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Feedback seeking in customer service relationships

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FEEDBACK SEEKING IN CUSTOMER SERVICE RELATIONSHIPS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Psychology

by

Aletta Machell Barnard
B. A., Denison University, 1995
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ABSTRACT

With the shift to a service economy (Cascio, 1995), customer service effectiveness is a critical measure of success for service firms. In service relationships, where a single employee may be the only point of contact for customers, monitoring service effectiveness becomes incumbent upon the employees delivering the service (i.e., boundary spanners). The purpose of this study was to provide an investigation into service effectiveness (i.e., customer satisfaction and repatronage and word-of-mouth intentions) in service relationships. Specifically, boundary spanners' perceived organizational support (POS) was proposed to impact customer satisfaction through its impact on feedback seeking behaviors (i.e., direct inquiry, monitoring, positive feedback, and negative feedback). Feedback seeking behaviors, in addition to customers liking of and perceived similarity to boundary spanners, were proposed to impact satisfaction. In turn, customer satisfaction was proposed to lead to repatronage intentions and word-of-mouth intentions. Participants included 147 boundary spanner and customer dyads in business-to-business service relationships. Despite the good fit of the overall model, the strength and significance of individual parameters in the model varied. Customer liking and perceived similarity had a direct impact on customer satisfaction, which in turn impacted repatronage and word-of-mouth intentions. Neither POS nor any individual feedback seeking behaviors had a significant impact on satisfaction. However, when considered together, three types of feedback seeking behavior (direct inquiry, positive and negative feedback seeking) did have a positive impact on satisfaction. These findings indicate that satisfied customers are more likely to return to boundary spanners and to recommend the boundary spanner to other prospective customers. Further, boundary spanners may enhance customer satisfaction through seeking feedback on their service delivery. Implications and directions for future research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Given the shift from a manufacturing to a service economy, customer service effectiveness has gained increased attention over the past several years (Bassi, Benson, & Cheney, 1996). Customer service effectiveness is important because organizations that provide good customer service gain a competitive advantage over organizations that do not. For example, quality of customer service is related to customer loyalty, customer retention, and increased organizational profits (Reicheld & Sasser, 1990). In addition, loyal and satisfied customers serve as an important source of free advertising through referrals and recommendations, whereas unsatisfied customers are more likely to defect and to convey negative experiences to other potential customers (Hartline & Jones, 1996). These findings highlight the important relationships between customer service effectiveness and organizational success.

The customer service literature tends to cluster around a limited number of themes that tend to be either organizational behavior (OB) oriented (e.g., climate for service, linkage of employee and customer attitudes in service encounters) or marketing oriented (e.g., customer loyalty, relationship marketing). One major difference between the OB and marketing orientations is the nature of the service situation under investigation. Service situations lie on a continuum, with service encounters at one pole, and service relationships at the other (Gronroos, 1995; Gutek, Bhappu, Liao-Troth, & Cherry, 1999). The OB focus has been on the service encounter, which is defined as a single interaction between a customer and a boundary spanner (i.e., employees who interface with customers and other constituents outside the organization). In service encounters, customers may tend to frequent a given service organization, but they interact with different boundary spanners each time (Gutek et al., 1999). Encounters tend to be routine and of short duration. In contrast, the marketing focus has been on service relationships, the focal

type of the current study. Service relationships are far less structured than service encounters, develop over time, and exist between a customer and a single employee who represents the firm, its image, and its services to the customer (Betancourt & Brown, 1997; Gutek et al., 1999).

Although the marketing literature (and OB literature to a much lesser extent, e.g., Gutek et al., 1999) provides some theoretical discussion of service relationships, surprisingly little research investigates the *behaviors* of employees in service relationships, and their impact on customer perceptions of service effectiveness. In service relationships, where a single employee may be the only point of contact for customers, monitoring service effectiveness becomes incumbent upon the employees delivering the service. Managers typically have little, if any, interaction with customers in service relationships, and managers are unable to train these employees for every possible customer service situation they will encounter (Cascio, 1995). Due to the nature of service (e.g., complex, dynamic, effectiveness is defined by customers) and service relationships (i.e., existing between a customer and a single employee, no direct manager involvement), seeking feedback from customers may be an important way for employees to monitor their own effectiveness in service relationships. No prior work has addressed employee feedback seeking behaviors (FSBs) in service relationships.

The current study addresses these limitations by investigating both an antecedent (i.e., perceived organizational support) and the consequences (i.e., service effectiveness perceptions) of employees' feedback seeking behaviors in service relationships. Specifically, the current study presents a model that links employee perceptions of organizational support (POS) to employees' seeking of customer feedback (i.e., strategy of feedback seeking, sign of feedback), and customer evaluations of service effectiveness (i.e., customer satisfaction, repatronage intentions, word-of-mouth intentions). The paper begins by defining and describing the criterion of interest: customer

service effectiveness. Next the paper reviews customer feedback seeking in service relationships, drawing on feedback seeking research in other contexts. Working backward through the model, the construct of POS is then reviewed as it relates to FSBs and customer service effectiveness.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Customer Service Effectiveness

Customer service effectiveness is an important means for organizations to gain a competitive advantage in today's service economy (Berry, 1995; Bowen & Schneider, 1988). Customers who are satisfied tend to return for future business and sometimes assist in marketing a service organization through word-of-mouth (Rucci, Kim, & Quinn, 1998). Previous research has demonstrated that customer retention is increasingly profitable year after year in many industries (e.g., automotive, banking; Reicheld & Sasser, 1990). Further, exerting efforts to retain current customers is significantly less costly than gaining new customers (Reicheld & Sasser).

Because service effectiveness is increasingly becoming a critical organizational objective (Cascio, 1995; Reicheld & Sasser, 1990), it is important to examine how the delivery of service differs from more traditional manufacturing and delivery of goods. The delivery of customer service is complex, dynamic, and dependent upon customer expectations and perceptions (Cascio, 1995; Iacobucci, Ostrom, & Grayson, 1995). Unlike manufacturing and distribution of products, the delivery of customer service generally is not a highly routine or structured task. A service is distinguished from a product in three principal ways (Bowen & Schneider, 1988). First, a product is a tangible good, while services are much more intangible and may consist solely of acts or processes with no tangible product at all. Second, products generally are produced and then consumed, while services are often produced and consumed simultaneously. Third, the nature of service requires that customers are active participants in service deliveries. This third factor, customer participation, highlights the relationship between the service contact employee and the customer throughout the service delivery process.

The effectiveness of customer service relationships has been operationalized in a variety of ways. Some studies focus on customer evaluations, such as customer satisfaction (Johnson, 1996; Schmit & Allscheid, 1995) or service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988; Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998). Other studies focus on customers' behavioral intentions, such as word-of-mouth intentions (Blodgett, Granbois, & Walters, 1993; Hartline & Jones, 1996), or repatronage intentions (Blodgett et al., 1993; Boulding, Kalra, Staelin, & Zeithaml, 1993). One limitation of the previous research is that customer attitudes and behavioral intentions infrequently are examined within a single study thereby precluding thorough examination of the construct validity of these variables and how these variables relate to one another (cf., Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). The current study addresses this limitation by including measures of attitudes and behavioral intentions that are relevant to the examination of employee – customer relationships (i.e., customer satisfaction, word-of-mouth intentions, repatronage intentions). By including multiple indicators of service effectiveness, the current study will be able to examine a) the factor structure of the constructs, b) construct validity, c) relations among variables, and d) structural paths among variables (e.g., customer satisfaction's impact on behavioral intentions). Service quality will not be examined in the current study because previous research suggests that service quality may stem more from behind-the-scenes processes (e.g., supply chain management) than actual exchanges between employees and customers (Iacobucci, et al., 1995). In contrast, the findings of Iacobucci et al. indicate that customer satisfaction stems from customers' experiences in service situations (e.g., interactions with service providers).

Despite the debate surrounding the specific nature of customer service effectiveness (cf. Iacobucci et al., 1995; Gotlieb, Grewal, & Brown, 1994), there is agreement that customer attitudes (e.g., customer satisfaction) are related to important customer behavioral intentions (i.e.,

word-of-mouth intentions and repatronage intentions). This proposition is consistent with Fishbein and Ajzen's (1977) model of attitudes predicting behavioral intentions. Previous research on attitudes and behavioral intentions in other contexts provides further support for the assertion that customer satisfaction leads to behavioral intentions. For example, Tett and Meyer (1993) conducted a meta-analysis that examined the link between job attitudes and turnover. They found that two job attitudes (i.e., job satisfaction, organizational commitment) contributed uniquely to turnover intentions of employees. Further, they found that turnover intentions were the strongest predictor of actual turnover. Consistent with this literature, the current study proposes that attitudes toward the service received from a boundary spanner (i.e., customer satisfaction) will predict intentions to continue doing business with the service provider (i.e., repatronage intentions) and intentions to recommend the boundary spanner to others (i.e., word-of-mouth intentions).

Hypothesis 1a: Customer satisfaction will have a direct positive impact on repatronage intentions.

Hypothesis 1b: Customer satisfaction will have a direct positive impact on word-of-mouth intentions.

In summary, service effectiveness is defined in the current study as consisting of three components: (1) customer satisfaction, which leads to (2) repatronage intentions, and (3) word-of-mouth intentions. Using this definition, customers are the evaluators of service effectiveness. Seeking feedback from customers is one important way to keep abreast of customer perceptions and thereby to evaluate the service one provides. This information regarding customer perceptions of service effectiveness likely helps employees meet organizational and personal goals

of satisfying customers. The next section defines boundary spanner feedback seeking behaviors (FSBs) and presents hypotheses regarding how FSBs are related to customer satisfaction.

Review of Feedback in the Customer Service Literature

The closeness between customers and service employees suggests that customers may hold unique information about the performance of service employees that supervisors and peers do not have (Cascio, 1995; Lambert, Sharma, & Levy, 1997). In an organization where customer service is important, service providers must gain a “glimpse” into customer perceptions of service effectiveness. While feedback-seeking behaviors by a boundary spanner have not been investigated in the customer service literature per se, there are two related research areas that provide a basis for the current research. First, there are a few studies that investigate a firm’s interest in gaining organizational level service effectiveness perceptions from customers (e.g., customer satisfaction surveys; e.g., Johnson, 1996; Schneider et al., 1998). In these studies, organizations are the collectors and administrators of customer feedback regarding organizational service effectiveness, compared to the current study, where employees seek feedback regarding their own service effectiveness directly from the customers with whom they interact. Second, there is a stream of research that examines customer evaluations of individual boundary spanners as a part of a formal performance appraisal system (e.g., Lambert et al., 1997; Lengnick-Hall, 1996; London & Smither, 1995; Milliman, Zawacki, Schulz, Wiggins, & Norman, 1995). Again, these evaluations are solicited and collected by the organization (as compared to individual boundary spanners), and someone in the organization (presumably a manager) determines what information will be relayed back to boundary spanners. Each of these areas will be reviewed below.

Customer evaluations of the organization. One body of research relevant to the role of feedback in customer service contexts examines employee perceptions that a firm seeks and/or values customer input in relation to service effectiveness. For example, Johnson (1996) considered “information seeking” with respect to service effectiveness in an employee survey of service climate. Johnson defined “information seeking” as an organization’s continuous efforts to identify and track service effectiveness and to share customer opinions of service with employees. Johnson found that employee perceptions of the organization’s information seeking were related to customer evaluations of overall service effectiveness and to customer evaluations of boundary spanners’ effectiveness. After controlling for branch size and location, information seeking was most strongly related to customer satisfaction ($r = .48, p < .01$). Johnson concluded that seeking information from customers regarding service effectiveness (i.e., determining needs and desires of customers) is a critical first step in providing excellent service.

