Title: On the positive aspects of customers: customer-initiated support and affective crossover in employee-customer dyads

Keywords: customer-initiated support; customer behaviour; crossover; dyadic multilevel analysis; service resources

Abstract: This study examines psychological resources for service employees and their customers which enhance service experiences of both parties during service conversations. We investigate whether customer behaviour (customer-initiated support) positively impacts on employees' affect. We also examine the crossover of employees' on customers' affect. State positive affect (PA) was assessed in 82 employees of car dealerships and 421 customers on 2 occasions (before and after conversation). Multilevel analyses showed the hypothesized positive impact of customer behaviour on employees' PA and of employees' PA on customers' PA. Results are integrated in an overall model: Customers' PA enhances customer-initiated support, which establishes employees' PA and in turn enhances customers' PA. Results suggest direct and indirect crossover effects. This study extends research on customer behaviour opening a positive view on customer behaviour and suggests actively involving customers in the service process in order to promote their positive behaviour towards employees.
Answer to Reviews of the Manuscript JOOP1452 entitled "About the positive side of customers: Affective crossover and customer-initiated support in employee-customer dyads"

Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology

Thank you for considering our article “About the positive side of customers: affective crossover and customer-initiated support” for the Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology. We appreciate the comments and constructive feedback that we received and are resubmitting this manuscript for your consideration. In this letter, we detail how we addressed the editor’s and reviewers’ comments.

Editor’s comments

I have now received two reviews of your paper "About the positive side of customers: affective crossover and customer initiated support in employee-customer dyads" (JOOP1452) submitted to the Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology for the special section on extending resource theories. Both reviewers had favorable impressions of your paper, though they also raised a number of points for improving the paper. In my own reading, I agree with the referees that this paper has the potential to make a significant contribution to the literature, but that a number of points need satisfactory resolution. As a result, I’d like to encourage you to revise the paper for additional consideration in JOOP.

While I will refer you to the reviews for their more specific comments, I would like to summarize the key issues that influenced my decision (and points that you will need to address when revising the paper).

1) The first crucial issue the reviewers raised was the question of what value it has to knowing which customers are more pleasant or easier to deal with. Reviewer 1 wonders whether there is any practical use to knowing that customers’ positive affect can crossover to salespeople, which in turn makes it easier for salespeople to perform well. First, organizations cannot select their customers based on their affect and citizenship behavior. They also need to serve unpleasant customers. The more interesting question then is how to serve those difficult customers well. In your paper you suggest bringing customers in a positive mood before they interact with the salespeople. According to reviewer 1, it is already well-known that bringing customers in a positive mood is good for sales. You seem to add one more mechanism that helps explain this relationship. Please work out the practical relevance of your study and provide more unique practical implications of your findings.

Thank you for raising the issue of the clear practical value of our study. You asked us to work out the unique practical implications of our findings in more detail. Reviewer 1 had a “big picture” concern of our whole study considering the practical relevance and also found the practical implications section underdeveloped. There are four major issues why positive customer behaviour is a practically relevant and important issue. Firstly, when service employees experience positive customer behaviour, they react with more positive behaviour towards their customers. Thereby, customers’ positive experiences are enhanced, which is likely to ultimately result in increased organizational profit (Han, Kwortnik, & Wang, 2008; Susskind, Kacmar, & Borchgrevink, 2003). Secondly, when perceiving their customers in a positive way, service employees might regard them as helpful co-producers of service, rather than as obstacles, which make satisfactory service delivery difficult
Furthermore, when being perceived as co-producers during service delivery, this leads to a feeling of empowerment on the customer’s part whereby they gain more control over the results of a service interaction (e.g., the amount of information which is given). Thus, they have a higher likelihood to be pleased or satisfied with the interaction. Thirdly, a high level of satisfaction in their work-force is an important factor for many organizations (e.g., Niklas & Dormann, 2005; Sharma & Levy, 2003). Therefore, a better understanding regarding as to how far customers contribute to employees’ positive experiences in their work may assist organisations to achieve their goal of employee satisfaction. Fourthly, a better theoretical understanding of positive exchange processes during service interactions (or a lack thereof) may improve the design of work- and service-processes to jointly optimize outcomes for employees, for their customers, and for companies. We addressed these points early in our manuscript (second paragraph).

We also suggested to bring the employee in a positive mood, which was already known (as Reviewer 1 noted). Nevertheless, we add further mechanisms what the employee can do to improve his or her mood. Also, this rather refers to our crossover hypothesis than to customer-initiated support. In what way we contribute to and enlarge existing literature on crossover, we describe more detailed below.

In our practical implications, we considered in more details how to use positive customer behaviour to cognitively restructure difficult situations, also situations with negative customers as you suggested to mention. We provided a deeper insight into employees strategies to use customer behaviour as psychological resource. Meaning that an employee does not only have to be “optimistic”, as Reviewer 1 noted, but has the opportunity to apply specific cognitive strategies to refocus on the positive side of the work. According to cognitive reappraisal strategies, employees might focus on their supportive customers instead of being overwhelmed by the stressful aspects. An implementation of this kind of cognitive anchor could be a short notation of the customer’s name as soon as a customer appreciates the work, praises the competences, or facilitates the working process and place it visible on the desk. We discovered customers’ supportive behaviour and positive affective crossover to be present in most of the dyads. In times of highly stressful events, the employee should be taught strategies to use to focus on the positive customers (within the same or the next conversation). This can be achieved for example if an employee has a personal self-instruction strategy: “As soon as someone yells at me, I force myself to look the note on my desk and recall the nice customer I just served”. To keep up positivity after a successful service interaction and to focus on the good side of customers can be beneficial for a service employee’s energy.

We also think that customer-initiated support can be encouraged if employees enable their customers to display support which is an important implication for customer treatment. This can be done if the service interaction is seen as a process where both interacting partners equally contribute to the success. We introduce this argument early and develop it in more detail in the practical implication section in drawing on theory that suggested customers as co-producers. Likewise, we see customers as “emotional” co-producers who present emotional benefit to the employee if they have the opportunity to actively engage in the service process.
In these terms, Reviewer 1 also had concerns that customer-initiated support doesn’t shape a greater body of knowledge. However, we still think and pointed out that all possible influence of a service employees’ work and health need to be considered. Thus, if we think in terms of psychological resources, employees’ health can be determined by the organization (e.g., organizational characteristics, supervisors, colleagues), by personal characteristics (e.g., personality, affective states, previous experiences, skills), and also by work characteristics (e.g., customers because the work itself consists in the direct interaction with customers). Therefore, these various facets need to be considered when studying service interactions. We therefore decided to focus on the customer and the personal (actual affective states) perspective.

2) Related to this point, Reviewer 2 directs you to literature on emotional contagion among customer-service dyads. Please integrate this literature into your manuscript. In addition, explain what your work adds to the knowledge gained from these studies.

We were thankful for Reviewer 2’s literature suggestions on positive customer behaviour. We included Groth (2005) work (comment 2a) and also, as mentioned above, inserted marketing literature on customers as co-producers (comment 2c).

We also took a closer look at the suggested literature on emotional contagion (Pugh, 2001; Tsai 2001; Tsai & Huang, 2002, comment 2b). We cited them already in the last version of the manuscript but focused now more clearly on where our work adds to the knowledge gained from these studies. Pugh (2001) conducted the only study to focus on the emotional processes during service interactions. They were unable to provide support for their hypothesis that employees’ PA directly impacts on customers’ PA, that is, to show a direct crossover effect. However, a link between employees’ displayed emotions and customers’ positive affect was shown. Though, Pugh (2001) analyzed aggregated data on employees’ and customers’ affect, which does not allow an investigation of situation-specific contagion in dyads of individual employees and their customers. Tsai and Huang (2002) investigated effects of shoe sales clerks’ affective delivery and behavioural intentions of their customers mediated by the customers’ mood. Again, contagion mechanisms of expression and customers’ outcomes were shown but no direct crossover. Henceforth, previous research has mainly dealt with and provided evidence for displayed emotions to crossover, whereas we explicitly deal with felt emotions and possible crossover. In summary, we extend previous research in the following ways. Firstly, we analyse individual service situations, by gathering data of both interacting partners. Secondly, we investigate the emotional crossover process without focussing on emotional expression. Thirdly, we draw on the concept of crossover and focus on customers’ change of PA by employees’ PA.

3) The third crucial issue concerned clarity of expression. Both reviewers had comments concerning the specific way in which terms were used in this paper. Reviewer 1 points out that the term "resources" is used in a totally different way in business practice and research than in your current manuscript, namely as the primary source of income. Reviewer 2 became confused
when reading the manuscript, because the paper was full of jargon, and because terms were not well defined. Reviewer 2, for example, wondered how cross-over is more than emotional contagion in your study. (By the way, Reviewer 2 writes spill-over, but I assume this should be cross-over). Reviewer 2 furthermore has several suggestions that would help you improve the structure of the paper. These also concern the integration of several theoretical models in your manuscript. I suggest you rewrite the introduction thoroughly, following the reviewers’ suggestions.

We have re-written our introduction as you suggested. In doing so, we introduced terms and definitions early and clearly. Particularly, the term “resources” in our context was used for psychological resources (Reviewer 2, comment 1e). We defined this early and draw on Hobfoll’s (1989) definition of resources as “conditions, objects, energies, and personal characteristics that are valued by the individuals or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects, personal characteristics, energies, and conditions” (p. 516). We also differentiated between psychological and material resources as suggested by Reviewer 1. Reviewer 2 got confused of our terms and mentioned the paper being full of jargon. We standardized our used terms and copyedited the manuscript to improve our wording and writing style (Reviewer 2, comment 2b, c).

We also provided details for the differences on crossover as a general concept and contagion as one underlying mechanism of crossover in our literature review and when deriving our hypotheses (Reviewer 2d, f). Above and beyond automatic emotion transfer as a specific psychological mechanism, the generic term crossover, generally applies when affective states (e.g., strain, positive affect) experienced by one person impact on the affective state of another person (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989; Westman, 2001). Automatic contagion thus represents one particular process out of many possible ones by which affective states cross over during service encounters (e.g., Pugh, 2001).

We re-arranged the structure of our introduction and theory part according to Reviewer 2’s suggestions. Firstly, we derived our hypotheses after each section. Secondly, we re-worded and clarified the hypotheses as suggested by both reviewers. Thirdly, we changed the sequence of the hypotheses beginning from crossover and then developing the model for the customer-initiated support hypotheses.

4) The fourth important issue is the way the data have been analyzed. Most importantly, Reviewer 2 points at an additional level in your multi-level data (shop level, shared physical environment), and asks if you can provide evidence that you can safely ignore this level. There was also some confusion concerning your mediation tests, as well as whether you want to test cross-lagged paneling and show affect crosses over from customer to sales person and NOT the other way around, or whether that is not what you want to prove. Please provide more clarity concerning what it is you want to test, and reanalyze your data and provide additional results if necessary.

