hoe kan hij/zij (verder) helpen met emotie regulatie voor u in uw werksituatie?
  - o Zou u daar nog verbetering in zien en zo ja, waar moet ik aan denken?

- Zijn er nog andere zaken die u vanuit uw organisatie zou willen zien, die u mogelijk zouden helpen om beter om te gaan met uw werk in een thuiswerksituatie?
  - o Wat zijn uw wensen daarin?

Afsluiting
- Zijn er nog onderwerpen die we niet hebben besproken, maar die u toch wil benoemen omdat die mogelijk belangrijk zijn om te begrijpen hoe u uw werksituatie ervaart?

Bedankt voor uw tijd!

Appendix C

Coding scheme

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Work experience	Customer conversations	Attitude in conversations	Empathize
			Keeping distance
			Playing a role
			Stay close to true self
		Conversation topics	Positive topics
			Negative topics
		Expectations from organization	
		Script in conversations	
		Freedom to handle conversations	
		Employee experienced emotions	
		Resource depletion	
	Home experience	Boundary management	
		Feelings of workload home	
		Feelings during teleworking	
		Home work materials	
		Organize own time	
		Productivity	
		Social contact colleagues home	
	Office experience	Connectedness with organization	
		Feelings of being watched	
		Feelings of workload office	
		Knowledge management colleagues	
		Social contact colleagues office	
		Stimuli in office	
Coping strategies	Intrapersonal	Mental coping	
		Physical coping	
		Verbal coping	
	Interpersonal service employee and peers home	Effectiveness home peer support	
		Employee sought support home	
		Peer initiated support home	

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
	Interpersonal service employee and peers office	Effectiveness office peer support	
		Employee sought support office	
		Peer initiated support office	
	Interpersonal leader and service employee	Accessibility leader	
		HR support	
		Types of leader support	
	Microbreaks	Home microbreaks	
		Office microbreaks	
		Task variety home	
		Task variety office	