In a longitudinal investigation, Schneider and his colleagues assessed “customer feedback” as a dimension of service climate (Schneider et al., 1998). Using essentially the same definition as Johnson’s (1996) information seeking, Schneider and colleagues also found that seeking customer feedback at Time 1 predicted customer perceptions of service quality three years later ($r = .31, p < .01$). They concluded that “the key to positive customer perceptions of service quality . . . may be listening to customers and creating conditions that will meet those customers’ expectations and needs” (p. 159). Results of these two studies (i.e., Johnson, 1996; Schneider et al., 1998) indicate that the popular press (e.g., Peters & Waterman, 1982) is on target – the best service firms *do* listen to their customers. The results of these studies also support the central tenet of this study – that customer feedback seeking behaviors are positively related to service effectiveness.

These studies (Johnson, 1996; Schneider et al., 1998) demonstrate that there is a positive relationship between employee perceptions that the organization solicits and values customer input and customer ratings of service effectiveness. The implication is that organizations that collect customer information on an organizational level are perceived as providing better service than those who do not collect customer information provide. Using customer feedback allows organizations to monitor and regulate their service offerings and delivery. The current study examines this link at an individual level in service relationships, proposing that boundary spanners who collect more information (feedback) from their customers will be perceived as providing more effective customer service.

Customer evaluations of individual boundary spanner employees. In addition to customers evaluating organizations, increasingly customers are being used to evaluate employees. For example, London and Smither (1995) report that approximately 60% of the consulting firms and organizations surveyed collect performance ratings of employees made by internal or external customers. In addition, customers traditionally have been included in formal performance appraisal programs in teaching settings, and more recently in other service settings (Lambert et al., 1997; Milliman et al., 1995). For example, an article in *Personnel Journal* describes how some businesses (e.g., Federal Express and Digital Equipment Corporation) include customers in 360-degree goal-setting processes (Milliman et al., 1995). A *Harvard Business Review* article by a Sears vice president describes their employee-customer-profit model that is used to determine rewards and compensation for the top 200 ranking managers within the company. All of these managers' long-term incentives are based equally on employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, and financial performance (Rucci, Kirn, & Quinn, 1998). Also, at General Electric, the formal appraisal process of senior management includes interviews with customers (Cascio, 1995).

Taken together, these findings indicate that organizations value customer perspectives as an important index of employee performance.

Although anecdotal examples abound, there is very little published research investigating customers as evaluators of individual employees; as London and Smither note “this is an area in which practice is well ahead of theory and research” (1995, p. 807). While the literature examining customer performance evaluations of service employees is thin, two relevant empirical studies have been identified. Schneider, Hanges, Goldstein, and Braverman (1994) examined the generalizability of customer service ratings of academic faculty made by undergraduate students. Schneider and colleagues found that student ratings of teaching effectiveness (service effectiveness) were related to department chair ratings of teaching, to other facets of faculty performance (e.g., graduate educator effectiveness, undergraduate educator effectiveness, department service, collegueship), and to chair ratings of overall faculty effectiveness. The significant correlation between student and chair ratings of faculty effectiveness ($r = .32, p < .01$) demonstrates that service effectiveness judgments made by customers and supervisors are related. The correlation also demonstrates that nearly 90% of the variance in student and chair ratings is not shared. This study indicates, as we might expect, that customer ratings are likely to agree to some extent with supervisor ratings of boundary spanners. However, this study also demonstrates that customers likely are providing important *additional* information and observing *additional* service behaviors that supervisors do not see, making their ratings a valuable addition to the performance appraisal process.

The second empirical study regarding customer evaluations of boundary spanners was conducted in the health care industry (Lambert et al., 1997). Evaluations of boundary spanners were made by two constituents: customers and managers of the boundary spanners. Similar to

Schneider et al. (1994), customer ratings of boundary spanner employees' knowledge, availability, and trustworthiness were significantly correlated with managers' ratings of employees on these dimensions (ranging from $r = .28 - .36$, $p < .05$). Again, these results indicate that while customers and managers demonstrate some agreement on the effectiveness of boundary spanners, each perspective provides unique information. For example, customers likely are in a better position to observe boundary spanners' behaviors in service interactions than are managers. One potential explanation for variability in boundary spanners' service effectiveness is that successful boundary spanners are engaging in more feedback seeking behaviors and incorporating more customer feedback compared to boundary spanners that perform less well. This conclusion is potentially more useful, as it provides an actionable conclusion: teach boundary spanners to seek and use feedback from customers to improve customer perceptions of the employee and the organization. This proposition has not been empirically tested prior to the current study.

Given that there is a little research on customer evaluations of boundary spanner performance, it is not surprising to learn that there is no published research on the social context of boundary spanner performance ratings made by customers. Two aspects of the social context might be particularly important in the customer service relationship: customer liking of boundary spanners and customers' perceived similarity to the boundary spanners. Outside the customer service context, previous research has shown a positive relationship between a supervisors' liking of subordinates and supervisors' performance ratings of subordinates (e.g., Judge & Ferris, 1993; Tsui & Barry, 1986; Wayne & Ferris, 1990; Wayne & Liden, 1995). Theoretically, liking may influence the supervisors observations and retention of performance information (Cardy & Dobbins, 1986). It may also be the case that supervisors provide more resources and support to liked subordinates, thereby contributing to better actual job performance (Feldman, 1986). Based

on the same logic, customers' liking of boundary spanners is likely to be related to customer satisfaction in the service context. Just as supervisors do, customers are likely to selectively attend to and recall positive performance information for liked boundary spanners. Similar to supervisors, customers may provide more information to liked boundary spanners that allows the boundary spanners to perform better in the eyes of the customer. Based on this rationale, customer liking is proposed to impact customer satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: Customers' liking of boundary spanners will have a direct, positive impact on customer satisfaction.

The second social factor of interest is the degree to which customers perceive boundary spanners to be similar to themselves. Previous research indicates a positive relationship between supervisors' perceived similarity of subordinates and supervisors' ratings of subordinate performance (Pulakos & Wexley, 1983; Turban & Jones, 1988; Wayne & Liden, 1995; Zalesny & Highhouse, 1992). According to Zalesny and Highhouse, this relationship might be explained by social cognitive information processing. Supervisors tend to develop a positive self-evaluation, thus subordinates perceived to be similar to themselves will be perceived in a more positive light than will subordinates perceived to be dissimilar to themselves. Customers are likely to engage in the same type of cognitive processing as supervisors when evaluating the service provided by boundary spanners. Thus, customers who perceive boundary spanners to be similar to themselves are likely to be more satisfied with the service delivered by these similar boundary spanners.

Hypothesis 3: Customers' perceived similarity of boundary spanners will have a positive impact on customer satisfaction.

The current section outlined the factors involved in customer evaluations of boundary spanners and the service they deliver. The next section defines and describes individual feedback seeking in service relationships, the focus of the current study.

The Role of Active Feedback Seeking Behaviors in Service Effectiveness

Customer feedback seeking behaviors (FSBs) can be defined as actions taken to assess customer perceptions of service effectiveness. These actions range from explicitly asking the customer for evaluations to passively observing customer reactions to service encounters. Some examples include:

- Calling hotel guests during their stay to see if there is anything that can be done to enhance satisfaction with the service
- Requesting that a client provide overall impressions/directions for improvement on current service and deliverable offerings
- Monitoring reactions during a presentation to clients, noting popular and unpopular components for future use
- Asking realty clients for an assessment of the match between their ideal properties and those shown by the realtors
- Contacting a financial service client to determine potential improvements to an on-line brokerage offering

These examples represent a variety of FSBs that could be enacted during a service relationship. FSBs such as these might benefit service effectiveness perceptions of customers in two ways. First, FSBs may provide critical information for boundary spanner self-regulation, allowing boundary spanners to tailor their services to customer expectations. Second, the sheer

act of participation (i.e., providing feedback to boundary spanners) may enhance customer satisfaction. Each of these is reviewed below.

Role of Feedback in Boundary Spanner Self-regulation. Although feedback seeking behaviors (FSBs) largely have not been investigated in terms of customer service, the role of FSBs has been explored in other areas, providing a basis for hypothesizing the link between feedback seeking behaviors and customer service effectiveness in the current study. For example, feedback and the feedback loop are central tenets of several theories of motivation, including control theory (Klein, 1991), goal setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990), reinforcement theory (Kreitner & Luthans, 1991), and social cognitive theory (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Theories involving self-management, the process of monitoring one's own performance and engaging in corrective mechanisms for improving that performance, emphasize the importance of seeking and utilizing important performance feedback (Gist, Bavetta, & Stevens, 1990; Rousseau, 1997). Recently there has been recognition that feedback is not merely a process in which a passive recipient receives performance-related information, but it also can be an active process to gather performance-related information (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). Prior to Ashford and Cummings' seminal article, feedback seeking was only a small component of theoretical models of feedback (e.g., Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). Since then, more attention has been placed on performers as active seekers of feedback from the environment and those around them (Madzar, 1995).

For boundary spanners, seeking customer feedback is an important strategy for continuous self-evaluation of service effectiveness. Boundary spanners can use customer feedback to develop performance goals. Boundary spanners scan the environment for performance cues that illuminate performance-goal discrepancies, and then work to reduce any discrepancies (London, 1997). This cycle of goal setting, performance assessment/discrepancy detection, and discrepancy reduction

makes up the self-regulation process (Ashford & Tsui, 1991; Lord & Hanges, 1987). In order to effectively carry out the performance assessment/discrepancy reduction phase, boundary spanners must gauge their performance in the eyes of their customers. Customer feedback seeking behaviors (FSBs) likely enable boundary spanners to gain critical information for performance assessment and discrepancy reduction. On an individual service provider level, those employees who actively seek feedback from customers likely will have more satisfied customers (compared to boundary spanners who seek feedback less frequently) because they will have more information with which to tailor their behaviors to the needs of customers, and thereby reduce performance - goal discrepancies.

In addition to allowing assessment of performance relative to goals, customer feedback may provide boundary spanners with more specific information regarding what their goals should be (i.e., reduce role ambiguity). Role ambiguity can reduce the clarity of performance goals, thus impeding performance (Locke & Latham, 1990). Because customer service effectiveness is defined by customers rather than by strict standards, boundary spanners may be faced with ambiguous roles. Previous studies have shown that role ambiguity is associated with decreased boundary spanner self-efficacy and job satisfaction, which leads to decreased service quality (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Parasuraman, Berry, & Ziethaml, 1990). Obtaining information about expectations of performance may help reduce role ambiguity (Ashford & Tsui, 1991). Seeking feedback from customers can be a useful method for obtaining this information, and at the same time be useful for providing the customer with personalized service, ultimately leading to greater customer satisfaction (Surprenant & Solomon, 1987).

Customer Participation. In addition to contributing to customer satisfaction by impacting role clarity and determining goal – performance discrepancies, soliciting customer input may

provide further benefits due, specifically, to asking customers to participate in the service they receive. According to the principles of relationship marketing, part of the service concept lies in developing relationships between customers and contact employees (Berry, 1995). As a relationship develops, so does reciprocity between the customer and the contact employee. Customer input can be viewed by the customer as an investment in the organization (or in the particular contact employee). The customer likely invests the time and input to the extent that the customer receives some benefit (Berry, 1995).

The proposition that customer participation may influence satisfaction may be bolstered by previous studies on employee participation. Previous research demonstrates that employee participation is positively related to employee commitment to the organization (Rodgers & Hunter, 1991; Rodgers, Hunter, & Rogers, 1993). Based on this, one might hypothesize that customer participation can influence customer attitudes (e.g., satisfaction). Ultimately, the benefits of customer participation are the same for the organization and the customer – increased service effectiveness, positive word-of-mouth intentions, and customer retention. Customers who receive better service are likely to be more satisfied and to return to the organization in the future (Gwinner, Gremler, & Bitner, 1998).