We clarified earlier in the paper that we have 3 levels of data (Reviewer 2, comment 5a). We also provided more details to justify that there is no variance on the third level. The tests that we were using, however, are commonly used methods in multilevel modelling to give details on the explained variance. For example, Bakker and Xanhtopoulou (2009) were applying a 3-level model with measures within persons within
dyads. The authors justified that a 3-level model would fit the data best by providing ICCs on each level (explained variance) and by comparing the deviances. Reviewer 2 wasn’t familiar with this test, however (comment 5a), and suggested to analyse our models on 3 levels. Since there is no additional variance explained on Level 3, our results would be the same (and they actually are if we run the analyses). However, for reasons of a better clarity and readability, we decided to keep our analyses on two levels.

We did not want to test cross-lagged panels. This is not what our hypotheses are like and if doing so, we could not test subsequent models. For the same reason, we did not include all variables in every table since this is not what we wanted to test. We clarified what our hypotheses are and how we analyzed them. A cross-lagged design was not what we intended to do (Reviewer 2, comment 5c).

We clarified further our intervening effect and referred to Mathieu and Taylor (2006) only instead of Baron and Kenny.

As I noted at the onset, we all see significant potential in this paper; however, several changes are necessary to make a final assessment of the paper. It is difficult to know for sure if you will be able to resolve the reviewers’ concerns satisfactorily, especially the issues of practical value, and the unique contribution this paper makes to the literature. As a result, please consider this a “high risk” revision - we cannot guarantee a positive outcome, though it certainly is possible. I would therefore urge you to try to thoughtfully respond to the reviewers’ points. If you do decide to submit a revision to JOOP, as I hope you will, please consider carefully all the referees' comments, not just the ones highlighted above. While you do not have to agree with each comment, you should provide some explanation addressing each comment.

Also to mention is that we slightly changed the title of our manuscript. It is called “on the positive aspects of customers: Customer-initiated support and affective crossover in employee-customer dyads.

I think these revisions have radically improved the essay’s argument, clarity, and conclusion of the findings-thanks to the editor’s and reviewers’ thoughtful recommendations. Thank you very much for your time and consideration. If you have any questions about the manuscript or changes that I have made, please do not hesitate to be in touch.

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Comments of Reviewer 1

Reviewer #1: I found this manuscript to be very well written and it has a lot of strengths. The study was designed well with appropriate methodology, a good selection of control variables, and an impressive sample. Conceptually, the arguments are supported well and make sense. From a purely technical standpoint, other than a few relatively minor concerns summarized below, I did not see much to dislike about the manuscript.

Thank you very much for your detailed and constructive feedback. We addressed each of your points in revising our manuscript and describe in detail how we did so.
I do have a "big picture" concern, however. As interesting as the arguments and findings of the study might be to those of us who study workplace emotions and stress (and it IS interesting to consider that positive emotional contagion and resources can flow from the customer to the employee and not just the other way around), I can’t help but wonder whether there is any practical value to knowing this. Unlike employees, organizations can’t (or at least shouldn’t!) pick and choose their customers based on, for example, their PA levels. In that regard, there is nothing an organization could do differently based on your findings. Of course your ultimate argument is that sales employees can reap the benefits of happy (high state PA) customers by exhibiting high PA (genuine smiles, etc.) themselves. This does have practical relevance but, as you noted in your literature review, it is something we already know.

Thank you for raising the issue of the clear practical value of our study. This was very important for us to know and we therefore described the unique relevance of positive customer behaviour for employees and customers more clearly, detailed, and early in the manuscript. There are four major issues why positive customer behaviour is a practically relevant and important issue. Firstly, when service employees experience positive customer behaviour, they react with more positive behaviour towards their customers. Thereby, customers’ positive experiences are enhanced, which is likely to ultimately result in increased organizational profit (Han, Kwortnik, & Wang, 2008; Susskind, Kacmar, & Borchgrevink, 2003). Secondly, when perceiving their customers in a positive way, service employees might regard them as helpful co-producers of service, rather than as obstacles, which make satisfactory service delivery difficult (e.g., Auh, Bell, McLeod, & Shih, 2007; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Groth, 2005). Furthermore, when being perceived as co-producers during service delivery, this leads to a feeling of empowerment on the customer’s part whereby they gain more control over the results of a service interaction (e.g., the amount of information which is given). Thus, they have a higher likelihood to be pleased or satisfied with the interaction. Thirdly, a high level of satisfaction in their work-force is an important factor for many organizations (e.g., Niklas & Dormann, 2005; Sharma & Levy, 2003). Therefore, a better understanding regarding as to how far customers contribute to employees’ positive experiences in their work may assist organisations to achieve their goal of employee satisfaction. Fourthly, a better theoretical understanding of positive exchange processes during service interactions (or a lack thereof) may improve the design of work- and service-processes to jointly optimize outcomes for employees, for their customers, and for companies. We addressed these points early in our manuscript (second paragraph).

As you mentioned, we suggested to bring the employee in a positive mood, which was already known in literature. Nevertheless, we still consider our research as an important addition of a further mechanisms in what the employee can do to improve his or her mood. However, this refers to our crossover hypothesis rather than to our customer-initiated support concept. In what way we contribute to and enlarge existing literature on crossover, we describe more detailed below.

I realize that not every study needs to have an obvious practical implication so long as it shapes a larger body of knowledge that has potential implications for organizational management. I worry that this particular line of inquiry might not lead to that point. I might be wrong of course, but I think the observation you make several times that research has not
investigated the effects of positive customer emotions/behaviors on employees might reflect the fact that the value in doing so is not clear. As such, my biggest recommendation is that you make a much stronger argument as to why your research question is interesting in terms of applied organizational management.

In these terms, you are addressing a recent discussion that was lately brought up in the Academy of Management (Bartunek & Rynes, 2010). Authors conclude their article that “the point is not so much that managers or other practitioners should immediately implement IFP [implication for practice] suggestions, but rather that it is important for academics to keep potential end-users in mind in our research conversation” (p. 114). Considering your concerns that customer-initiated support doesn’t shape a greater body of knowledge, we concur with Bartunek and Rynes conclusion. In doing so, we particularly think and pointed out that all possible influence of a service employees’ work and health need to be considered in research. Thus, if we think in terms of psychological resources, employees’ health can be determined by the organization (e.g., organizational characteristics, supervisors, colleagues), by personal characteristics (e.g., personality, affective states, previous experiences, skills), and also by work characteristics (e.g., customers because the work itself consists in the direct interaction with customers). Therefore, these various facets need to be addressed when studying service interactions. In our particular study, we therefore decided to focus on the customer and the personal (actual affective states) perspective.

- Related to my previous point, the only part of the manuscript that I found lacking was the practical implications section. I eagerly anticipated this section due to my curiosity about the practical value of your findings but felt that your recommendations in this section were overly simplistic and, as such, were not really "practical" recommendations. For example, on p. 24 you say that your findings suggest employees should focus on the good aspects of their job. While there is always something to be said for an optimistic perspective, I don't think it would be realistic or effective to tell employees that they can sell more cars by ignoring the stressful parts of their job. The recommendation that front-line staff be trained to put employees in a good mood before they meet the sales staff makes more sense but this is something we already know to be effective. Again, my concern is that, as currently written, the only realistic implications seem to be things we already know.

This is a very important and interesting point that you are addressing. In our practical implications, we considered in more details how to use positive customer behaviour to cognitively restructure difficult situations, also situations with negative customers as you suggested to mention. We provided a deeper insight into employees strategies to use customer behaviour as psychological resource. Meaning that an employee does not only have to be “optimistic”, as you noted, but has the opportunity to apply specific cognitive strategies to refocus on the positive side of the work. According to cognitive reappraisal strategies, employees might focus on their supportive customers instead of being overwhelmed by the stressful aspects. An implementation of this kind of cognitive anchor could be a short notation of the customer’s name as soon as a customer appreciates the work, praises the competences, or facilitates the working process and place it visible on the desk. We discovered customers’ supportive behaviour and positive affective crossover to be present in most of the dyads. In times of highly
stressful events, the employee should be taught strategies to use to focus on the positive customers (within the same or the next conversation). This can be achieved for example if an employee has a personal self-instruction strategy: “As soon as someone yells at me, I force myself to look the note on my desk and recall the nice customer I just served”. To keep up positivity after a successful service interaction and to focus on the good side of customers can be beneficial for a service employee’s energy.

Additionally, customer-initiated support represents an important issue for customer treatment if employees enable their customers to display support. This can be done if service providers consider the whole service interaction as a process where both interacting partners equally contribute to its success. We introduce this argument early and develop it in more detail in the practical implication section in drawing on theory that suggested customers as co-producers (e.g., Auh et al., 2007; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Groth, 2005). Likewise, we see customers as “emotional” co-producers who present emotional benefit to the employee if they have the opportunity to actively engage in the service process. Particularly, in the car industry’s service sector customers do not have the chance to cooperate as mechanics follow checklists to find the problem of the car. If service employees give their customers a chance to contribute with either their knowledge or with what they want to know and thus individualize services, this will not only help the employee in terms of a better mood but also the customer in terms of higher positive affect. Our data shows a correlation of .24 between customer-initiated support and customers’ PA after conversation (independent ratings) indicating that customers themselves benefit from their supportive behaviour.

- The statement on p. 2 that research has not considered customers as resources is true in the sense of stress research and coping resources, but unintentionally reads more broadly than that. Customers are, of course, a business’s primary resources so you might want to clarify that they have not been considered as this particular TYPE of resource.

We have re-written our introduction as you suggested. In doing so, we introduced terms and definitions early and clearly. Particularly, the term “resources” in our context was used for psychological resources (Reviewer 2, comment 1e). We defined this early and draw on Hobfoll’s (1989) definition of resources as “conditions, objects, energies, and personal characteristics that are valued by the individuals or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects, personal characteristics, energies, and conditions” (p. 516). We also differentiated between psychological and material resources as suggested by Reviewer 1. Reviewer 2 got confused of our terms and mentioned the paper being full of jargon. We standardized our used terms and copyedited the manuscript to improve our wording and writing style (Reviewer 2, comment 2b, c).

We also provided details for the differences on crossover as a general concept and contagion as one underlying mechanism of crossover in our literature review and when deriving our hypotheses (Reviewer 2d, f). Above and beyond automatic emotion transfer as a specific psychological mechanism, the generic term crossover, generally applies when affective states (e.g., strain, positive affect) experienced by one person impact on the affective state of another person (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, &
Automatic contagion thus represents one particular process out of many possible ones by which affective states cross over during service encounters (e.g., Pugh, 2001).

- The wording of your hypotheses on p. 9 could be clearer. They are currently fairly laborious to read through and process. Also, in the text of the hypotheses it would be helpful to state the direction of the predicted change in customers' (H1) and employees' (H2) PA (the phrase "impacts on the change of PA" is a bit vague).

Thank you for addressing this. We re-worded our hypothesis: Employees’ PA after the conversation is positively related to the change of customer’ PA after the conversation (Hypothesis 1). Customer-initiated support is positively related to the change of employees’ PA (Hypothesis 2). Customers’ PA before the conversation and employees’ PA after the conversation are indirectly and positively linked via customer-initiated support (Hypothesis 3).

- I was a bit surprised by your use of the dated Baron and Kenny (1986) mediation test, but do not consider this a major problem.

Though minor, this is a very good point! We clarified the analyses used to test our intervening effect and referred to Mathieu and Taylor (2006) only instead of Baron and Kenny.

To reiterate, I think there is a great deal to like about this study and this manuscript. I worry that clarifying the "big picture" contribution of the study will not be easy but would have a very favorable view of the manuscript if you are able to do so.