The previous section describes some of the reasons why feedback seeking may enhance customer perceptions of service effectiveness (e.g., self-regulation of service performance, customer investment in providing feedback). In the feedback literature, FSBs are classified more specifically, based on FS strategy (i.e., direct inquiry, monitoring) and FS sign (i.e., positive, negative). The following sections outline the strategy and sign of FSBs in relationship to service effectiveness.

Feedback Seeking Strategy. There are two feedback seeking strategies reviewed in the literature: direct inquiry and monitoring (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). Direct inquiry involves overt requests for feedback from others. Monitoring involves more indirect attempts at gaining feedback, such as observation and eavesdropping. These strategies result in different types of obtained information for the boundary spanner. Feedback gained through direct inquiry depends upon what questions are asked, and what a customer is willing to report (Fedor, Rensvold, & Adams, 1992) whereas feedback obtained through monitoring necessarily depends on making inferences about customer perceptions of service effectiveness (Ashford & Cummings, 1983).

While not in a customer service setting, empirical studies have investigated the link between feedback seeking strategies and performance effectiveness. Ashford and Tsui (1991) investigated feedback seeking strategy in a field study of mid-level executives and found that feedback seeking through direct inquiry was positively related to managerial effectiveness ratings by supervisors, subordinates, and peers. They also found that monitoring was positively related to ratings made by subordinates and peers.

In another study, Farr, Ringseis, and Unckless (1999) investigated the relationships of direct inquiry and monitoring with self-ratings of performance among two samples of employed individuals. Although not all of the bivariate correlations reached statistical significance at the .05 level, there was a pattern of positive relationships between both FS strategies and performance. Specifically, significant positive correlations were observed in Sample 2 for contextual performance with FS through direct inquiry ($r = .36, p < .01$) and through monitoring ($r = .36, p < .01$). In Sample 1, the relationships of contextual performance with direct inquiry ($r = .16$) and with monitoring ($r = .16$) were in the predicted direction, but were not significant. The results of this study suggest that employees who seek more feedback through direct inquiry or through

monitoring their managers and/or co-workers rate themselves as better performers than those who seek less feedback.

The empirical findings reviewed here (Ashford & Tsui, 1991; Farr et al., 1999) have provided some evidence that FS strategy has a bivariate relationship with performance. The current study seeks to take this bivariate relationship one step further, placing it in a model of boundary spanner perceptions, behavior, and customer evaluations and behavioral intentions. Based on the findings of previous research on FS strategy, the tendency for boundary spanners to seek customer feedback, either through direct inquiry or through monitoring, is proposed to lead to greater customer service effectiveness.

Hypothesis 4: Feedback seeking through direct inquiry will have a direct positive impact on customer satisfaction.

Hypothesis 5: Feedback seeking through monitoring will have a direct positive impact on customer satisfaction.

Feedback Sign. In addition to FS strategy, researchers have also examined the sign of feedback sought. The sign of feedback sought can be positive or negative. While there is an extensive literature covering positive and negative feedback (i.e., not sign of feedback *sought*, but feedback *offered* without a request), there is not as much research regarding the sign of feedback that employees actively seek. The research on feedback in general indicates that negative (sometimes called constructive feedback) has more informational value than positive feedback (London, 1997; Morrison & Bies, 1991). A recent meta-analysis investigating the effects of feedback on performance in 131 studies (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996) found that feedback improves performance by .41 SD on average. The results showed that the sign of feedback (positive or negative) did not moderate the relationship with performance. Thus, despite some speculation

that negative feedback provides more informational value and thus should have a greater positive impact on performance, this meta-analysis does not indicate any differential effects of positive versus negative feedback. Instead, both positive and negative feedback were found to be beneficial for performance. Negative and positive feedback seeking are reviewed next.

Negative Feedback Seeking. Despite the self-image risks of seeking negative feedback (Ashford & Cummings, 1983), Ashford and Tsui (1991) found that negative feedback seeking was positively associated with subordinates' opinions of managers' overall effectiveness. These results indicate that in a managerial situation, seeking negative feedback is associated with impressions that the seeker is strong and eager for improvement (Morrison & Bies, 1991).

Type of feedback sought has not been investigated in a customer service situation, but there are two related studies that provide support for the impact of negative feedback on performance. First, one study addressed the impact of positive and negative formal feedback from managers (i.e., feedback provided as part of a performance appraisal intervention). Waldersee and Luthans (1994) instructed managers to provide either positive, negative, or no feedback to fast food employees over a three week period. In this study, employees in the negative feedback and control conditions significantly improved their performance.

Second, evidence for the negative feedback – performance relationship can be drawn from research on recovery from service failure. A service failure is signaled by a customer report of dissatisfying service. This report of dissatisfying service provides negative feedback regarding the service received. Research shows that service providers who effectively recover from service failures often find customers to be *more* satisfied than *prior* to the service failure (Hart, Heskett, & Sasser, 1990; Johnston, 1995). Thus boundary spanners who effectively recover are taking into account the negative feedback received from customers and acting upon it to the customers'

eventual satisfaction. In order to effectively recover from a service failure, or improve upon mediocre service, a boundary spanner needs feedback regarding customer assessments of service effectiveness. Due to the informational value of negative feedback, it is logical to predict that seeking customers' negative feedback will have an impact on customer evaluations of service effectiveness.

Hypothesis 6: Seeking negative customer feedback will have a direct positive impact on customer satisfaction.

Positive Feedback Seeking. While there seems to be agreement that the informational value of negative feedback leads to performance benefits, there is less agreement about the relationship between positive feedback seeking and performance (e.g., Ilgen et al., 1979; London & Smither, 1995; Morrison & Bies, 1991). While some authors point out the potential for positive feedback seeking to be associated with weakness or insecurity on the part of the seeker (Ashford & Tsui, 1991), others point out that the content of positive feedback can enhance perceptions of the seeker's performance (Morrison & Bies, 1991). For boundary spanners serving in complex and unstructured roles, positive feedback seeking may be viewed by customers as an attempt to personalize service delivery, rather than as a sign of weakness or insecurity. That is, customers may view boundary spanner positive FSBs as beneficial to the customer. In fact, seeking any feedback from customers may be taken as a sign of caring about customer satisfaction. Given that previous research suggests that positive feedback is more readily accepted and accurately perceived by recipients than negative feedback (Ilgen, et al., 1979; London, 1997), boundary spanners who seek more positive feedback from customers likely are equipped to actually tailor their services to individual customers' needs and preferences. For

these reasons, it is hypothesized that boundary spanners who seek more positive feedback likely provide better customer service.

Hypothesis 7: Seeking positive customer feedback will have a direct positive impact on customer satisfaction.

Boundary Spanner Perceptions of Organizational Practices

One of the most critical arguments made by proponents of relationship marketing is that organizations must “market” themselves to employees so that employees will reciprocate by “marketing” the organization to customers (Berry, 1995; Bitner, 1995). Because managers likely have very little involvement with customers, it is in the best interest of the firm to create conditions that will maximize the “marketing,” or service orientation, of employees in their service relationships. According Berry and Bitner, the best way to maximize employee service orientation is to treat employees the way you want them to treat customers. The guiding principal of this proposition is the norm of reciprocity.

Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986) used the term “perceived organizational support” (POS) to describe employees’ perceptions of the extent to which their contributions are valued and their well-being is supported by the organization. The construct of POS is a measure of an employee’s perceptions of the organization’s affective commitment to him or her, including satisfaction with the employee’s performance, consideration of the employee’s needs, recognition of the employee’s input, and provision of future development and promotion opportunities. Employees with high POS believe that the organization cares about them and will reward their efforts to perform beyond expectations. Employees with low POS perceive that the organization is not understanding of mistakes or special needs and would prefer to hire someone else over them. Distinct from the work related attitudes of organizational commitment and job

satisfaction, POS represents employees' beliefs regarding the commitment and support they receive from their organization that develop based on accumulated personal experiences (Shore & Tetrick, 1991) rather than employees' attitudes toward the firm.

When boundary spanners perceive that their organization is supportive, they may reciprocate by engaging in behaviors that are supportive of customers (i.e., seeking customer feedback to improve service effectiveness). While not explicitly tested in a customer service context, POS has been linked to important employee behaviors in other settings. POS is positively related to employee effort in job performance and to employee innovativeness (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990), and negatively related to absenteeism (Eisenberger et al., 1986). There also is evidence that constructs similar to POS are related to FSBs. In a study of employed undergraduates, Farr and colleagues (1999) investigated perceived managerial support for career development in relationship to seeking feedback from co-workers and managers. Specifically, direct inquiry for performance feedback ($r = .41, p < .01$) was related to support for career development. Monitoring co-workers for feedback also was related to support for career development ($r = .19, p < .05$). In a second sample, Farr et al. found similar relationships between measures of feedback seeking strategy and ratings of training climate (e.g., monitoring, $r = .27, p < .01$; inquiry, $r = .18, p < .05$). These studies provide preliminary evidence of a link between perceptions of organizational support and employee feedback seeking behaviors.

A recent study (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001) explicitly investigated the role of reciprocation in the relationships between POS and outcome variables such as performance. In a survey of postal workers, including mail processing handlers, secretarial staff, and supervisors, Eisenberger, et al. (2001) found that POS was positively related to employees' felt obligation to care about and support their organization. In turn, felt obligation

was positively related to outcomes like in-role performance, affective commitment, and organizational spontaneity. This was the first study to directly demonstrate the theoretical role of reciprocity as the link between POS and outcome variables. Consistent with the norm of reciprocity, boundary spanners in a service relationship who feel supported by an organization may be more likely to attempt to achieve the organizational goals of service effectiveness by seeking feedback from customers.

Hypothesis 8a: POS will have a direct positive impact on customer feedback seeking through direct inquiry.

Hypothesis 8b: POS will have a direct positive impact on customer feedback seeking through monitoring.

Hypothesis 8c: POS will have a direct positive impact on seeking negative customer feedback.

Hypothesis 8d: POS will have a direct positive impact on seeking positive customer feedback.

Hypothesized and Alternative Models of Customer Service Relationships

The current study proposes the model depicted in Figure 1. As described, the hypothesized model proposes that boundary spanner perceptions of organizational support impact their gathering of feedback from customers. Feedback seeking, customer liking, and perceived similarity to the boundary spanners, are proposed to have direct, positive impacts on customer satisfaction. In turn, satisfaction is proposed to lead to intentions to return to the boundary spanner for future needs and intentions to recommend the boundary spanner to other potential customers.

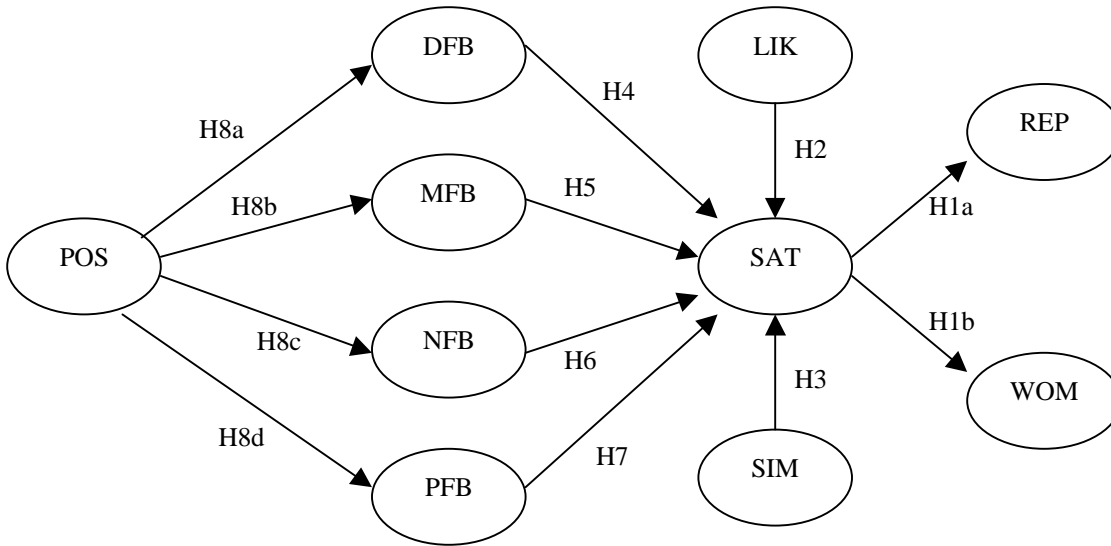


Figure 1. Initially Hypothesized POS Indirect Model.