I think these revisions have radically improved the essay’s argument, clarity, and conclusion of the findings—thanks especially in terms of their practical relevance and the “big picture” thanks to your thoughtful recommendations.

Comments of Reviewer 2:

Reviewer #2: This field study of employee-customer dyads proposes to examine a process by which positive interactions with customers provide resources to employees. This positive view of the employee-customer service interaction is unique and interesting as well as having practical import. The methodological approach at the dyad level is creative. Overall, however, I found the ideas of the paper difficult to follow and the methods leading to ambiguous conclusions.

Thank you very much for your detailed, helpful and constructive feedback. We considered all points that you addressed, which were very helpful to simplify the idea and improve the clarity of our paper.

1. Clarity. I found the organization of the paper difficult to follow. You introduce terms early in the paper without really defining, suggest relationships without evidence, and then these are brought up later. You might try organizing and trimming the length of the paper for better flow. Putting the hypotheses after each supportive section would also help.
Overall, there were many places where I was uncertain of your meaning. Here are some examples:

Thank you for addressing this point and for your helpful suggestions to improve the clarity of our argument. We have re-written our introduction. In doing so, we introduced terms and definitions early and clearly. We standardized our used terms and copyedited the manuscript to improve our wording and writing style.

We re-arranged the structure of our introduction and theory part according to your suggestions. Firstly, we derived our hypotheses after each section. Secondly, we re-worded and clarified the hypotheses as suggested by both reviewers. Thirdly, we changed the sequence of the hypotheses beginning from crossover and then developing the model for the customer-initiated support hypotheses.

a. Abstract: The summary of your study is too wordy and full of jargon, it should communicate clearly and concisely the main contributions of your work.

   We have revised the abstract into a less wordier and more precise form.

b. Sales service employees - usually sales are viewed separately from service - what do you mean by this term?

   This differentiation refers to our sample - the car dealerships. There are car dealers and mechanics. Both of them deal with people, are engaged in solving customers problems and handle sales issues. The content of their conversations with the customers however is of course different. It was very helpful that you addressed this confusing issue because the reader - of course - wants to know about service personnel in general and not about the personnel of car dealerships. Therefore, we unified our expressions and addressed service employees / providers when talking about general theoretical processes and concepts but specified “car dealer” vs. “mechanics” when addressing our particular sample.

c. What does it mean for social support to be 'profitable for customers'?

   Customers can “benefit” from social support was the term that we meant. We changed this. Thank you for noticing!

d. Crossover processes - when you first introduce this, it is unclear how is this similar or distinct from other spillover effects like contagion.

   Whereas crossover is a general theoretical concept, emotional contagion reflects one of many possible underlying mechanism of crossover. Above and beyond automatic emotion transfer as a specific psychological mechanism, the generic term crossover, generally applies when affective states (e.g., strain, positive affect) experienced by one person impact on the affective state of another person (Bolger et al., 1989; Westman, 2001). Automatic contagion thus represents one particular process out of many possible ones by which affective states cross over during service encounters (e.g., Pugh, 2001). This is addressed in the manuscript when we first introduce the term crossover, and when deriving our crossover hypothesis.

e. Resources - define what you mean by resource, is this simply anything that is positive?
Particularly, the term “resources” in our context was used for psychological resources. We defined this early and draw on Hobfoll’s (1989) definition of resources as “conditions, objects, energies, and personal characteristics that are valued by the individuals or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects, personal characteristics, energies, and conditions” (p. 516). We also differentiated between psychological and material resources.

f. What does it mean to 'control for' the common reaction mechanisms (p. 7) - it is not clear how you intend to, or actually do, this.

Indeed, to ‘control for’ the common reaction mechanism, is a confusing term to the reader. As emotions can be shared after a commonly experienced event, this mechanism cannot be ‘controlled for’ in field studies. Westman, Vinokur, Hamilton, & Roziner, 2004, however, raised that this mechanism has not necessarily something to do with emotions crossing over from one person to another person. We concur with Westman et al. (2004), who argued against this mechanism as being a genuine form of crossover. To study crossover, the studied dyads are sometimes separated from each other and asked for their commonly experienced events (e.g., Westman et al., 2004). In our study, however, this would not meet the core research aim. To exclude common reactions to common experiences, repeated measures designs are extremely useful. Common experiences are occasion factors, which can be seen as ‘the Achilles’ heel of cross-sectional designs, where they must be measured and controlled explicitly to avoid bias in the estimation of structural [causal] coefficients” (Dwyer, 1983, p. 360). On the other hand, the influence of occasion-factors can be absorbed when repeated measures are available for analysis.

g. It is unclear whether you are trying to predict customer PA, employee PA, or both (p. 8).

Employees’ PA after the conversation is positively related to the change of customer’ PA after the conversation (Hypothesis 1). This is predicted because making customers feel happy in response to an employee’s genuine smile is a basic job task. This is fostered when service employees are in a good mood themselves (Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, & Sideman Goldberg, 2005), and may be transmitted via contagion. Emotional processes in customer-service interactions were studied in the context of emotional contagion (Pugh, 2001). We described below in more detail how we extend Pugh’s work.

To consider whether customers are psychological resource, we predict employees’ PA: Customer-initiated support is positively related to the change of employees’ PA (Hypothesis 2). Customers’ PA before the conversation and employees’ PA after the conversation are indirectly and positively linked via customer-initiated support (Hypothesis 3). Employees’ PA is predicted but NOT by customers’ PA after conversation.

h. The statement of hypotheses is confusing.

We changed this (see comment g).

i. The tables are difficult to read, with the abbreviated labels, and lack of double spacing between lines, and some random spaces that seem to be in error.
We changed this as you suggested.

j. You refer to 'volitional path' and 'motivational path' and 'automatic path' - but it is not really clear what you mean or how they differ.

We deleted the terms "volitional, motivational, automatic" from our Figure 2 because they seemed to confuse the reader. Instead, we inserted the hypotheses into this model and referred to the model when deriving our hypotheses. Overall, we present both theoretical models earlier in the manuscript to give a better picture of our research model.

2. Unique contribution.

a. You suggest customer-initiated support as a 'novel service resource concept' - however you also acknowledge work on customer citizenship behavior by Bettencourt, and should see work by M. Groth.

We were thankful for your literature suggestions on positive customer behaviour. We included Groth’s work. Bettencourt (1997) and Groth (2005) referred to positive customer behaviours as customer citizenship behaviour, which encompasses customers’ extra-role behaviours that traditionally has been performed by service employees (e.g., online check-in with airlines); Rosenbaum and Messiah (2007) referred to customer voluntary performance as a concept of social support between customers. Also, customers’ co-production was considered in marketing literature (e.g., Auh et al., 2007; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006) and found to positively predict customer satisfaction. However, research has not considered forms of customers’ positive behaviour occurring in virtually every interaction and thus its influence on employees’ affect. We therefore extend the literature to examine emotional processes in service interactions and argue that customer-initiated support constitutes a psychological resource for service employees.

b. You state that crossover processes have not been studied in customer-service dyads. But if it’s similar to contagion, that has certainly been studied (e.g., Pugh, 2001; Tsai & Huang, 2001). You can better show how you attempt to improve on this literature (e.g., by obtaining actual pre-interaction mood).

We took a closer look at the suggested literature on emotional contagion (Pugh, 2001; Tsai 2001; Tsai & Huang, 2002). We cited them already in the last version of the manuscript but focused now more clearly on where our work adds to the knowledge gained from these studies. Pugh (2001) conducted the only study to focus on the emotional processes during service interactions. They were unable to provide support for their hypothesis that employees’ PA directly impacts on customers’ PA, that is, to show a direct crossover effect. However, a link between employees’ displayed emotions and customers’ positive affect was shown. Though, Pugh (2001) analyzed aggregated data on employees’ and customers’ affect, which does not allow an investigation of situation-specific contagion in dyads of individual employees and their customers. Tsai and Huang (2002) investigated effects of shoe sales clerks’ affective delivery and behavioural intentions of their customers mediated by the customers’ mood. Again, contagion mechanisms of expression and customers’ outcomes were shown but no direct crossover. Henceforth, previous research has mainly dealt with and provided evidence for displayed emotions to crossover, whereas we explicitly deal
with felt emotions and possible crossover. In summary, we extend previous research in the following ways. Firstly, we analyse individual service situations, by gathering data of both interacting partners. Secondly, we investigate the emotional crossover process without focussing on emotional expression. Thirdly, we draw on the concept of crossover and focus on customers' change of PA by employees' PA. All possible mechanisms over and above the rather unconscious and automatic mood contagion are considered. In addition, we assess change in PA since we account for baseline measures of affect before the conversation. This controls for common experiences as potential confounders at least partially (Dwyer, 1983). In doing so, we contribute to crossover literature and shed further light on the transfer of affective states in service interactions.

c. I believe there is research on customer friendships and intimacy in the services marketing literature, which may suggest customer support mechanisms as well (p. 5).

We had a closer look at the marketing literature and found that the idea to see customers as co-producers would strengthen our concept. We therefore included work of Auh et al. (2007) and Bagozzi & Dholakia (2006) and consider customers as “emotional co-producers”. This leads to a feeling of empowerment on the customer’s part whereby they gain more control over the results of a service interaction (e.g., the amount of information which is given). Thus, they have a higher likelihood to be pleased or satisfied with the interaction.

3. Theoretical background. You mention demands-resources model, COR, Broaden-and-Build, interpersonal affect regulation, and emotional contagion, but need to more clearly explain the models and how they lead to your predictions. You mention testing the direct path between employee PA and customer PA, but this does not permit testing whether this is due to 'automatic' crossover (or the primitive emotional contagion due to mimicry) or if it is due to empathy, service behaviors, or other contextual features.

Thank you for mentioning the lack of theoretical clarity. In re-structuring and re-arranging our introduction and theory sections, we decided to draw on a few theoretical concepts only and explain them. In doing so we draw on crossover for Hypothesis 1 (see above). We do not call this the “automatic path” anymore since it lead to confusion. We do refer to underlying mechanisms of crossover though and explain that in service interaction, empathetic and indirect crossover (cf. Westman et al., 2004) may occur. In doing so, we draw on emotional contagion which is commonly considered as one underlying mechanism of crossover (see above). To explain Hypotheses 2 and 3, we refer to conservation of resources theory and broaden-and-build theory to explain how positive (and negative) behavior lead to loss or gain spirals. We do neither use interpersonal affect regulation nor the Job-demands resources model anymore.

4. Method
a. Why do you assume that the affective crossover requires face-to-face conversations? I believe that audio or phone interactions can also result in shared affect due to vocal communication of emotions.

Face-to-face conversations were not necessarily required to justify contagion although it is certainly easier to find the effect. However, in voice-to-voice interactions, it is not possible to track down the
customer to ask him or her before and after the interaction for his or her affective state and at the same time as the employee.

b. Since you asked customers to complete a survey, why not ask them to rate the service behaviors of the employee? Then you could have tested the full model you should in Figure 1.

Thanks for raising this important issue that we also discussed. However, service behavior was not included into our research model though theory would predict so because Oliver (1999) argued that affective measure would provide valid outcomes for customer satisfaction. We raised that issue in our theory and discussion section.

c. It is interesting that 80% had prior service interactions with each other. You can draw on Gutek’s work on service encounters/relationships to better develop these ideas and justify including as a control variable.

Thank you for suggesting Gutek’s work to us! That was an excellent recommendation. It work provided an interesting extending to justify our control variables therefore we included this work (4c).

d. What is the source of the customer support measure? Was it developed for this study or is there prior validation evidence?

The customer-initiated support scale was developed for this study.

e. How long is the time lag between 'before' the conversation and 'after'? This is important given you cite this as an explanation for a lack of direct effect (p. 16). How did the research associates determine when it was time to administer the time 2 surveys? Before or after the bill was paid, and might this make a difference?

Time lag ranged between 20 and 60 minutes. We weren’t able to assess the exact duration of the conversations because in many cases the conversation per se was interrupted with several breaks e.g., getting information material about a car, checking mechanical details on the car. Time 1 was at the beginning of the conversation, Time 2 at the end (after the farewell of the service provider). In car dealerships, the bill is usually not paid after the conversation with the mechanic or the car dealer. Therefore, this would not make any differences to the findings.

5. Analysis

a. On p. 12 you state that you have 2 level nested data, but actually you have 3: 13 dealerships, 85 employees, and 440 customers. You mention having three levels on p. 13 - please clarify this earlier as well. I’m not familiar with the test you give (p. 14) to argue focusing on 2 level results, but would be more convinced if you also conducted a 3-level test and the results were similar even when taking store into account. This seems important also given you earlier statements about needing to control for shared environmental features that might explain a link between employee and customer PA.

Thanks for addressing the lack of clarity in our analyses and the structure of our data. We clarified earlier in the paper that we have 3 levels of data. We also provided more details to justify that there is no variance on the third level. The tests that we were using, however, are commonly used methods in multilevel modelling to give details on the explained variance. For example, Bakker and Xanhtopoulou (2009) were
applying a 3-level model with measures within persons within dyads. The authors justified that a 3-level model would fit the data best by providing ICCs on each level (explained variance) and by comparing the deviances. You suggested to analyse our models on 3 levels. Since there is no additional variance explained on Level 3, our results would be the same (and they actually are if we run the analyses). However, for reasons of a better clarity and readability, we decided to keep our analyses on two levels.

b. The fact that a large amount of variance in PA is due to the characteristics of the employee suggest that you need to examine traits and abilities. It seems likely that employee competence could influence both employee PA and change in customer PA, though I don't think that is consistent with your theoretical ideas.

Thanks for raising this issue! We agree that traits and abilities might play an important role. Although we did not explicitly control for employees’ traits, this is in accordance with our developed theory and does not contradict the implications drawn from our findings. Personality traits determine affective states and behaviours, which were measured in our study. Our design allows to analyze affective changes and therefore justifies that we explain variance of state affective changes.

c. The method of testing the direction of the crossover effect was unclear to me. I think you want to do cross-lag paneling, such that Emp T1 leads to change in Cust T2, and NOT Customer T1 leads to change in Emp T2? This is not well stated in predictions or in the description of analyses. Nor is it clear why customer PA T2 is only included in Table 3, but customer PA T1 is only included in Table 4.

We did not want to test cross-lagged panels. This is not what our hypotheses are like and if doing so, we could not test subsequent models. For the same reason, we did not include all variables in every table since this is not what we wanted to test. We clarified what our hypotheses are and how we analyzed them. A cross-lagged design was not what we intended to do.

d. You state using the intervening model approach to mediation, yet when you describe the analysis you still state that you need to show that the relationship between PA 'decreases' when the mediator is included and 'may even fail to reach significance', which seems inconsistent with your earlier point about indirect or distal effects. Please clarify the way you will test mediation and provide evidence for this as the best approach.

We clarified further our intervening effect and referred to Mathieu and Taylor (2006) only instead of Baron and Kenny.

e. Does the type of support provided by the customer matter in predicting employee PA?

We discussed potential differences of the various sources of support and think this would be an excellent implication for further research. There is evidence that instrumental support can be negative for the employee, whereas emotional support is always positive (e.g., Deelstra et al., 2003; Elfering et al., 2002). Further research should therefore consider emotional and instrumental support and their impact on employees’ mood distinctly. Future research on resources for service employees should
investigate additional effects of team- and supervisor-support as well as interpersonal resources like rapport or appreciation on service employees’ health and well-being.

f. Cross-level effects seem important to test - such as whether the relationship of customer and employee PA, and with customer support, is stronger for service or sales, for ongoing versus new relationships, etc.

To further explore whether relations between employees’ and customers’ PA after conversation as well as customer-initiated support differ according to Level 2 control variables (weekly working hours, job tenure, car dealer vs. mechanics), we added the relevant variables as moderating predictors. Cross-Level interactions displayed differences between car dealer and mechanics in the relation between employees’ and customers’ PA, $\beta = -0.14$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = -2.05$, $p < .05$: The impact of employees’ on customers’ PA is stronger for car dealer than for mechanics. No differences are shown for the relation between customer-initiated support and employees’ PA. This is in accordance to the relevant main effects which were discussed already in the first version of our manuscript.

I think these revisions have radically improved the essay’s argument, clarity, and conclusion of the findings-thanks thanks to your thoughtful recommendations.

References


On the positive aspects of customers: 
Customer-initiated support and affective crossover in employee–customer dyads

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Abstract
This study examines psychological resources for service employees and their customers which enhance service experiences of both parties during service conversations. We investigate whether customer behaviour (customer-initiated support) positively impacts on employees’ affect. We also examine the crossover of employees’ on customers’ affect. State positive affect (PA) was assessed in 82 employees of car dealerships and 421 customers on 2 occasions (before and after conversation). Multilevel analyses showed the hypothesized positive impact of customer behaviour on employees’ PA and of employees’ PA on customers’ PA. Results are integrated in an overall model: Customers’ PA enhances customer-initiated support, which establishes employees’ PA and in turn enhances customers’ PA. Results suggest direct and indirect crossover effects. This study extends research on customer behaviour opening a positive view on customer behaviour and suggests actively involving customers in the service process in order to promote their positive behaviour towards employees.

Keywords: customer-initiated support; customer behaviour; crossover; dyadic multilevel analysis; service resources
On the positive aspects of customers: Affective crossover and customer-initiated support in employee–customer dyads

When service employees are asked why they have chosen their particular job, a frequent answer is “to deal with people”. Employees who do so called ‘people work’ often mention that dealing with people makes them happy (e.g., Grandey, Fisk, & Steiner, 2005; Homburg & Stock, 2004; Wright & Pandey, 2008). Although this implies that dealing with people in service interactions is a source of positive experiences for many people, previous research in service psychology has mainly focused on negative experiences in service interactions. For example, there is ample research on negative customer behaviour (e.g., Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005; Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Rupp & Spencer, 2006) or employees’ emotional labour, that is, the employees’ emotion regulation required during service delivery (e.g., Grandey, Kern, & Frone, 2007; Kern & Grandey, 2009; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990); the depleting impact of negative customer behaviour and employees’ emotional labour on their well-being has been well-established.

However, the explicit examination of positive experiences in service interactions is beneficial in various ways. Firstly, when service employees experience positive customer behaviour, they react with more positive behaviour towards their customers. Thereby, customers’ positive experiences are enhanced, which is likely to ultimately result in increased organizational profit (Han, Kwortnik, & Wang, 2008; Susskind, Kacmar, & Borchgrevink, 2003). Secondly, when perceiving their customers in a positive way, service employees might regard them as helpful co-producers of service, rather than as obstacles, which make satisfactory service delivery difficult (e.g., Auh, Bell, McLeod, & Shih, 2007; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Groth, 2005). Furthermore, when being perceived as co-producers during service delivery, this leads to a feeling of empowerment on the customer’s part whereby they gain more control over the
results of a service interaction (e.g., the amount of information which is given). Thus, they have a higher likelihood to be pleased or satisfied with the interaction. Thirdly, a high level of satisfaction in their work-force is an important factor for many organizations (e.g., Niklas & Dormann, 2005; Sharma & Levy, 2003). Therefore, a better understanding regarding as to how far customers contribute to employees’ positive experiences in their work may assist organisations to achieve their goal of employee satisfaction. Fourthly, a better theoretical understanding of positive exchange processes during service interactions (or a lack thereof) may improve the design of work- and service-processes to jointly optimize outcomes for employees, for their customers, and for companies. Hence, our aim was to focus on ‘dealing with people’ as a source of positive experiences, that is, as potential resources in service interactions.

According to conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), psychological resources are built through positive experiences and are depleted through negative ones. Hobfoll defined resources as “conditions, objects, energies, and personal characteristics that are valued by the individuals or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects, personal characteristics, energies, and conditions” (p. 516). As per COR theory, resources are useful to prevent the actual or anticipated loss of further resources. As a result, a lack of resources can render people even more vulnerable to losing even more resources (loss spiral), and a surplus of resources may help to gather even more resources (gain spirals). These may be particularly useful during threatening times (e.g., Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993). In this study, we draw on Hobfoll (1989) and define psychological resources as all conditions, objects, energies, and personal characteristics in service interactions that help employees gain well-being, prevent stress reactions and thus facilitate the achievement of personal and organizational goals (i.e., to satisfy customers and achieve job satisfaction). Henceforth, dealing with people and thus having positive experiences
in customer interactions may be considered as source of psychological resources for service employees.

Psychological resources enabling service employees in dealing with emotions at work in particular deserve closer attention since service psychology literature has emphasized the importance, challenge and stress of dealing with emotions in the service industry (Gump & Kulik, 1997; Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993, 1994; Tschan, Rochat, & Zapf, 2005). For example, making customers feel happy in response to an employees’ genuine smile is a basic job task. This is fostered when service employees are in a good mood themselves (Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, & Sideman Goldberg, 2005), and may be transmitted via contagion. Emotional processes in customer-service interactions were studied in the context of emotional contagion (Pugh, 2001), which describes the phenomenon of automatically catching the interacting partner’s emotion through imitating another person’s mimics, gestures, and other emotionally driven behaviours (Hatfield et al., 1993, 1994).

Above and beyond automatic emotion transfer as a specific psychological mechanism, the generic term crossover, generally applies when affective states (e.g., strain, positive affect) experienced by one person impact on the affective state of another person (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989; Westman, 2001). Automatic contagion thus represents one particular process out of many possible ones by which affective states cross over during service encounters (e.g., Pugh, 2001). Generally, service interactions are likely to benefit from positive crossover processes, but crossover processes of emotions (beyond contagion) have not yet been studied in customer-service dyads. Hence, our study extends existing literature by (1) extending Pugh’s findings on contagion by examining crossover effects of employees’ and customers’ state positive affect, (2) investigating positive customer behaviour in terms of customer-initiated
support as psychological resources that may increase employees’ positive affect, and (3) linking crossover mechanisms and customer-initiated support in an overall model.