Researchers suggest routinely examining alternative models that are based on theoretical rationale. Reviews of the use of structural equation modeling (SEM) in psychological research indicate that many papers suffer from confirmation bias (i.e., testing only the hypothesized model and ignoring other theoretical alternatives; MacCallum & Austin, 2000). Even when an hypothesized model fits the data well, other models that fit the data equally well routinely exist (MacCallum, Wegener, Uchino, & Fabrigar, 1993). To address this critique, the current study proposes and tests alternative models. Specifically, four theoretical alternatives are proposed a priori, as described below.

The first alternative model posits that POS has a direct impact on customer satisfaction, rather than through its impact on feedback seeking behaviors. As described earlier, POS is a measure of an employee's perception of the organization's affective commitment to him or her (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The current study proposes that when boundary spanners perceive that their organization is supportive, they will reciprocate by engaging in behaviors that are supportive of customers. The supportive behaviors may manifest themselves in feedback seeking behaviors

as proposed. However, it could be argued that POS has a direct, positive impact on customer satisfaction rather than indirect effects through specific feedback seeking behaviors. The direct link between POS and customer satisfaction is based in research linking employee attitudes to customer attitudes (e.g., Schmitt & Allscheid, 1995; Schneider & Bowen, 1985). In this case, employees' beliefs about the organization's attitudes toward them (i.e., POS) impacts customer attitudes (i.e., satisfaction). This conceptual model, labeled POS Direct, is presented in Figure 2.

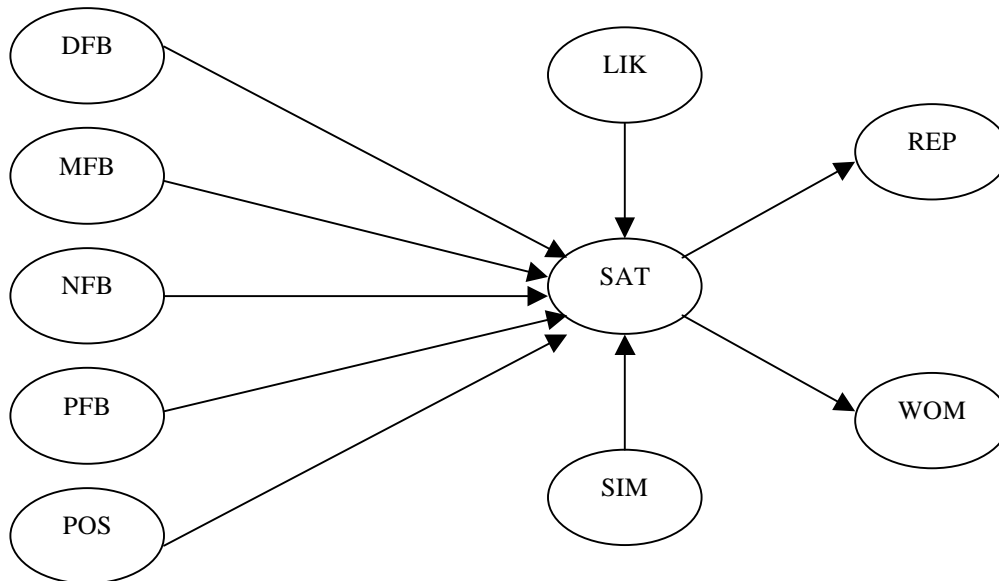


Figure 2. Conceptual POS Direct Model.

The second alternative model, depicted in Figure 3, proposes that feedback seeking behaviors have a direct, positive impact on repatronage and word-of-mouth intentions rather than only indirect links through customer satisfaction. This alternative indicates that the act of feedback seeking itself leads to intentions to recommend and continue doing business with a boundary spanner. As discussed earlier, one potential mechanism by which feedback impacts service outcomes such as these is the invitation (through feedback seeking) that boundary spanners extend to customers to participate in the service delivered. Another reason that may

explain this link is that feedback seeking behavior demonstrates the boundary spanner's motivation to please the customer. For reasons such as these, feedback seeking is proposed to directly impact behavioral intentions in this alternative model.

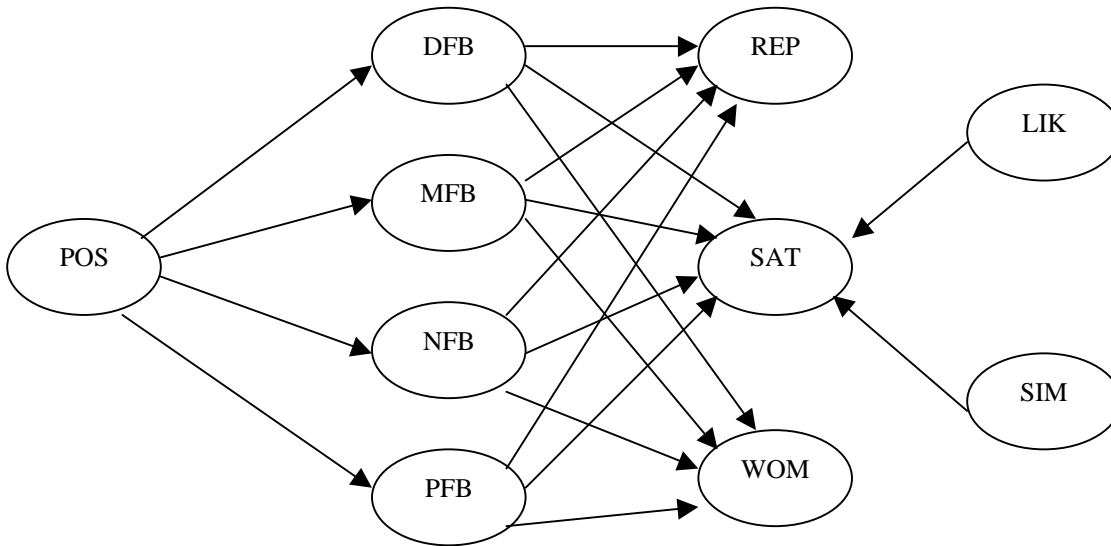


Figure 3. Conceptual Feedback Direct Model.

The third alternative model proposes direct, positive links from liking and similarity to repatronage and word-of-mouth intentions, rather than only indirect links through satisfaction. This alternative indicates that when a customer likes a boundary spanner, he or she is more willing to endorse that boundary spanner to others and to continue doing business with them. In this alternative model, the effects of liking and similarity on behavioral intentions are proposed to exist in addition to the direct, positive impact of satisfaction on word-of-mouth and repatronage intentions.

The fourth alternative model posits that perceived similarity between the customer and boundary spanner has a direct, positive impact on feedback seeking behavior as well as on satisfaction. To the extent that customers and boundary spanners have more similar goals and

values, boundary spanners may be less likely to engage in feedback seeking behaviors, relying instead on their own perceptions.

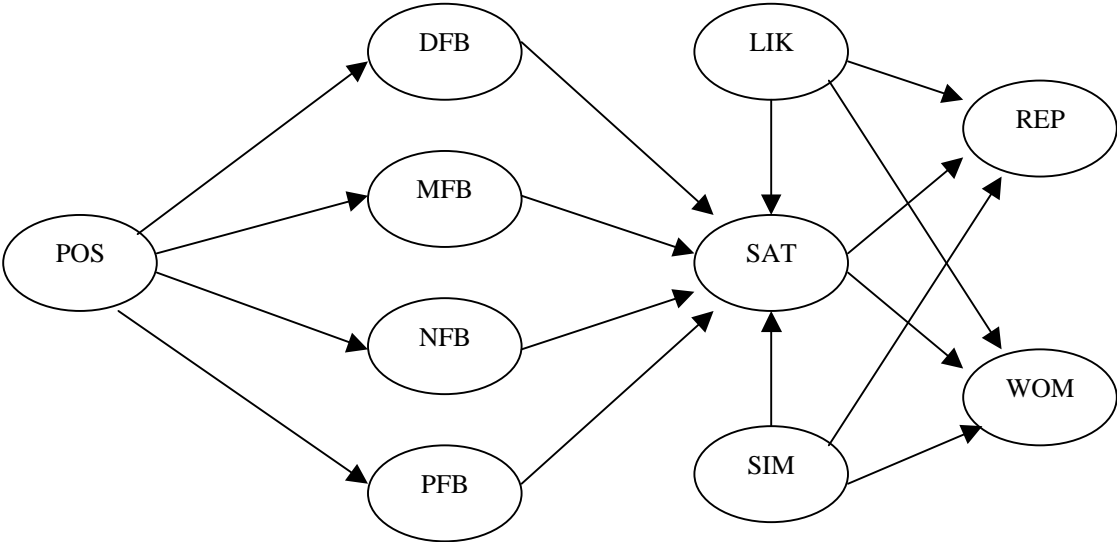


Figure 4. Conceptual Liking/Similarity Direct Model.

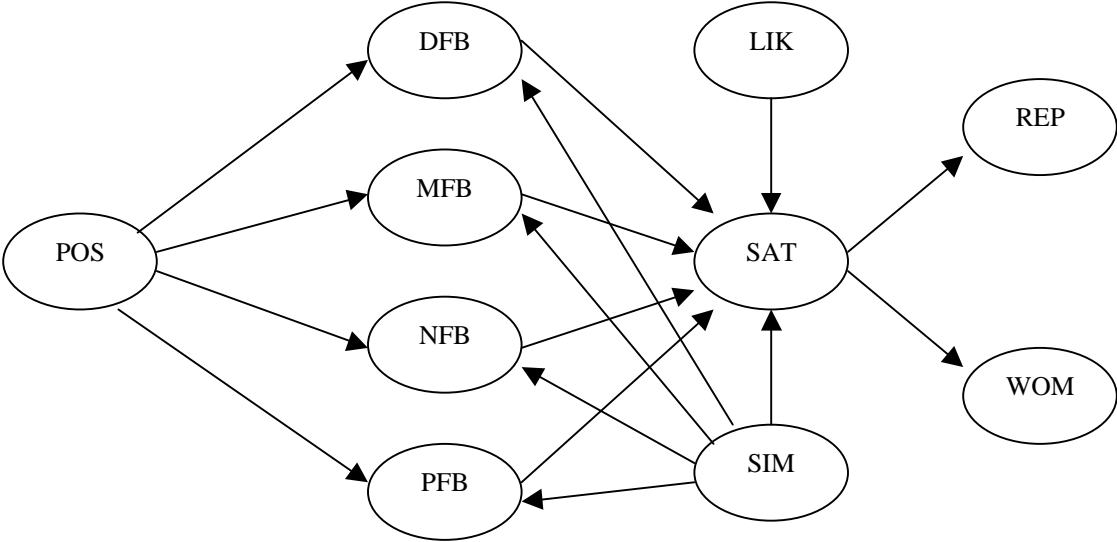


Figure 5. Conceptual Similarity Feedback Model.