According to equity theory (Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973), people’s reactions return what they receive and perceive. Thus, positive experiences are most likely to be rewarded to the interacting partner via positive behaviour in return. We henceforth believe that customer-initiated support re-bounces in terms of employees’ service-oriented behaviour, which in turn facilitates establishing customers’ positive mood. Thus, supportive behaviour makes it more likely to achieve customers’ and employees’ goals. A so-called positive spiral emerges (e.g., Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Negative customer behaviour on the other hand elicits employees’ negative affect, which in turn facilitates establishing counterproductive service work (i.e., lack of being friendly) and therefore facilitates customers’ negative mood. (e.g., Tschan et al., 2005). Since a lack of resources can render people even more vulnerable to losing even more resources, a loss spiral emerges (Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993). Figure 1 displays these spirals.

Because there is evidence that service behaviours are more strongly influenced by positive rather than negative affect (e.g., George, 1991; Tsai, 2001), we only focus on positive affect only. In doing so, we examine the first path and develop assumptions for a positive spiral and resource-gain mechanisms in customer-service interactions. Considering psychological resources in service interactions, we examine two major sources of resources to establish employees’ affect: customers’ behaviour and customers’ affect. Whereas we assume customers’ positive behaviour to directly help to turn the interaction into a positive experience, customers’ affect indirectly helps to enhance employees’ mood, for example, by fostering positive customer
behaviour. We focus on this particular section of the explained theoretical model to show how positive experiences during service encounters help to enhance service employees’ positive affect (see Figure 2). Out of this theoretical model, we derive our hypotheses.

Hypotheses

In the following section, we review literature on crossover in general and on contagion in particular and discuss the relevant mechanisms that occur during service encounters. We then explain mechanisms of customer-initiated support as a psychological resource for customer-service employees. We conclude with integrating customers’ behaviour and affect as antecedents of employees’ affect in an overall theoretical framework. Figure 2 represents our research model showing the process of the service interaction.

Crossover, Affective Linkages, and Mood Contagion

The process of crossover through which a person’s mood is influenced by another person or group resulting in mutually shared mood is based on several mechanisms. Former research has used a variety of technical terms for a similar phenomenon: crossover (Bakker, Demerouti, & Dollard, 2008; Bakker, Demerouti, & Burke, 2009; Haines, Marchand, & Harvey, 2006; Westman, Keinan, Roziner, & Benyamini, 2008; Westman, Vinokur, Hamilton, & Roziner, 2004), mood contagion (Barsade, 2002; Neumann & Strack, 2000; Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005) or affective linkages (Ilies, Wagner, & Morgeson, 2007; Totterdell, 2000; Totterdell, Kellett, Teuchmann, & Briner, 1998). Totterdell (2000) widely used the term of mood linkage when studying teams. Westman et al. (2004) recently referred to crossover of stress and health processes in colleagues and spouses. They summarized three underlying mechanisms for
crossover: The first mechanism is direct *empathetic crossover*. Empathetic crossover represents a conscious reaction of closely related persons to the emotions of another person, for example the willingness to feel and to engage in what the spouse is feeling (McBane, 1995). Employees’ communication skills are required within the conversation to cognitively and emotionally engage in the customers’ actual state (e.g., Comer & Drollinger, 1999; Stock & Hoyer, 2005; Tschan et al, 2005). Research found sales performance to be related to sales clerks’ empathetic communication skills (Comer & Drollinger, 1999; Homburg & Stock, 2005; Stock & Hoyer, 2005; empathetic crossover of emotions).

The second mechanism refers to *common reactions* to the same experiences of several people, that is, social sharing of emotions (Bakker et al., 2009; Neumann & Strack, 2000). We concur with Westman et al. (2004), who argued against this mechanism as being a genuine form of crossover. To exclude common reactions to common experiences, repeated measures designs are extremely useful. Common experiences are occasion factors, which can be seen as ‘the Achilles’ heel of cross-sectional designs, where they must be measured and controlled explicitly to avoid bias in the estimation of structural [causal] coefficients” (Dwyer, 1983, p. 360). On the other hand, the influence of occasion-factors can be absorbed when repeated measures are available for analysis.

Thirdly, *indirect crossover* of emotions could happen due to the imitation of another person’s mimics, gestures, and other emotionally driven behaviours that in turn influences the recipient’s mood. Part of this process has been widely studied under the umbrella term of emotional or mood contagion (Hatfield et al., 1993, 1994; Pugh, 2001; Tsai, 2001; Tsai & Huang, 2002). Service employees endeavour to enhance their performance through “service with a smile” (Barger & Grandey, 2006; Grandey et al., 2005; Sideman Goldberg & Grandey, 2007).
The displayed smile indirectly leads to customers’ positive mood (indirect crossover of emotions).

Emotional expression and customer behaviour through automatic contagion processes were studied in a retail banking setting (Pugh, 2001) and with shoe store sales clerks (Tsai, 2001; Tsai & Huang, 2002). Pugh (2001) conducted the only study to focus on the emotional processes during service interactions. They were unable to provide support for their hypothesis that employees’ PA directly impacts on customers’ PA, that is, to show a direct crossover effect. However, a link between employees’ displayed emotions and customers’ positive affect was shown. Though, Pugh (2001) analyzed aggregated data on employees’ and customers’ affect, which does not allow an investigation of situation-specific contagion in dyads of individual employees and their customers. Tsai and Huang (2002) investigated effects of shoe sales clerks’ affective delivery and behavioural intentions of their customers mediated by the customers’ mood. Again, contagion mechanisms of expression and customers’ outcomes were shown but no direct crossover. Henceforth, previous research has mainly dealt with and provided evidence for displayed emotions to crossover, whereas we explicitly deal with felt emotions and possible crossover.

In summary, we extend previous research in the following ways. Firstly, we analyse individual service situations, by gathering data of both interacting partners. Secondly, we investigate the emotional crossover process without focussing on emotional expression. Thirdly, we draw on the concept of crossover and focus on customers’ change of PA by employees’ PA. All possible mechanisms over and above the rather unconscious and automatic mood contagion are considered. In addition, we assess change in PA since we account for baseline measures of affect before the conversation. This controls for common experiences as potential confounders at
least partially (Dwyer, 1983). In doing so, we contribute to crossover literature and shed further light on the transfer of affective states in service interactions.

_Hypothesis 1:_ Employees’ PA after the conversation is positively related to the change of customer’ PA after the conversation.

**Customers as Resources: Customer-initiated Support**

The consideration of psychological resources in service interactions is important as they determine employees’ health, mood, and performance (cf. Hobfoll, 1989). On the one hand, previous research on customer behaviour has primarily focused on service employees’ negative experiences. Dormann and Zapf (2004) introduced the concept of customer-related social stressors. These were found to influence employees’ well-being. Organizational variables (colleagues’ and supervisor support), personal traits, and work-related characteristics (i.e., autonomy) were found to buffer stress-reactions for service employees (thus, represent resources for service employees; de Jonge & Dormann, 2006; Meier, Semmer, Elfering, & Jacobshagen, 2008; Sideman Goldberg & Grandey, 2007).

On the other hand, positive experiences due to customer behaviour as psychological resource to enhance service employees have not yet been studied. The idea of customers behaving in a positive and supportive way, however, is not entirely new. To our knowledge, there are three studies that examined positive customer behaviours in various forms (Bettencourt, 1997; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2007; Groth, 2005). Bettencourt (1997) and Groth (2005) referred to positive customer behaviours as customer citizenship behaviour, which encompasses customers’ extra-role behaviours that traditionally has been performed by service employees (e.g., online check-in with airlines); Rosenbaum and Messiah (2007) referred to customer voluntary performance as a concept of social support _between_ customers. Also, customers’ co-
production was considered in marketing literature (e.g., Auh et al., 2007; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006) and found to positively predict customer satisfaction. However, research has not considered forms of customers’ positive behaviour occurring in virtually every interaction and thus its influence on employees’ affect. We therefore extend the literature to examine emotional processes in service interactions and argue that customer-initiated support constitutes a psychological resource for service employees.

We define customer-initiated support as instrumental and emotional behaviour that customers direct towards employees during the customer contact, making it easier to cope with service demands. This mirrors definitions of social support in general, as it has been defined as a resource to buffer stress (e.g., Cohen, 1985). Research frequently distinguishes between six sources of social support (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983; Cohen, 1985): material, behavioural, emotional, informational, support through feedback, and support through attachment / integration. Most of these kinds of social support may be exhibited by customers, too. Customers may behaviourally support employees in service conversations by adapting to the working process (e.g., helping to fill in documents, fast-tracking the process if the employee is in a hurry, etc.). Customers may also show emotional support through appreciation of the employees work (e.g., explicitly valuing the employee’s effort). Furthermore, customers may provide informational support by using their knowledge about the product or the service, which could streamline and simplify the process (e.g., knowledge about recent models of a specific car, being informed about potential engine problems). Customers may also support the relevant employee in a service conversation by providing feedback (e.g., by believing in the employee’s competences by voicing potential modifications of the car). In addition, customers may get attached to the employee. The latter kind of social support is rather unintended and enhanced, for
example, through chemistry of both participants. The employees’ perception that customers’ proactively engage in the service interaction should turn the conversation into a positive experience. This can be achieved according to conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) because customers emotionally, behaviourally, or via information prevent a loss of personal resources during the service interaction. Moreover, customers help employees to perceive the interaction as positive and thus engage in a positive gain spiral (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002).

_Hypothesis 2:_ Customer-initiated support is positively related to the change of employees’ PA.

**Affect – Behaviour – Affect: An Integrated Model**

Besides customers-initiated support, customers’ affect per se might impact on employees’ positive affect and thus be beneficial for the service interaction. We are therefore interested in how positive affect can elicit employees’ affect and in potential antecedents of customer-initiated support. Broaden–and–build theory (Fredrickson, 2005) states that positive emotions broaden an individual’s momentary thought-action repertoire and build individual’s health and well-being. Thus, the experience of positive affect enables people to engage in positive behaviour. In other words, customers should be more likely to display customer-initiated support when they are in a positive mood. Because positive emotions can also elicit positive behaviour (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002), we argue that positive emotionally driven behaviour facilitates the crossover of positive affect (see Figure 2).

_Hypothesis 3:_ Customers’ PA before the conversation and employees’ PA after the conversation are indirectly and positively linked via customer-initiated support.

**Method**

_Procedure and Sample_
We conducted our study in 13 German car dealerships. To collect data of the customer–employee dyads, we focused on service employees working in direct customer contact. Car dealers and specially trained car mechanics were identified as the appropriate participants for our study. We investigated service employees in car dealerships because they usually engage in face-to-face conversations with customers for more than a couple of minutes. This is important because affective crossover and the development of positive customer behaviour requires a minimum amount of time. Though not entirely impossible, contagion mechanisms particularly are more likely under face-to-face conditions as voice-to-voice conditions lack facial expressions, postures, and movements for adaption (e.g., Hatfield et al., 1993, 1994; Pugh, 2001). Gutek, Bhappu, Liao-Troth, and Cherry (1999) distinguished between service relationships and service encounters. Service relationships are defined as repeated interactions in which service providers have a self-interest for long-term relationships. In the context of car dealerships, sales as well as mechanical service personnel are provided with incentives for longer relationships. Both the parameters time and the intended relationship are favourable in terms of the emotional crossover processes.

Data collection of customer–employee dyads on site occurred in cooperation with the first author and the employees: participants were instructed to inform customers that a university study was being conducted in the organization; they asked the customers to participate. The first author or a replacement from the research team introduced themselves and explained the procedures of the assessment. Customers and employees filled in rating scales of state affect when addressed (Time 1 as a baseline measure of state affect). Both partners of the dyad were given the same items. When finished with the conversation (Time 2), customers were addressed by the research team again and given a second rating scale of state affect (same measure as first)
as well as questions to demographic data. At the same time (Time 2), employees rated their state affect again (same measure as Time 1). Again, both partners of the dyad responded to the same items. Time lag ranged between 20 and 60 minutes\(^1\). Additionally, employees were given an assessment scale of customer behaviour during the conversation (therefore rated retrospectively). Because in car dealerships service employees are not identical with cashiers, the point in time when Time 2 variables were assessed, was the end of the conversation with the car dealer or mechanic and thus independent from paying the bill.

In sum, data were obtained from 85 employees and from 440 customers in 13 car dealerships. Employees were requested to provide reports of five to ten customer contacts (\(Minimum = 2, Maximum = 10, M = 5\)). Due to missing data we had to exclude 19 customers and 3 employees; the final sample consisted of 82 employees (54.9% car dealer) and 421 dyads. The customer-sample was comprised of 203 (48.2%) customers of car dealer and 218 (51.8%) customers of mechanics. Missing data in the control variable scales were replaced by the respective sample mean of the scale.

All employees were male except for four female participants (4.9%). Of all customers, 64.8% were male. Employees' average age was 38.5 years (\(SD = 8.7\)) with a range from 24 to 61, average job tenure was 9.9 years (\(SD = 9.4\)) and ranged from 0 to 40 years with an average working time of 48.5 hours per week (\(SD = 7.3; Minimum = 15\) and \(Maximum = 65\)). All employees worked full-time. Customers mean age was 45.5 years (\(SD = 13.4; Minimum = 18\),

\(^1\) We weren’t able to assess the exact duration of the conversations because in many cases the conversation per se was interrupted with several breaks e.g., getting information material about a car, checking mechanical details on the car.
Maximum = 88), and 20.4% had no prior service contact with the relevant employee (so called “new customers”).

**Measures**

State positive affect was assessed in a survey given to employees and customers and was filled in by both when the conversation started and once again when it had finished. Employees were additionally asked to rate customer-initiated support after the customer had left.

**Customer behaviour.** Customer behaviour was assessed by the employee directly after the sales conversation. The customer-initiated support scale was developed for this study and consisted of the following items: “The customer adapted my working process” (behavioural support), “The customer could facilitate the service conversation through his previous knowledge” (informational support), “The customer trusted in my competences” (support through feedback), “The customer explicitly valued the effort of my work” (emotional support), “The customer and I were on the same wavelength” (liked customers). Responses were given on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = I completely disagree to 5 = I completely agree; the scale had an internal consistency reliability of .82. Confirmatory factor analysis showed that all customer-initiated support items loaded on a single factor $\chi^2(5) = 17.6 (p < .01)$, normed fit index (NFI) = .98, comparative fit index (CFI) = .99, root-mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .078.

**State affect.** Positive affect was assessed via self report by customers and employees at the beginning of the conversation and afterwards. We applied six items from PANAS (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988; German version of Krohne, Egloff, Kohlmann, & Tausch, 1996). They were chosen in regard to content (sample items are interested, excited, and inspired). All items had to be answered on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = very slightly or not at all to 5 = very
The average internal consistency reliability of the affect scores across the two measurements and across separate employees and customers was .82 (ranging from .81 to .84).

**Statistical Analyses**

The data of our study is nested within three Levels—the car dealerships reflecting Level 3, the employee reflecting Level 2, and the customer–employee dyads reflecting Level 1. Therefore, non-independence of customer–employee dyads must be taken into account (all dyad ratings of one employee share common variance; all dyad ratings of one employees’ customers share common variance through employees’ characteristics). Furthermore, commonly shared perceptions within one car dealership must be taken into account. In addition to the repeated measures design of our study, this also reduces possible confounders, making the cross-over model more likely than common reactions-model to explain relations. Major analyses were carried out on the lowest level only. In our analyses we followed the guidelines of Kenny, Kashy, and Cook (2006). We implemented the one-with-many dyadic data designs and considered recommendations of Bolger, Davis, and Rafaeli (2003) for event-sampling approaches. We assess within- and between-variance proportions with intra-class correlation coefficients (ICC). ICC coefficients were calculated for proportions of variance between and within persons (Level 2 vs. Level 1) as well as between and within organizations (Level 3 vs. Level 2).

In conducting dyadic data analyses with multilevel modelling, we followed prior approaches done in crossover and affective linkage research (Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009; Haines et al., 2006; Ilies et al., 2007) We used a hierarchical linear modelling (HLM, Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992) framework. In testing our hypotheses, we centred predictor scores (at Level
1) at the grand means. Thus, we estimated the relation of the predictor (for example customer-initiated support) and the outcome (e.g., employees’ PA) between dyads.

Control Variables

We included employees’ and customers’ state affect at the beginning of the conversation (Time 1) into the analyses of customer behaviour. We therefore controlled for baseline state affect and focused on changes during the conversation. Further, we controlled for the content of the sales conversation (cars or mechanical details) and for type of customers (whether the examined contact was the first or whether participants had seen each other before). Gutek et al. (1999) work of service relationships vs. service encounters found service relationships to be related to higher customer satisfaction. Although in car dealerships long-term service relationships are generally intended, one could argue that employees who have seen the relevant customers before, have already established a relationship, whereas new customers primarily engage in service encounters. Therefore, customers’ positive affect is likely to differ according to this variable and hence was included into our analyses. Since dyadic research has shown a relationship between mood and working hours (Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2007; Galambos & Walters, 1992), we included weekly working hours in our analyses. Given that relations between job tenure and work stress may exist (Beutell & O’Hare, 1987; Bradley, 2007), we controlled for job tenure. We further examined differences in the relationship between employees’ and customers’ PA as well as the extent to which customer-initiated support and employees’ PA differ and thus conducted cross-level interactions for employees’ job tenure, weekly working hours, and working area (car dealer vs. mechanics) as moderators. Finally, we also controlled for the impact of the time of the day and of customers’ gender on the outcome variables.

Results
Preliminary Analyses

Before testing our hypotheses, we examined whether customers’ and employees’ state affect scores varied substantially between dyads. ICC(1) coefficients showed that 30.6% of the variance in customers’ positive affect and 58.4% of the variance in employees’ positive affect was attributable to the relevant employee (Level 2). Furthermore, ICC coefficients dividing within and between organization variance (Level 3) showed that 0.7% of the variance in customers’ positive affect and 4.1% of the variance in employees’ positive affect was attributable to the relevant car dealership (Level 3). According to James (1982), a minimum of 12% of the variance should be explained by differences in the upper level (between person, between organization) to account for differences in the relevant upper level. Our data therefore suggests to account for differences between persons (Level 2) but not between organizations (Level 3).

To further justify that we can conduct our analyses on two levels and thus to prove that accounting for shared perceptions in organizations does not improve our analyses, we analyzed deviances (-2 log likelihood) for Model 0 (intercept only) of both outcome variables; these indicate the model fit of the data (the lower the measured value the better). We compared the model fit for two-level with three-level models and found better fits for two-level models in both outcome variables: Deviance (Level 2) = 1104.32 vs. Deviance (Level 3) = 1180.16; PA employee: Deviance (Level 2) = 898.83 vs. Deviance (Level 3) = 991.97. Therefore, two-level models provided a better fit for our data. Hence, we restricted our analyses to two-level models.

Table 1 presents the inter-individual correlations of the variables. It shows that control variables were related to outcomes as expected. Additionally, customers’ and employees’ PA before and after conversation differed between service type (car dealer vs. mechanics; PA customer: t(419) = 8.79, p < .001; t2: t(419) = 9.39, p < .001; PA employee t1: t(419) = 4.03, p
Car sellers as well as their customers reported higher PA compared to mechanics and their customers. We therefore included a (dummy) variable (mechanics vs. car dealer) when analyzing our hypothesis testing models.

Hypotheses Testing

For each hypothesis, we first started with an intercept-only model (Model 0), added the relevant control variables (i.e., state PA at Time 1 to account for changes in affect after the conversation) in a second step (Model 1), and then conducted analyses with the predictors (Model 2). Furthermore, we analyzed model fit indices (deviances) for all models; these indicate the model fit for the data (the lower the measured value the better). The differences of the deviances of two subsequent models follow a chi-square distribution and indicate if the additional explained variance is significant.

Hypothesis 1 proposed a positive main effect of employees’ PA at Time 2 on the change of customers’ PA from Time 1 to Time 2. We therefore regressed employees’ PA at Time 2 on customers’ PA at Time 2 controlling for the outcome variable (customers’ PA) at Time 1. Table 2 displays results for customers’ PA at Time 2 as an outcome variable. Correlations with control variables (see Table 1) showed significant positive associations with customers’ PA at Time 1, time of the day, weekly working hours, and type of customers. Therefore, after analyzing Model 0 (intercept-only model), we entered the relevant control variables (Model 1), and then employees’ PA as a predictor. Deviances showed that Model 1 fitted our data better than Model 0, $\Delta \chi^2(7) = 367.30, p < .001$, with a significant prediction of customers’ PA at
Time 1 and time of the day (positive) as well as content of service (negative); Model 2 showed an improved model fit over Model 1, $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 6.48, p < .05$, with employees’ PA at Time 2 positively predicting customers’ PA at Time 2. Predictor and control variables entered into the models explained 93.6% of Level 2 variance and 51% of Level 1 variance. Therefore, our data fully supports Hypothesis 1 proposing a positive main effect of employees’ state PA at Time 2 on the change of customers’ state PA.

In addition, we tested a model where customers’ PA predicted employees’ state PA to ensure the direction of the crossover effect. We therefore regressed customers’ PA at Time 2 on employees’ PA at Time 2 controlling for the outcome variable (employees’ PA) at Time 1. Correlations with control variables showed significant positive associations with employees’ state positive affect at Time 1, time of the day and weekly working hours. Table 3 displays results of employees’ state PA at Time 2 as an outcome variable. Again, Model 1 showed a better fit than Model 0, $\Delta \chi^2(4) = 328.78, p < .001$. Model 2 however, did not improve the model fit further, $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 2.65$, n.s. Customers’ state PA at Time 2 did not predict employees’ state PA at Time 2. Predictor and control variables entered into the models explained 84.9% of Level 2 variance and 45.1% of Level 1 variance.

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Hypothesis 2 proposed a positive main effect of customer-initiated support on employees’ state PA after conversation. Table 1 shows significant correlations of the outcome variable with control variables; employees’ state PA at Time 1, time of the day, and weekly working hours (Level 2) were positively related. The content of service differed in outcome variables as
explained above. Table 4 displays results of the multilevel model. Model 1 showed a better fit than Model 0, $\Delta \chi^2(4) = 328.78$, $p < .001$, with employees’ state PA at Time 1 significantly predicting the outcome variable. When adding customer-initiated support as a further predictor (i.e., Model 2), model fit increased, $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 6.80$, $p < .05$. Predictor and control variables entered into the models explained 85.1% of Level 2 variance and 45.5% of Level 1 variance. Therefore, our data fully supports Hypothesis 2 proposing a positive main effect of customer-initiated support on employees’ state PA.