METHOD

Participants

Participants consisted of customers and boundary spanners in business-to-business market research relationships. Participants were recruited from two sources: an international research firm (Firm A) and an international technology firm (Firm B). Both sources were verbally screened to determine that boundary spanners and clients were engaged in service relationships rather than encounters. The existence of a relationship between each boundary spanner and client dyad also was confirmed using an item measuring relationship tenure, reported below.

Firm A. Two hundred boundary spanners from Firm A who were involved in service relationships with 375 different clients were invited to participate. Responses were received from 143 out of 200 boundary spanners (72% response rate) and 135 out of 375 clients (36% response rate) from Firm A. As shown in Table 1, these boundary spanners returned 247 surveys (66% survey return rate). Each boundary spanner respondent from Firm A returned between one and seven surveys, as shown in Table 2. The boundary spanners had a mean age of 40.25 years (SD = 9.43) and were 24% male. The clients had a mean age of 39.24 years (SD = 9.04) and were 51% male. Clients reported working with a mean of 6.25 research firms (median = 5.00 firms; SD = 7.58), while boundary spanners reported working with a mean of 10.58 client organizations (median = 6.00 organizations; SD = 10.30). Clients reported having worked with their boundary spanner counterparts from 1 month to 20 years, with a mean of 26.40 months (median = 14.00 months; SD = 32.04).

Table 1
Response Rates Among Sample Sources

	Firm A	Firm B	Total
BS invited to participate	200	66	266
BS responded	143	45	188
BS response rate	72%	68%	71%
BS surveys sent out	375	66	441
BS surveys received	247	45	292
BS survey return rate	66%	68%	66%
Clients invited to participate	375	66	441
Clients responded	135	50	185
Client response rate	36%	76%	42%
Dyads invited to participate	375	66	441
Dyads received	108	42	150
Dyad response rate	29%	64%	34%

Note. BS = boundary spanners.

Table 2
Response Frequency of Boundary Spanners From Firm A

# Surveys Returned Per Boundary Spanner	Incidence	Total Surveys Returned
1	101	101
2	20	40
3	4	12
4	7	28
5	5	25
6	1	6
7	5	35
Total	143 BS	247 Surveys

Firm B. Sixty-six boundary spanner and client dyads were invited to participate from Firm B. All boundary spanners were unique. Responses were received from 45 out of 66 boundary spanners (68% response rate) and 50 out of 66 clients (76% response rate) from Firm B. The boundary spanners had a mean age of 43.60 years ($SD = 9.75$) and were 56% male. The clients had a mean age of 35.96 years ($SD = 8.39$) and were 60% male. Clients reported working with a mean of 5.45 research firms (median = 4.00 firms; $SD = 4.15$), while boundary spanners reported

working with a mean of 8.43 client organizations (median = 6.00 organizations; SD = 9.74). The relationship tenure of the clients and boundary spanners in this sample ranged from 1 month to just over 12 years, with a mean of 26.78 months (median = 10.00 months; SD = 38.98).

Total Sample. Participants from the two sources were combined for a total sample of 188 boundary spanners and 185 clients. The boundary spanners had a mean age of 41.07 years (SD = 9.59) and were 32% male. The clients had a mean age of 38.35 years (SD = 8.96) and were 53% male. Clients reported working with a mean of 6.03 research firms (median = 4.00 firms; SD = 6.80), while boundary spanners reported working with a mean of 9.96 client organizations (median = 6.00 organizations; SD = 10.15). The relationship tenure of the clients and boundary spanners in this sample ranged from 1 month to 20 years, with a mean of 26.51 months (median = 12.00 months; SD = 34.10). From among the 188 boundary spanners, a total of 292 boundary spanner surveys were received. The full sample (i.e., all surveys received) was used for testing of the hypothesized measurement models.

Dyads. From the total sample, 150 client/boundary spanner dyads were formed. Of these, 108 were from Firm A and 42 were from Firm B. Exactly half of the dyads were of mixed gender, with 52 male client/female boundary spanner dyads and 23 female client/male boundary spanner dyads. Twenty-four of the dyads were comprised of a male client and male boundary spanner, while 45 dyads were made up of a female client and female boundary spanner. Gender data were not available for the other six dyads. Dyads were used for testing of the path models.

Measures

The current study employed existing scales for the constructs of interest when available. However, note that some of the constructs in this study did not have established scales, and in these cases, items were created, modified, or added as discussed below.

Perceived Organizational Support (POS). POS is defined as employees' perceptions of the affective commitment and emotional support an organization provides to them. The current study employed the eight-item short form of the SPOS as used in previous research (e.g., Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997). Sample items include "the organization cares about my well-being" and "the organization considers my goals and values." A five-point Likert-type scale was used to indicate agreement with each statement (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The POS measure is presented in Appendix A.

Direct Inquiry. Direct inquiry is a strategy of feedback seeking by which a boundary spanner overtly asks a client for feedback on the service delivered. The direct inquiry measure was based on scales used by Ashford and Tsui (1991) and Fedor et al. (1992) with slight modifications. Three items from Ashford and Tsui and three items from Fedor et al. were adapted for the current study. The modified items were adapted to be consistent with a self-report format in a service context (e.g., "this executive" was changed to "you"; and "my IP" was changed to "your client"). This resulted in a six-item direct inquiry scale for the current study. The instructions were similar to those used in Ashford and Tsui except that the six-month timeframe was eliminated. For example, the Ashford and Tsui item that read, "During the past six months, to obtain feedback, how frequently did this executive directly ask for an informal appraisal?" This item was changed to "Throughout your working relationship with this client, how frequently did you directly ask this client for an informal appraisal?" Responses to all items were made on a five point Likert-type scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*). The direct inquiry measure is presented in Appendix B.

Monitoring. Monitoring is defined as actively seeking, but not overtly asking for, feedback from clients. For the monitoring scale, three of the five items in Fedor et al. (1992)

were adapted for use in the current study. The two excluded items were context dependent (e.g., included references to pre-flight briefings and the stick buddy) and therefore irrelevant to the current setting. All three items from the Ashford and Tsui (1991) direct cue monitoring scale also were adapted. This resulted in a six-item monitoring scale for the current study. Modifications were similar to those made with the direct inquiry scale. That is, the modified items were adapted to be consistent with a self-report format in a service context (e.g., “this executive” was changed to “you”; and “my IP” was changed to “your client”). The instructions were similar to those used in Ashford and Tsui except that the six-month timeframe was eliminated. For example, the Ashford and Tsui item read, “During the past six months, to obtain feedback, how frequently did this executive pay attention to informal, unsolicited feedback?” This item was changed to “Throughout your working relationship with this client, how frequently did you pay attention to informal, unsolicited feedback from this client?” Responses were made on a five point Likert-type scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*). The monitoring measure is presented in Appendix C.

Positive Feedback Seeking. The measure of positive feedback seeking employed both items adapted from Ashford and Tsui (1991). Modifications were similar to those made with the direct inquiry and monitoring scales. That is, the modified items were adapted to be consistent with a self-report format in a service context (e.g., “this executive” was changed to “you”; and “my IP” was changed to “your client”). Ashford and Tsui’s six-month timeframe was eliminated. For example, the Ashford and Tsui item read, “Thinking about the past six months, how characteristic was it of this executive to tend to seek good news about himself or herself?” This item was changed to “Throughout your working relationship with this client, how frequently did you seek good news about yourself from this client?” Due to the borderline reliability of Ashford and Tsui’s positive feedback seeking measure ($\alpha = .72$), two items were added in attempt to

increase the scale's reliability. These procedures resulted in a four-item scale of positive feedback seeking behavior. Responses were made on a five point Likert-type scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*). The positive feedback seeking measure is presented in Appendix D.

Negative Feedback Seeking. The measure of negative feedback seeking employed both items from Ashford and Tsui (1991). Modifications were similar to those made with the other feedback seeking scales. That is, the modified items were adapted to be consistent with a self-report format in a service context (e.g., "this executive" was changed to "you"; and "my IP" was changed to "your client"). The instructions were similar to those used in Ashford and Tsui except that the six-month timeframe was eliminated. For example, the Ashford and Tsui item read, "Thinking of the past six months, how characteristic was it of this executive to ask others to be critical when they gave him or her feedback?" This item was changed to "Throughout your working relationship with this client, how frequently did you ask this client to be critical when he or she gives you feedback?" Due to the borderline reliability of Ashford and Tsui's negative feedback seeking measure ($\alpha = .70$), two items were added in attempt to increase the scale's reliability, resulting in a four-item measure of negative feedback seeking behavior. Responses were made on a five point Likert-type scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*). The negative feedback seeking measure is presented in Appendix E.

Customer Satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is operationalized as customers' affective reactions to the service provided. In an effort to improve upon the current measurement of customer satisfaction, items were adapted from those previously used or were developed for the current study. Two items were adapted from previous studies. The first item, "I am satisfied with this (COMPANY NAME) representative as a provider of services," was adapted from Schmidt and Allscheid (1995). The only modification to this item was the addition of the phrase "this

(COMPANY NAME) representative” to refer to the specific boundary spanner employee in the service relationship. The second item, “Overall, I am satisfied with the service I received from this (COMPANY NAME) representative,” was modified from Goodwin and Ross (1992). The item originally read “the way the complaint was handled” to assess service recovery; it was modified to read “the service I received” in order to assess overall satisfaction. Two additional items were developed by the author and reviewed by customer satisfaction SMEs functioning in a customer satisfaction measurement role in a Fortune 500 company. Thus, four total items were used to assess overall customer satisfaction (e.g., “Overall, I am satisfied by the service I receive from this (COMPANY NAME) representative”). The customer satisfaction items utilize a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The customer satisfaction measure is presented in Appendix F.

Word-of-mouth Intentions. Word-of-mouth intentions are defined as the behavioral intentions to recommend the boundary spanner to others. Three items from the Zeithaml et al. (1996) scale were adapted for the current context. The items were modified, changing the referent from the company to the individual boundary spanner. For example, the original item “Say positive things about (COMPANY NAME) to other people” was changed to “Say positive things about this (COMPANY NAME) representative to other people”. One additional item was created for the current study resulting in four items assessing word-of-mouth intentions. The word-of-mouth intentions items utilize a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all likely* to 5 = *extremely likely*). The word-of-mouth intentions measure is presented in Appendix G.

Repatronage Intentions. Repatronage intentions are defined as the behavioral intentions to continue using the boundary spanner for future services. Two items from the Zeithaml et al. (1996) scale were adapted for the current context. For example, the original item “Consider

(COMPANY NAME) your first choice to buy (TYPE OF SERVICE) services” was changed to “Consider this representative your first choice for market research services”. Two additional items were created for the current study resulting in four items used to assess repatronage intentions. The repatronage intentions items utilize a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all likely* to 5 = *extremely likely*). The repatronage intentions measure is presented in Appendix H.

Liking. Liking is defined as customers’ affect toward the boundary spanner and was measured with a previously published scale (see Wayne & Ferris, 1990). Items were modified from the subordinate rating context to the service context. Specifically, the term “subordinate” was changed to “(COMPANY NAME) representative” to refer to the boundary spanner. A sample item is “I think this (COMPANY NAME) representative would make a good friend.” The liking items utilize a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The liking items are presented in Appendix I.

Perceived Similarity. Perceived similarity refers to the degree to which the customer believes the boundary spanner has similar attitudes and beliefs. Perceived similarity was measured with four items, adapted from the supervisor context to the customer service context. Three items were used from Turban and Jones (1988), including “This (COMPANY NAME) representative and I are similar in terms of our outlook, perspectives, and values.” A fourth item was used from Greguras (1998). The perceived similarity scale utilized a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The perceived similarity items are presented in Appendix J.