Insert Table 4 about here

To test Hypothesis 3, the indirect linkage between customers’ PA before conversation and employees’ PA after conversation through customer-initiated support, we followed the guidelines of (Mathieu & Taylor, 2006). *Indirect effects* are a special form of intervening effects whereby the predictor and the outcome variable are not associated directly, but indirectly through a significant relation with a linking variable (Mathieu & Taylor, 2006). Step 1 required a test of the relation $a$ of $X$ (predictor) on $M$ (mediators). Step 2 tested the $M \rightarrow Y$ (outcome) relation $b$ (Table 4). The magnitude of the indirect effect is tested with the Sobel (1982) $z$–test. Indirect effects compared to full or partial mediation do not require a direct link $c$ between $X$ and $Y$.

Due to the nature of our nested data, dependence and random upper level variability of the data within the lower level has to be considered (Kenny, Korchmaros, & Bolger, 2003). We therefore modified the formula for calculating the total effect $c$ of customers’ PA on employees’ PA via customer-initiated support. We included the covariance of the residuals of (1) the effect
of customers’ PA at Time 1 on customer-initiated support and (2) the effect of customer-initiated support on employees’ PA at Time 2 ($\sigma_{ab}$) into the equation as suggested by Kenny et al. (2003).

$$c = c' + ab + \sigma_{ab}$$

Additional results for the conditions of the indirect effect are displayed in Table 4 and path coefficients are displayed in Figure 3. Our data showed no direct effect $c$ of customers’ PA at Time 1 on employees’ PA at Time 2 ($\beta^2 = -0.01, t = -0.40; \text{n.s.}$). Furthermore, we found a relation $a$ between customers’ PA at Time 1 and customer-initiated support ($\beta = 0.18, t = 4.25; p < .001$), and a relation $b$ between customer-initiated support and employees’ PA at Time 2 ($\beta = 0.09, t = 2.63; p < .01$) with a significant indirect effect of $z = 2.24$ and $p < .05$. Comparing the direct effect of customers’ and employees’ PA with the total effect $c$ controlling for customer-initiated support ($\beta = -0.03, t = -0.840; \text{n.s. and } c = c' + ab + \sigma_{ab}$) with $c = -0.03 + 0.18*0.09 + (-0.007) = -0.02$, customer-initiated support explained 50% of the total effect ((-0.02 - -0.01) / -0.02 = 0.5). Therefore customers’ positive affect at Time 1 was indirectly related to employees’ positive affect at Time 2 via customer-initiated support. This supports Hypothesis 3.

We extended hypotheses testing by including all predictors in a single model to show whether the linkage of customers’ PA, customer-initiated support, and employees’ PA in turn positively predicts customers’ PA after conversation. As shown in Table 2, Model 3 showed an non-significant increased fit over Model 1, $\Delta \chi^2(2) = 2.37$, n.s.. Employees’ PA at Time 2 still

\[\text{All } \beta \text{ coefficients are unstandardized}\]
positively predicted the outcome whereas customer-initiated support did not predict customers’ PA at Time 2.

To further explore whether relations between employees’ and customers’ PA after conversation as well as customer-initiated support differ according to Level 2 control variables (weekly working hours, job tenure, car dealer vs. mechanics), we added the relevant variables as moderating predictors. Cross-level interactions displayed differences between car dealer and mechanics in the relation between employees’ and customers’ PA, $\beta = -0.14$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = -2.05$, $p < .05$: The impact of employees’ on customers’ PA is stronger for car dealer than for mechanics. No differences are shown for the relation between customer-initiated support and employees’ PA.

To sum up our results, we found Hypothesis 1 was fully confirmed as we demonstrated a crossover of employees’ state PA after conversation on the change of customers’ PA. This relation was particularly strong for car dealer. Data also supported Hypothesis 2: customer-initiated support increased employees’ state PA after conversation. Moreover, customers’ state PA before conversation enhanced customer-initiated support which in turn enhanced employees’ PA after conversation (Hypothesis 3). Model 3 showed no further increase of model fit to finally predict customers’ PA after conversation.

**Discussion**

In the present study, we aimed at investigating positive experiences with customers as psychological resources for employees’ mood. We further aimed at extending research on emotional contagion in customer-service dyads (Pugh, 2001) and examined the crossover of affective states. We thus established the concept of customer-initiated support. Our study results showed that state positive affect crosses over from employee to customer and customer-initiated
support enhances employees’ positive affect. Moreover, customer-initiated support indirectly links customers’ state PA before with employees’ state PA after the interaction.

**Contribution to Literature**

Although there has been some research on crossover in teams and dyads (Bakker et al., 2008, 2009; Haines et al., 2006; Westman et al., 2004, 2008), none of these considered crossover in service dyads. Our study opens insight into crossover processes in service conversations in a sales service setting. The crossover of employees on customers’ state positive affect (automatic path) is in accordance with research on positive emotional contagion (cf. Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; McIntosh, 2006; Sy et al., 2005). Also, there are studies that linked service employees’ affective delivery and emotional expression with customers’ emotion (Pugh, 2001; Tsai, 2001; Tsai & Huang, 2002). Our findings link employees’ and customers’ affective states and thus enables to focus on mechanisms beyond automatic contagion. Service employees are trained to enhance their performance through “service with a smile” policies (Barger & Grandey, 2006; Grandey et al., 2005). Service employees’ positive mood helps to deliver this smile genuinely. To share this positive mood with customers is organizationally desired because it increases customer satisfaction, of which customer positive affect represents a major component (Oliver, 1999). This is particularly important if repeated interactions with customers are intended to change encounters into long-term relationships (Gutek et al., 1999). Our findings, conducted in organizations that aim to establish long-term relationships with customers, suggest that employees’ positive affect can be spread to customers’ positive affect and thus enable a first step to establish service relationships.

We did not find however the crossover effect in the reversed direction. We consider the receptivity for mood contagion processes as the main explanation for this: Employees are trained
to display positive emotions and they usually do not adopt to customers’ mood as easily as customers adopt to the employees’ mood (e.g. Barger & Grandey, 2006; Grandey et al., 2005; Pugh, 2001; Sideman Goldberg & Grandey, 2007). Customers react positively to employees’ positive affect after conversation as an indication for well-performed service behaviour. Moreover, customers’ positive mood reflects their satisfaction (e.g., Comer & Drollinger, 1999; Homburg & Stock, 2005; Stock & Hoyer, 2005). Expressing satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a service encounter is tolerable when done by customers, whereas this violates professional or organizational norms when portrayed by employees (Zapf, Isic, Fischbach, & Dormann, 2003). Therefore, it is more likely for customers to adopt the employees’ mood than for employees to adopt the customers’ mood. To further investigate the reciprocity of crossover, future research could focus on emotion regulation strategies, communications skills, or potential benefit as moderators to explain circumstances of bidirectional crossover.

Although in car dealerships long-term service relationships are generally intended, one could argue that employees who have seen the relevant customers before have already established a relationship, whereas new customers primarily engage in service encounters. Interestingly, customers’ PA was higher when no former interaction had taken place. This can be interpreted in the context of equity theory (Walster et al., 1973): service providers intend to establish a long-term relationship and thus show more engagement in making their customers feel good. Finally, we found that the hypothesized crossover of employees’ on customers’ PA was particularly strong for car dealer. This finding is in accordance with our general findings that car dealers’ PA was generally higher than mechanics’ PA. Our results can be explained by the employees’ different training and contents of their service tasks; car dealers’ service interactions comprise mainly positive contents, whereas employees of the mechanics-department of a car
dealership mainly handle the reclamations of customers. Our results suggest that crossover mechanisms are even more important in sales relationships than in service relationships.

Perhaps the most important contribution to literature is that we found as proposed that customer behaviour can be beneficial for service employees’ mood. Customer-initiated support enhances employees’ state positive affect and thus suggests that customer behaviour reflects a potential psychological resource for service employees. Whereas former research has focused on social stressors in service jobs (e.g., Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Tschan et al, 2005), we focus on positive customer behaviours as a source for employees to enhance and implement positive mood. Thus, employees draw on these positive experiences to prevent stress and establish well-being, which facilitates achievement of personal and organizational goals (e.g., Hobfoll, 1989). Our findings are in accordance with social support of supervisors or colleagues, which has generally been considered as an important resource for service providers’ health and well-being (Dormann, 1999; de Jonge & Dormann, 2006). To take a resource-perspective on customers reflects service employees’ motivation to work with people instead of computers (e.g., Frei & McDaniel, 1998; Grandey et al., 2005; Homburg & Stock, 2005; Wright & Pandey, 2008). Thus, positive experiences might help service employees to maintain their positive feelings, which in turn facilitates to return positive experiences to customers and display better performance (e.g. Walster et al., 1973).

Customer-initiated support also enables service providers to see their customers as co-producers and thus allow them to establish a service interaction according to their needs. This is in line with research on customers’ in- and extra-role behaviour (Groth, 2005) and literature on customers’ co-production (Auh et al., 2007; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006) which suggests that customers’ instrumental behaviour facilitates the process of the service interaction. Our findings
indicate that customers also emotionally facilitate the process of service interaction when they allow themselves to actively participate in the process. If a customer feels appreciated by the service employee and the service organization, he or she will return this investment by increasing supportive behaviour. Thus allowing an equal relationship with the customer where both interacting participants contribute to the service interaction instead of a strictly hierarchical interaction, enables to enhance customers’ as well as employees’ satisfaction with the interaction. There is evidence that instrumental support can be negative for the employee, whereas emotional support is always positive (e.g., Deelstra et al., 2003; Elfering et al., 2002). Further research should therefore consider emotional and instrumental support and their impact on employees’ mood distinctly. Future research on resources for service employees should investigate additional effects of team- and supervisor-support as well as interpersonal resources like rapport or appreciation on service employees’ health and well-being.

The display of customers’ positive behaviour raises the question for its antecedents. We aimed at integrating our findings and therefore supplying an overall model to show that customer-initiated support indirectly links customers’ and employees’ mood. Our results fit into former research on underlying mechanisms of crossover of strain (Westman et al., 2004, 2008). Thus, undermining (negative emotionally driven behaviour) elicits an actors’ negative reactions. Our research is in line with Westman’s findings addressing the positive mechanism of the link between customers’ PA, customer-initiated support, and employees’ PA. The results of our overall linkage can also be interpreted in the context of the broaden–and–build theory (Fredrickson, 2005) saying that positive emotions broaden an individual’s momentary thought-action repertoire and build individual’s health and well-being. Hence, this process was found to interpersonally take place: customers’ positive affect at the beginning of the conversation was
found to *broaden* customer-initiated support which in turn *built* employees’ positive affect after the service interaction. Our findings therefore suggest that positive emotionally driven behaviour in terms of customer-initiated support facilitate the crossover of positive affect.

**Limitations and Strength**

This study is not without limitations. First of all, the participants of our study were employees and customers of car dealerships. Therefore, any generalization of the theory developed in this study to other service sectors should be dealt with caution. We are aware that processes described in this article might be different in other branches of service jobs (e.g., where customer–employee interaction have shorter durations). When considering the two car service areas that we studied, for instance, we find differences in employees’ and customers’ state positive affect: PA in car dealers and their customers is consistently higher than in mechanics. This might reflect common reactions to the conversation content: whereas sales personnel rather deal with enjoyable topics (the purchase of a new car), mechanics mainly handle problems with the car. This could be an indication for the impact of the content of service conversations in general. Also, our findings show that crossover processes are stronger when talking about buying a car than about fixing mechanical problems. Future research should examine comparable but differently pleasant service areas (services with longer conversations that intend to establish service relationships, e.g. credit institutes, insurances, travel agencies) in order to generalize our preliminary results.