Procedure

Boundary spanner and client dyads were recruited from two different firms. With the exception of identifying information (e.g., other member of the dyad’s name), survey materials

were identical for both firms. Boundary spanner survey materials contained the POS measure and the FSB measure. Customer survey materials contained the service effectiveness, liking, and perceived similarity measures. FSBs were measured using boundary spanners, rather than customers, for three reasons. First, there is a precedent for asking employees about their own FSBs (Fedor et al., 1992). Second, employees should be better judges of their own monitoring activities because by definition it involves observation of customers (as opposed to asking customers for input). Third, customers provide the criterion measures of customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Thus, having boundary spanners and clients rate different variables in the model reduces the concern associated with single source bias.

Firm A. To protect the anonymity of their clients, Firm A developed and maintained internally a comprehensive list of boundary spanners (Firm A employees) and their clients. The primary researcher did not have access to the list of boundary spanners and clients at any time. Invitation letters to participate in the research and survey were mailed to boundary spanners and clients by Firm A. This letter explained that the study was for research purposes only and that responses would remain confidential and would only be shared with Firm A in aggregate form. The letter indicated that participation was voluntary. Up to seven clients for each service provider were randomly selected from among the comprehensive client list and invited to participate in the study, creating a total of 375 dyads invited to participate. Among the 375 dyads were 200 unique boundary spanners and 375 unique clients. Survey packets with identification numbers were returned directly to the researcher without further identifying information, protecting the confidentiality of the clients. Initially, 305 survey responses were received from individuals recruited from the research firm. For dyads in which one member had responded and the other had not, reminder letters with an additional copy of the survey materials were mailed to the non-

responding dyad member approximately six weeks after the initial mailing. Seventy-seven additional survey responses were received, 55 of which were from employees. In total, 247 boundary spanner surveys (66%) and 135 client surveys (36%) were received, forming 108 dyads (29%). Table 1 presents the total number of responses and response rates for both sample sources.

Firm B. For the technology firm recruits, the primary investigator forwarded an invitation letter to a comprehensive group of market research clients within the firm that described the study and requested participation. The invitation letter explained that the study was for research purposes only and that responses would be presented only in aggregate form. The letter indicated that participation was voluntary and that all individual responses would be kept confidential. Surveys contained no identifying information and were coded to allow matching of dyads for analytic purposes only. All responses were returned directly to the primary investigator.

The invitation letter also requested contact information for up to five boundary spanners with whom that client had established service relationships. The primary investigator forwarded survey materials via electronic mail to clients who agreed to participate and one of the boundary spanners with whom they had service relationships. A total of 66 clients from the technology firm and their boundary spanners were invited to participate. Of those, responses were received from 50 clients (76%) and 45 boundary spanners (68%) making a total of 42 dyads (64%).

RESULTS

Overview

As recommended by James, Mulaik, and Brett (1982), the current study employed a two-step approach to hypothesis testing. Using this approach, the first step is to use confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the measurement models. The CFA provides evidence for determining whether the indicators appropriately measure the latent constructs. Once an appropriate measurement model has been identified, items can be combined to form scales of the latent constructs. The second step is to utilize the scales to test the hypothesized structural models. Based on this approach, the results are organized in four main sections. The first section provides the results of the CFAs conducted separately for all boundary spanners and all customers (i.e., not just dyads) to capitalize on the full sample when investigating the hypothesized measurement models. This approach has been used when examining confirmatory factor structures of different latent constructs measured by different constituents (e.g., subordinates provide ratings of POS and LMX, while managers provide ratings of performance and OCBs; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). A single measurement model was then tested to confirm the factor structure among the dyads, after the removal of singleton responses. The second section presents the final scales and their descriptive statistics among the dyads. The third section contains the tests of the hypothesized path model and alternative models. The final section presents exploratory analyses.

Prior to reporting the CFA results, some comments on the analysis and evaluation of model fit in this study are warranted. Measurement and path models in the present study were tested using LISREL 8.3 software (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993). All models were tested using the covariance matrices obtained from PRELIS and used maximum likelihood estimation. Given that

rigorous constraints typically are inappropriate for real data (Bentler & Chou, 1987), rigorous constraints were not placed on the data (i.e., factors were allowed to correlate with one another). Consistent with the recommendation of researchers (e.g., Byrne, 1998), the factor loading parameter of one arbitrarily selected item from each latent factor was set to the value of 1.0. This constraint allows LISREL to establish a scale for the latent factors. Error terms were not allowed to correlate. Other than the hypothesized structures, no additional restrictions were placed on the data.

In structural equation modeling, the null hypothesis states that the data fit the hypothesized model. This is worth noting because in structural equation modeling the researcher typically wants to fail to reject the null rather than the reverse (Fan & Wang, 1998). There are three key categories of metrics used to test hypotheses in structural equation modeling: the chi-square test statistic, fit indices, and parameter estimates. The chi-square test is an inferential test statistic that can be used to determine whether the null hypothesis should be rejected. There are many known disadvantages to using the chi-square statistic alone, including the inflation of the power of chi-square with large sample sizes (Fan & Wang, 1998). However, chi-square commonly is used as a guideline by itself and to calculate fit indices, the second category of metrics described below. Additionally, the ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom is a useful index of fit because it provides a guideline of whether more information could be extracted from the data. Most researchers recommend that chi-square to degrees of freedom ratios around 3:1 or less are indicative of an acceptable fit (Carmines & McIver, 1981).

The second category of metrics used to test hypotheses in structural equation modeling is fit indices. Fit indices are a descriptive indication of the overall fit of the observed data to the hypothesized model. Fit indices can be grouped into two broad classes (Bollen, 1989; Gerbing &

Anderson, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1995). The first class of fit indices, absolute indices (also called covariance matrix reproduction indices, Fan & Wang, 1998) indicate the extent to which the hypothesized model reproduces the sample covariances. Some examples of this type of fit index are the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; Steiger & Lind, 1980), standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR; Bentler, 1995), goodness-of-fit index (GFI) and the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI; Joreskog & Sorbom, 1989). The second class of fit indices, incremental fit indices, indicate the comparative fit of a model to the fit of a null model, typically one in which the observed variables are uncorrelated. Some examples of incremental fit indices are the comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI; Tucker & Lewis, 1973; also referred to as the NNFI; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000), the BL89 (more commonly referred to as the IFI; Bollen, 1989) and the normed fit index (NFI; Bentler & Bonnet, 1980).

There has been much discussion comparing the characteristics of various fit indices (e.g., Gerbing & Anderson, 1993; Tanaka, 1993). It has been suggested that there exists no single ideal fit index (Gerbing & Anderson; Steiger, 1990). Instead, researchers suggest using a variety of fit indices to test model fit (Bagozzi, & Yi, 1989; Fan & Wang, 1998; Gerbing & Anderson, 1993; Tanaka, 1993). Recently, Hu and Bentler (1999) investigated the sensitivity of fit indices to model misspecification and their rejection of true and misspecified models under various conditions using maximum likelihood estimation. Results indicated that the SRMR is the index most sensitive to misspecification in the latent variable structure. The CFI, TLI, IFI, and RMSEA were among the indices most sensitive to misspecified factor loadings. Based on their findings, they recommend using a two-index presentation strategy that includes the SRMR supplemented with TLI, IFI, CFI, or RMSEA, among others.

In addition to the chi-square statistic and its ratio to degrees of freedom described above, the current study reported indices required for the two-index evaluation strategy, including the SRMR, RMSEA, CFI, TLI and IFI. For the CFI, TLI, and IFI, the index ranges from 0.0 to 1.0, with higher values indicating better fit. As a general rule, values close to .90 have been interpreted to indicate good fit (Schumacker & Lomax, 1996). For RMSEA, values less than .05 indicate good fit, values between .05 and .08 indicate reasonable fit, values between .08 and .10 indicate mediocre fit, and values $> .10$ indicate poor fit to the data (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawarra, 1996). These recommended guidelines were employed in the current study.

Even if the hypothesized model provides good fit to the data, acceptance of the model may be premature. Reviews of the use of structural equation modeling in psychological research indicate that many papers suffer from confirmation bias (i.e., testing only the hypothesized model and ignoring theoretical alternatives; MacCallum & Austin, 2000). Even when a hypothesized model fits the data well, other models that fit the data equally well routinely exist (MacCallum, et al., 1993). To address this critique, the current study tested alternative models based on conceptual similarities and relationships among latent constructs.

If the model is judged to provide adequate fit then a third class of metrics, parameter estimates should be examined (Fan & Wang, 1998). There has been some debate as to the assessment of overall model fit versus assessment of individual parameters in the model (i.e., component fit). The overall model fit describes the general pattern of relationships among variables, while parameter estimates indicate the direction and strength of individual paths. It has been noted that many researchers interpret models based on overall fit alone (MacCallum & Austin, 2000). Because parameter estimates provide additional information to guide interpretation (i.e., strength and direction of individual parameters), the current study will assess

overall model fit and report standardized parameter estimates for each path in the structural models tested.

Confirmatory Factor Analyses

CFA for Client Measures. The measurement model for the clients in the present study contained five latent factors: customer satisfaction, repatronage intentions, word-of-mouth intentions, liking of boundary spanner, and perceived similarity of boundary spanner. Results for the hypothesized client measurement model (Five Factor Model), tested among all client respondents, are presented in Table 3. Based on the fit indices, the hypothesized model provides good fit to the data.

Table 3
Goodness of Fit Measures for the Client Measurement Model

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	p	SRMR	CFI	TLI	IFI	RMSEA
Five Factor	357.2	160	2.23:1	.00	.05	.96	.95	.96	.08
Single Factor	1941.3	170	11.42:1	.00	.10	.75	.72	.75	.24
Two Factor	950.0	169	5.62:1	.00	.06	.87	.85	.87	.16
Three Factor	804.8	167	4.82:1	.00	.06	.89	.88	.89	.14
One Service	515.9	167	3.09:1	.00	.05	.93	.92	.93	.11
Two Service	367.3	164	2.24:1	.00	.05	.95	.95	.95	.08

Note. The Five Factor model is the hypothesized measurement model. The Single Factor model represents method bias. The Two Factor model collapses into one service factor (SAT, REP, WOM) and one liking/similarity factor. The Three Factor model collapses into one behavioral intention factor (REP, WOM), one SAT factor, and one liking/similarity factor. The One Service Factor collapses service into one factor (SAT, REP, WOM), retaining liking and similarity as separate factors. The Two Service factor collapses into one behavioral intention factor (REP, WOM) and one SAT factor, retaining liking and similarity as separate factors.

Given that all of the client-measured constructs were measured in a single survey, there is a possibility of mono-method bias affecting the measurement model. For example, if a client had a negative overall experience with the boundary spanner, that client’s responses to all items in the survey could be strongly influenced by that negative experience. If this were the case, then

relations among the constructs may be due to measurement rather than structural relations among them (i.e., the items would load on a single construct rather than a model consistent with the hypothesized latent constructs). To test for this possibility, researchers suggest testing a single factor model with all items loading on a single construct (Bollen, 1989; Ferris, Judge, Rowland, & Fitzgibbons, 1994). The single factor model provided poorer fit to the data than the hypothesized model ($\Delta\chi^2 (10) = 1584.12, p < .05$).

Several alternative models based on conceptual similarities and relationships among the latent factors also were tested, as presented in Table 3. For each alternative, only the departures from the hypothesized model are described. The Two Factor model collapses the three service outcomes into one latent factor and collapses liking and similarity into another factor. The Two Factor model does not fit the data as well as the hypothesized model ($\Delta\chi^2 (9) = 592.87, p < .05$). The Three Factor model collapses the behavioral intentions (REP, WOM) into one latent factor and liking and similarity into another latent factor, retaining satisfaction as a separate factor. The fit of the Three Factor model is poorer than that of the initially hypothesized model ($\Delta\chi^2 (7) = 447.64, p < .05$). The One Service Factor model, with all three service constructs combined into one latent factor retaining liking and similarity as separate factors, also fits less well than the hypothesized model ($\Delta\chi^2 (7) = 158.72, p < .05$). Finally, a model with the two behavioral intentions constructs combined into one factor (REP, WOM), retaining the remainder of the hypothesized constructs was tested. The change in chi-square test indicates that the hypothesized model fits better ($\Delta\chi^2 (4) = 10.15, p < .05$).

Based on these results, the hypothesized model provides the best fit to the data. All items load significantly on their respective factors (.63 - .95), as shown in Table 4. In addition to confirmatory factor analytic support, the items in the current scales are supported by previous

theory and research. The items comprising the customer satisfaction scales were based on those used in previous investigations of customer satisfaction (Goodwin & Ross, 1992). The items in the repatronage intentions and word-of-mouth intentions were adopted from studies of behavioral intentions in service situations (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Items for liking and similarity also were adopted from past studies (Wayne & Ferris, 1990; Turban & Jones, 1988; respectively).

Table 4
Completely Standardized Item Loadings in Client Measurement Model

ITEM	SAT	REP	WM	LIK	SIM
SAT1	.95				
SAT2	.95				
SAT3	.89				
SAT4	.84				
REP1		.93			
REP2		.94			
REP3		.77			
REP4		.86			
WM1			.91		
WM2			.87		
WM3			.91		
WM4			.63		
LIK1				.94	
LIK2				.93	
LIK3				.91	
LIK4				.85	
SIM1					.92
SIM2					.87
SIM3					.88
SIM4					.88

Note. All items loaded significantly on their respective factors ($p < .05$). SAT = customer satisfaction; REP = repatronage intentions; WM = word-of-mouth intentions; LIK = liking; SIM = perceived similarity.

CFA for Boundary Spanner Measures. The hypothesized measurement model for boundary spanner measures includes five latent factors: POS, positive FSB, negative FSB, monitoring, and direct inquiry. The fit indices for the hypothesized model of boundary spanner measures are presented in Table 5. The hypothesized measurement model with five latent factors

(Five Factor Model) did not adequately fit the data (e.g., SRMR = .11; CFI = .82; RMSEA = .098). As was done with the client measures, a single factor model was used to test for mono-method bias. The hypothesized measurement model fit the data significantly better than did the single factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(10) = 3286.68, p < .05$).

Table 5
Goodness of Fit Measures for the Boundary Spanner Measurement Model

Model	χ^2	df	p	χ^2/df	SRMR	CFI	TLI	IFI	RMSEA
Five Factor	1258.2	340	.00	3.70:1	.11	.82	.80	.82	.098
Single Factor	4544.8	350	.00	12.99:1	.18	.47	.43	.47	.210
Two Factor	2463.8	349	.00	7.06:1	.12	.71	.68	.71	.150
Two FSB Factor	1394.2	347	.00	4.02:1	.11	.80	.78	.80	.100
Five Factor, 27 items	1112.8	314	.00	3.54:1	.08	.84	.82	.84	.095
Five Factor, 26 items	925.4	289	.00	3.20:1	.07	.86	.85	.86	.088
Five Factor, 25 items	826.5	265	.00	3.12:1	.07	.87	.86	.88	.086
Five Factor, 24 items	741.8	242	.00	3.07:1	.07	.89	.87	.89	.085
Five Factor, 23 items	678.0	220	.00	3.08:1	.07	.89	.88	.89	.086

Note. The Five Factor model is the hypothesized measurement model. The Single Factor model is the model representing method bias. The Two Factor model tests feedback seeking as a single construct. The Two FSB Factor model tests feedback seeking as two constructs (monitoring and active feedback seeking). The Five Factor model with 27 items is the hypothesized measurement model with MFB3 removed. The Five Factor model with 26 items is the hypothesized measurement model with MFB3 and PFB1 removed. The Five Factor model with 25 items has MFB3, PFB1, and POS6 removed. The Five Factor model with 24 items has MF32, PFB1, POS6, and NFB2 removed. The Five Factor model with 23 items has MFB3, PFB1, POS6, NFB2, and PFB3 removed.

As with the client measures, alternative theoretical models for the boundary spanner measures also were tested. Previous investigations regarding feedback seeking have sometimes measured feedback seeking sign and strategy in a single scale (e.g., Schleicher, Edwards, & Struheck, 2001). The viability of feedback as a unidimensional construct was tested in the current study (i.e., a model with all feedback items loading on a single construct), referred to as the Two Factor model (referring to one feedback factor and on POS factor). The Two Factor model provided significantly worse fit to the data compared to the hypothesized model ($\Delta\chi^2(9) = 1205.60, p < .01$).

Another alternative model was based on examining the viability of feedback seeking behavior as two separate constructs, rather than four. Because monitoring behavior involves listening and paying attention for feedback but not overtly asking for it, a feedback seeker may be unable to directly influence the sign of feedback obtained. However, in direct inquiry, a feedback seeker may ask for positive or negative feedback (i.e., direct positive inquiry or direct negative inquiry), or ask for feedback without reference to a particular sign (i.e., the hypothesized construct of direct inquiry). Based on this, a model treating feedback as two factors, with one factor measuring monitoring and the other factor measuring active feedback seeking (including direct inquiry, positive and negative feedback) was tested, labeled Two FSB Factor model. The hypothesized measurement model with feedback seeking as four distinct constructs provides significantly better fit than the Two FSB Factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 (7) = 136.01, p < .01$).

Based on these analyses, the originally hypothesized model that is theoretically consistent with the five latent constructs, including four feedback seeking factors and one POS factor, provided the best fit to the data. However, the fit indices do not reach conventional levels indicating good fit. Because many items were developed and/or modified for inclusion in this study, factor loadings and modification indices were examined. In conducting the current confirmatory factor analyses, items were free to load only on their hypothesized factors. Factor loadings on factors other than those hypothesized are constrained to zero. Thus, cross-loadings are not provided as part of the confirmatory factor analyses presented here. However, modification indices provide evidence of potential cross-loadings. Modification indices (MIs) are expressed in terms of the expected minimum reduction in the model's chi-square by freeing the associated parameter(s). Therefore, large MIs suggesting that an item be freed to load on a factor other than hypothesized may indicate the presence of cross-loadings.

An examination of the factor loadings in the initially hypothesized model revealed that one item on the monitoring scale had a very low factor loading (MFB3 = .09). The item, “eavesdrop on this client to get information concerning your performance,” may function poorly because an answer in the affirmative indicates engagement in socially undesirable behavior (i.e., eavesdropping). The removal of this item improved the fit of the model, increasing the CFI by .02, as shown in Table 5 as Five Factor Model with 27 items.

An item on the positive feedback scale exhibited a low factor loading ($r = .36$), compared to a typical cutoff of .40 (see Wayne et al., 1997). The item, “look for positive signs from this client regarding your performance,” was a new item developed for this study. The words “look for” may connote monitoring behavior and impact the relatively low factor loading of the item on the positive feedback scale. The removal of this item increased the CFI by .02 and therefore improved the fit over the Five Factor model with 27 items, but the fit remained mediocre (e.g., RMSEA = .088; CFI = .86).

Further investigations revealed that POS6 (“if given the opportunity, this organization would take advantage of me”) had the next lowest item loading ($r = .48$) in the current study. Although it is above the cutoff of .40, the largest modification index is associated with this item, indicating that its elimination might improve the fit of the model and the measurement of POS. This item also had the lowest factor loading in the development of the short form of POS ($r = .51$; Eisenberger et al., 1997). In addition to a low item loading, this POS item is negatively worded and seems too harsh to be the opposite of organizational support. The perception that an organization would take advantage of an employee seems to be an extreme case of organizational non-support or even maliciousness. It is interesting to note that this item was dropped (without explanation) by its original authors in the most recent publication using the POS short form

(Eisenberger et al., 2001). In the current study, the elimination of POS6 led to an increase in CFI of .01, demonstrating an improvement in the fit of the revised model (Five Factor, 25 items) over the Five Factor 26 item model.

Modification indices revealed that an item on the negative feedback seeking scale (NFB2) had substantial cross-loadings with all three other feedback scales. The item, “prefer detailed, critical appraisals even though they might hurt,” could be interpreted as an overall desire for detailed feedback, which may, on some occasions, be hurtful or negative. The desire for this feedback could be expressed through direct inquiry or through monitoring. This, combined with the ambiguous sign, could explain the cross-loadings with the other feedback seeking scales, suggested by the MIs. The removal of this item improved the fit of the model (Five Factor, 24 items), increasing the CFI by .02. The resulting MIs indicated that an item from the positive feedback seeking scale (PFB3) had substantial cross-loadings that were contributing to the poor fit of the model. Similar to NFB2, this item, “seek feedback about what you do well” is ambiguous as to the sign of feedback sought. Even though a boundary spanner may perform well in certain tasks, such as report writing, a client still may have both positive and negative feedback regarding any particular report. The removal of the item led to reasonable fit for the Five Factor, 23 item model (e.g., SRMR = .07; CFI = .89; RMSEA = .086). Modification indices revealed no remaining substantial cross-loadings.

Considering the group of fit indices examined, the best fitting model, Five Factor, 23 items, provided reasonable fit to the data (e.g., SRMR = .07; RMSEA = .086). All items loaded significantly on their respective factors (.59 to .95). The POS items in the best fitting model are identical to those in Eisenberger et al. (1997), with the exception of a dropped item that also was deleted in a subsequent publication by the scale’s developers (Eisenberger et al., 2001). One item

each, modified for the current study, was deleted from the MFB and NFB items. Two newly created PFB items for this study were dropped, making the current items consistent with those used in Ashford and Tsui (1991). No modifications were made to the proposed DFB items.

Table 6
Completely Standardized Item Loadings of the Five Factor, 23 item Boundary Spanner Measurement Model

Item	POS	PFB	NFB	MFB	DFB
POS1	.80				
POS2	.95				
POS3	.80				
POS4	.74				
POS5	.59				
POS7	.64				
POS8	.73				
PFB2		.71			
PFB4		.80			
NFB1			.79		
NFB3			.81		
NFB4			.66		
MFB1				.69	
MFB2				.67	
MFB4				.76	
MFB5				.86	
MFB6				.81	
DFB1					.76
DFB2					.66
DFB3					.88
DFB4					.87
DFB5					.90
DFB6					.77

Note. All items loaded significantly on their respective factors ($p < .05$). Eliminated factors (MFB3, PFB1, PFB3, POS6, NFB2) are not reported. POS = perceived organizational support; PFB = positive feedback seeking; NFB = negative feedback seeking; MFB = monitoring; DFB = direct inquiry.

CFA for Dyads. A single confirmatory factor analysis was performed using the dyads to confirm that the measurement model holds when eliminating the singleton respondents. The model was specified based on the final measurement models reported above for the boundary spanners (Five Factor, 23 Items) and the clients (Five Factor Model) individually. The results of

this CFA are presented in Table 7. Similar to the results of the boundary spanner CFA, the dyad CFA provides a relatively good fit to the data (e.g., SRMR = .06; RMSEA = .06; IFI = .90; $\chi^2/df = 1.52:1$). All items loaded significantly on their respective factors, and no substantial cross-loadings were observed. Completely standardized item loadings for the dyads are presented in Table 8. These results indicate that the elimination of the singleton responses did not have an adverse affect on the measurement model, and that the measurement model provides reasonable fit to the data. Further, the current scales are based on those used in previous research, with very few modifications. In summary, two feedback seeking items created for the current study and two feedback seeking items modified for the current study were eliminated, in addition to one item from the POS scale, which was also dropped by its developers in publications subsequent to the scale's development (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Based on theoretical and statistical support, the items were collapsed into scales for further analyses. Each of the client-measured scales, customer satisfaction, repatronage intentions, word-of-mouth intentions, liking, and similarity, consisted of four items. The boundary spanner scales ranged from two to seven items, with a DFB scale of six items, a MFB scale with five items, a NFB scale with three items, a PFB scale with two items, and a POS scale with seven items.