Also, one could argue that our data is liable to an observation bias since a member of our research group was present in the car dealership and gave instructions to the participant. Employees and customers already knew about the study before conversation (because of Time 1 measurement of state affect). However, we chose this type of study design as it ruled out many
disadvantages of common event sampling methods concerning (1) compliance of participants, (2) response rate of customers, and (3) investigation of event-related (customer contact) effects. Furthermore, we ensured matching our data for both participants. Moreover, our participants were accustomed to evaluations due to regular service performance evaluations. Effectively, the employees work on commission according to customers’ satisfaction evaluation. Behaviour during service interactions therefore is transparent to supervisors and staff all the time. Arguing from a methodological point of view, observation bias is reduced since all participants were exposed to the same conditions. Thus, range-restrictions might occur that make analyses more conservative.

The fact that a large amount of variance is attributable to differences between employees suggests that service providers’ traits or abilities are likely to impact on change of employees’ state PA as well as the change of customers’ PA. Although we did not explicitly control for employees’ traits, this is in accordance with our developed theory and does not contradict the implications drawn from our findings. Personality traits determine affective states and behaviours, which were measured in our study. A further limitation is that we focused on PA only. Our theory predicts crossover of negative affect, too, with more types of positive and negative behaviours as mediators. Also, it remains to be demonstrated if employee’s service oriented behaviour acts as a mediator between employee PA and customer PA. Thence, much further work is required in order to gain a better theoretical and empirical understanding of crossover processes in service work.

We focus on customers’ affect as outcome variable. Oliver (1999) argued that customer satisfaction reflects the consumer’s fulfilment response and thus comprises a behavioural, cognitive, and affective component (namely the pleasure of consumption-fulfilment). Whereas
attitudes towards the interaction are focused on products and service process in addition to the employees’ behaviour, affective reactions are seen as more proximal consequence to a service interaction. Customer orientation to the service employee is therefore regarded as a concept consisting of all three facets. In other words, if rated by customers, employees’ service behaviour will reflect customers’ satisfaction with the retailer, the service process, as well as the sales’ outcome and product in addition to the positive emotional reaction to the service interactions.

We thus decided to focus on this emotional (affective) component rather than to include employees’ customer orientation, which allows us to draw conclusions from our results on customers’ interactional satisfaction due to crossover mechanisms.

Finally, although we had measures of two independent sources on two occasions, effects of customer-initiated support and employees’ affect could be overestimated because of common method variance. We aimed at reducing common method bias by using relatively objective and behaviourally anchored phrasing of the customer-initiated support items. Still, further research should consider support measures of independent observers.

The limitations of the study should be considered in light of its strengths. Firstly, our study was conducted in a naturalistic setting in a representative service sector. Secondly, to examine emotional crossover and affective linkage, state affect measurements were taken from different sources at the same event-related time. Thirdly, in addition to the event-sampling dyadic approach we assessed affect data at two occasions to get a baseline measurement from two different data sources. We can therefore rule out alternative interpretations due to higher baseline state affect prior to the conversation.

Practical Implications
In order to focus on an unilateral crossover of positive affect, it would be helpful to educate employees about how to adopt positive affect. Cognitive strategies to focus on another person’s positive emotions would be beneficial for employees in their interactions with customers (cf. Barsade, 2002). Referring to health effects of positive and negative customer behaviours, employees should be taught what customer behaviours they are likely to find helpful and be aware of potential negative and positive effects of customer behaviour. Also, our findings suggest that customers’ positive mood increases the likelihood to display supportive behaviour towards the employee. In most cases, service providers can’t chose their customers according to customers’ positive mood. Nevertheless, service providers can increase the likelihood to experience customer-initiated support firstly, if they manage to elicit customers positive mood and secondly, if they establish an equal interaction instead of hierarchical conversations. In other words, if service providers consider customers’ needs, they encourage the customers to display positive behaviour. This is in accordance with equity theory (Walster et al., 1973) saying that people return what they receive.

In addition, service providers should use previous positive customer behaviour as a cognitive anchor in times of stress: according to cognitive reappraisal strategies, employees might focus on their supportive customers instead of being overwhelmed by the stressful aspects. An implementation of this kind of cognitive anchor could be a short notation of the customer’s name as soon as a customer appreciates the work, praises the competences, or facilitates the working process and place it visible on the desk. We discovered customers’ supportive behaviour and positive affective crossover to be present in most of the dyads. In times of highly stressful events, the employee should be taught strategies to use to focus on the positive customers (within the same or the next conversation). This can be achieved for example if an employee has a
personal self-instruction strategy: “As soon as someone yells at me, I force myself to look the note on my desk and recall the nice customer I just served”. To keep up positivity after a successful service interaction and to focus on the good side of customers can be beneficial for a service employee’s energy.

Finally, we recommend managerial strategies to help service frontline staff to engage in higher state positive affect and, through this, to transfer their own positive mood to customers. Lewin and Sager (2008) conducted a study on salespersons’ burnout and found supervisor support to be negatively related to emotional exhaustion. Thus, supportive management strategies could facilitate employees to have a stable positive affect. From a marketing perspective, the customer could be seen as a co-producer in service interactions. Mostly, customer-service interactions follow standard procedures. Particularly, in the car industry’s service sector customers do not have the chance to cooperate as mechanics follow checklists to find the problem of the car. If service employees give their customers a chance to contribute with either their knowledge or with what they want to know and thus individualize services, this will not only help the employee in terms of a better mood but also the customer in terms of higher positive affect. Our data shows a correlation of .24 between customer-initiated support and customers’ PA after conversation (independent ratings) indicating that customers themselves benefit from their supportive behaviour.

Conclusion

Despite a long history of research on customer-services, interest has neither been given to crossover processes so far, nor to customer behaviours as potential psychological resources for service employees. Our data clearly demonstrated crossover processes of employees’ and customers’ PA. We found customer-initiated support to be beneficial for service providers’
wellbeing by enhancing employees’ short term positive mood. In an overall theoretical model, we discussed that employees’ PA directly leads to customers’ PA whereas customers’ PA in turn indirectly leads to employees’ PA through customer-initiated support. To see customers as resources therefore is beneficial for employees and customers in turn. We encourage service providers to establish inter pares service relationships and thus regard their customers as co-producers to encourage positive customer behaviour. Hence, customers themselves are invited to express their needs, knowledge, and prior knowledge. Service employees on the other hand are reminded of why they chose their job: namely working with people instead of computers!
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Table 1.

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability Coefficients, and Correlations for all Variables.

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<td>.24**</td>
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<td>.17**</td>
<td>.78**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Gender customer(^3)</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-03</td>
<td>-01</td>
<td>-02</td>
<td>-02</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Type of customer(^4)</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Content of service(^5)</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.23**</td>
<td>-.42**</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.19**</td>
<td>-.40**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.21**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Time of day</td>
<td>12.09</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>-.30*</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>-.45**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Age of employee</td>
<td>38.96</td>
<td>38.96</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.10*</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Job tenure</td>
<td>10.22</td>
<td>10.22</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.15**</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Weekly working hours</td>
<td>47.79</td>
<td>47.79</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>-.16**</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>-.58**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.41**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. N = 421. * p < .05; ** p < .01. PA = positive affect, Diagonal replaced with Cronbach alpha.

\(^3\) 1 = Male; 2 = Female.

\(^4\) 0 = customer has seen the employee before; 1 = new customer.

\(^5\) 1 = car dealer; 2 = mechanics.
Table 2.

*Multilevel Estimates for Models Predicting Customers’ Positive Affect at Time 2 (Right After Customer Contact).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Coeff</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Coeff</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Coeff</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Coeff</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>288.87</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>35.41***</td>
<td>403.91</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td></td>
<td>402.99</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td></td>
<td>186.60</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>5.76***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA customer t1</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>22.02***</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>21.94***</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>21.43***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time of day</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.96**</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.84**</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.79**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of customer</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service area</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>-2.11*</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-1.72</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-1.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of employee</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.48</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job tenure</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>402.99</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly working hours</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA employee t2</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>2.57*</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>2.47*</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-1.37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA employee t1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer-initiated support</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deviance: 1180.16 812.85 806.37 804.00
Diff Dev: 367.30*** 6.49* 135.47
DF: 7 1 2
Δχ²: 367.30*** 6.49* 135.47
DF: 7 1 2
Level 1 intercept variance (SD): 0.34 (0.59) 0.38 (0.16) 0.38 (0.62) 0.38 (0.61)
Level 2 intercept variance (SD): 0.78 (0.88) 0.03 (0.62) 0.02 (0.15) 0.02 (0.15)

*Note: N on Level 1 = 421. N on Level 2 = 82. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001. PA = positive affect.*
Table 3.

*Multilevel Estimates for Crossover Models Predicting Employees' Positive Affect at Time 2 (Right After Customer Contact).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 0</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coef</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>31.72***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA employee t1</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>23.50***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time of the day</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly working hours</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working area</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA customer t2</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deviance       | 991.97 |       | 661.77 |       | 659.63 |
Diff Dev       |        | 330.19***|       | 2.14  |
\(df\)         |        | 4       |       | 1     |
\(\Delta \chi^2\) |        | 328.78***|       | 2.65  |
\(df\)         |        | 4       |       | 1     |

Level 1 intercept variance (SD) | 0.42 (0.65) | 0.23 (0.48) | 0.23 (0.48) |
Level 2 intercept variance (SD) | 0.58 (0.76) | 0.09 (0.30) | 0.09 (0.30) |

*Note:* \(N\) on Level 1 = 421. \(N\) on Level 2 = 82. * \(p < .05\); ** \(p < .01\); *** \(p < .001\). PA = positive affect.
Table 4.

*Multilevel Estimates for Customer-initiated Support Models Predicting Employees' Positive Affect at Time 2 (Right After Customer Contact).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 0</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coeff</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>31.72***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA employee t1</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>23.50***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time of the day</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly working hours</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working area</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA customer t1</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer-initiated</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deviance</td>
<td>991.97</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diff Dev</td>
<td></td>
<td>330.19***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δχ²</td>
<td>328.80***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 intercept variance (SD)</td>
<td>0.42 (0.65)</td>
<td>0.23 (0.48)</td>
<td>0.23 (0.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 intercept variance (SD)</td>
<td>0.58 (0.76)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.30)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: N on Level 1 = 421. N on Level 2 = 82. * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001. PA = positive affect.*
Figure Captions

*Figure 1.* Positive and negative spiral of customers’ and employees’ behaviour and mood during service interactions.

*Figure 2.* Tested model of customers’ and employees’ behaviour and mood during service interactions.

*Figure 3.* Mediation model of customers’ and employees’ affective crossover through customer-initiated support.
Figure 1
$a = 0.18^{***}$

$\text{Customer-initiated support}$

$b = 0.09^{**}$

$c = -0.01$

$c' = -0.03$

Figure 3