Table 7
Goodness of Fit Measures for the Dyad CFA

Model	χ^2	df	<u>p</u>	χ^2/df	SRMR	CFI	TLI	IFI	RMSEA
Dyad Model	1235.0	815	.00	1.52:1	.06	.89	.88	.90	.059

Note. N = 147 dyads. The Dyad Model is based on the Five Factor client model and the Five Factor, 23 item final version of the boundary spanner model.

Table 8
Completely Standardized Item Loadings of the Dyad CFA

Item	POS	PFB	NFB	MFB	DFB	SAT	REP	WOM	LIK	SIM
POS1	.84									
POS2	.94									
POS3	.82									
POS4	.74									
POS5	.61									
POS7	.41									
POS8	.69									
PFB2		.91								
PFB4		.72								
NFB1			.83							
NFB3			.79							
NFB4			.65							
MFB1				.70						
MFB2				.67						
MFB4				.76						
MFB5				.84						
MFB6				.83						
DFB1					.77					
DFB2					.71					
DFB3					.86					
DFB4					.88					
DFB5					.91					
DFB6					.74					
SAT1						.95				
SAT2						.95				
SAT3						.88				
SAT4						.84				
REP1							.92			
REP2							.94			
REP3							.78			
REP4							.84			
WM1								.85		
WM2								.89		
WM3								.61		
WM4								.90		
LIK1									.93	
LIK2									.92	
LIK3									.90	
LIK4									.84	
SIM1										.92
SIM2										.86
SIM3										.88
SIM4										.87

Note. All items loaded significantly on their respective factors ($p < .05$). Eliminated factors (MFB3, PFB1, PFB3, POS6, NFB2) are not reported. POS = perceived organizational support; PFB = positive feedback seeking; NFB = negative feedback seeking; MFB = monitoring; DFB = direct inquiry. SAT = customer satisfaction; REP = repatronage intentions; WM = word-of-mouth intentions; LIK = liking; SIM = perceived similarity.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 9 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations among the scales and demographic variables for the dyads. For all scales, the mean was above 2.5 on a five-point scale. Standard deviations for scales in the current study range from .64 to 1.16. Means and standard deviations in the current study are similar to those in previous investigations. For example, on the FSB scales and behavioral intentions scales previously published means are above the mid-point (e.g., Ashford & Tsui, 1991; Blodgett, Granbois, & Walters, 1993; Fedor et al., 1992; Zeithaml et al., 1996). Statistics for NFB ($\underline{M} = 2.87$; $\underline{SD} = 1.04$) in the current study are similar to those reported in Ashford and Tsui ($\underline{M} = 2.82 - 2.98$; $\underline{SD} = .82 - .91$).

Coefficients alpha in the current study range from $\alpha = .80$ (PFB) to $\alpha = .94$ (customer satisfaction, liking), indicating acceptable reliabilities for all scales. The alpha coefficients in the current study compare favorably to those achieved in previous research. For example, previous alphas for POS ranged from $\alpha = .77$ (Eisenberger et al., 2001) to $\alpha = .93$ (Wayne et al., 1997), compared to value of $\alpha = .89$ in the current study. For the feedback seeking scales, alphas in the current study are improved over those in previous research. For example, Ashford and Tsui report values in the $\alpha = .70 - .72$ range for negative and positive feedback seeking, while the current study reports values ranging from $\alpha = .80 - .81$.

The data were checked to verify that the assumption of multivariate normality was met. In a strict definition of a normal distribution, the skewness and kurtosis of the data would equal zero. In a practical sense, normality is defined as a range of scores that span either side of zero. According to Monte Carlo studies, skewness values ranging from 2.00 to 3.00 and kurtosis values ranging from 7.00 to 21.00 indicate that the data should be considered moderately non-normal (Curran, West, & Finch, 1996). If values are less than these (i.e., 2.00 for skewness and 7.00 for

kurtosis), data should be considered to be approximating a normal distribution. Other authors provide more rigorous guidelines, indicating mild non-normality when two-thirds of the observed variables exceed skewness or kurtosis values of +/- 1.0 and moderate non-normality when two-thirds of the observed variables have skewness values at about +/- 1.5 and kurtosis values around +/- 3 to 4 (Fan & Wang, 1998). In the current study, skewness ranged from -1.06 to 0.18. Kurtosis values in this study ranged from -0.99 to 0.55. Following either definition, skewness and kurtosis scores of the current data indicate an approximately normal distribution.

Tests of the Path Models

Preliminary Analysis. Recall that among the dyads, 21 boundary spanners (out of 109) completed more than one survey, each regarding a different client relationship. The existence of multiple responses among these boundary spanners allowed for a consistency check on the POS measure. While all other boundary spanner measures were constructed at the relationship level, the POS measure is an individual level variable. For example, on the direct inquiry items, the boundary spanner is asked how frequently he/she asks *this client* for feedback. The amount of feedback a boundary spanner seeks in one client relationship may differ from the amount of feedback the same boundary spanner seeks in a different client relationship. However, the POS items refer to the boundary spanners' perception of their employer, which is theoretically independent from client relationships. Therefore, while scores on most scales are free to vary within a boundary spanner, scores on the POS items should not vary widely. To test for this possibility, the initial eight-item POS scores were examined for consistency within each boundary spanner with multiple responses ($n = 21$). Visual inspection revealed that most boundary spanners ($n = 12$) scored identically on the POS measure across responses, and three more had scores that varied by less than .20 on a 5-point scale. However, for the other six boundary

Table 9
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Scales and Demographic Variables

Scale	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1 POS	3.64	.81	.89																	
2 PFB	2.82	1.16	-.03	.80																
3 NFB	2.87	1.04	.03	<u>.52</u>	.81															
4 MFB	4.37	.64	-.08	<u>.32</u>	<u>.34</u>	.87														
5 DFB	2.86	1.03	.01	<u>.62</u>	<u>.77</u>	<u>.34</u>	.92													
6 SAT	3.93	.95	.08	<u>.25</u>	<u>.27</u>	.14	<u>.27</u>	.94												
7 REP	3.93	.90	.05	<u>.26</u>	<u>.32</u>	.14	<u>.36</u>	<u>.84</u>	.92											
8 WOM	4.16	.86	.09	<u>.24</u>	<u>.30</u>	.14	<u>.29</u>	<u>.86</u>	<u>.88</u>	.90										
9 LIK	4.13	.86	.05	<u>.18</u>	<u>.21</u>	.11	<u>.18</u>	<u>.67</u>	<u>.60</u>	<u>.66</u>	.94									
10 SIM	3.44	.87	.01	<u>.18</u>	.15	.08	.16	<u>.55</u>	<u>.52</u>	<u>.54</u>	<u>.70</u>	.93								
11 CLAGE	37.81	8.83	.08	<u>.19</u>	<u>.20</u>	.16	<u>.20</u>	.15	.11	.12	.14	.04	na							
12 EEAGE	41.55	10.14	.22	-.12	-.06	<u>-.23</u>	-.05	-.07	-.13	-.10	-.11	<u>-.20</u>	.14	na						
13 NUMCLI	18.47	21.40	.00	.10	.01	.16	.06	.02	.01	-.10	.04	.00	-.13	.07	na					
14 NUMORG	9.60	9.43	-.07	.14	.00	-.09	.02	.00	-.02	-.08	.06	.03	-.11	.14	.83	na				
15 SVCTEN*	13.61	8.45	.18	-.06	.11	-.04	.10	.03	-.01	.03	-.05	-.17	.10	<u>.71</u>	.03	.06	na			
16 ORGTEN*	7.29	6.99	.14	<u>-.30</u>	<u>-.20</u>	<u>-.20</u>	<u>-.34</u>	-.08	<u>-.21</u>	-.14	-.07	-.13	-.05	<u>.64</u>	.00	.16	<u>.44</u>	na		
17 CLITEN*	2.41	3.14	<u>.26</u>	.16	<u>.24</u>	-.13	<u>.30</u>	<u>.22</u>	<u>.20</u>	<u>.23</u>	<u>.23</u>	.17	<u>.32</u>	<u>.30</u>	.11	.12	<u>.26</u>	.09	na	
18 NUMPRO	7.16	18.76	.08	.08	<u>.24</u>	.12	<u>.19</u>	<u>.23</u>	.16	<u>.18</u>	<u>.22</u>	.14	.15	.01	.07	.08	.14	.07	<u>.39</u>	na

Note. Correlations significant at $p < .05$ are underlined. Coefficient alpha reliabilities for each scale are reported on the diagonal. The pairwise deletion method was employed for correlational analyses. POS = perceived organizational support; PFB = positive feedback seeking; NFB = negative feedback seeking; MFB = monitoring; DFB = direct inquiry. SAT = customer satisfaction; REP = repatronage intentions; WM = word-of-mouth intentions; LIK = liking; SIM = perceived similarity. CLAGE = client age; EEAGE = employee age; NUMCLI = number of individual clients the employee currently works with; NUMORG = number of client organizations employee currently works with; SVCTEN = employee's tenure in customer service field; ORGTEN = employee's organizational tenure; CLITEN = tenure of relationship between this client and this employee. * SVCTEN, ORGTEN, CLITEN are reported in years. NUMPRO = number of projects boundary spanner has done with this client.

spanners, the POS scores were more variable. A rule of thumb was needed to detect and remove aberrant scores. Given the small and unequal number of responses among the boundary spanners (i.e., between two and seven responses), a traditional guideline of 2-3 standard deviations from the mean was not the optimal method for identifying outliers. Instead, POS scores that deviated +/- 0.5 points from the boundary spanner's mean on the five-point scale across responses were considered outliers and removed from analyses. Based on this guideline, three boundary spanners had one response each qualifying as an outlier. The three boundary spanners and their associated clients were removed from further analysis, resulting in 147 dyads for path analyses.

Path Analysis Approach. The fit of a model and the estimation of parameters can be influenced by the ratio of sample size to parameters in the model (Bentler & Chou, 1987). Minimization of the sample size to parameters ratio is particularly important with small sample sizes. There are two common approaches to minimize the sample size to parameter ratio: using a single manifest indicator for each latent variable (e.g., Schmit & Allscheid, 1995; Schneider et al., 1998; VandeWalle, Brown, Cron, & Slocum, 1999; Wayne et al., 1997) or using randomly combined item parcels or "testlets" (e.g., Chen, Gully, Whiteman, & Kilcullen, 2000; Williams & Anderson, 1994). To minimize the number of parameters estimated, the current study used a single manifest indicator for each latent variable, created by calculating the arithmetic mean of the items in each scale. This approach was selected because a single indicator provides a more favorable sample size to parameter ratio than using multiple item parcels. Additionally, most scales in the current study have four or fewer items, making testlets quite small or impossible to create (e.g., in the case of the two-item positive feedback scale). Further, the single item indicator approach has been used in recent investigations on customer service (Schmit & Allscheid, 1995; Schneider, et al., 1998), feedback seeking (VandeWalle et al., 1999), liking, and POS (Wayne et

al., 1997). Therefore, following recommendations outlined by Williams and Podsakoff (1989), the factor loading for each of the manifest indicators was set equal to the square root of the scale's reliability. The measurement error of each indicator was set to the scale's variance multiplied by the quantity one minus the scale's reliability. The covariance matrix used in subsequent analyses was computed using PRELIS.

Hypothesized Model: POS Indirect. The results of the hypothesized model, POS Indirect, are presented in Table 10 and Figure 6. In this model, POS directly impacts feedback seeking behaviors. In turn, feedback seeking, liking and similarity impact customer satisfaction, which impacts repatronage and word-of-mouth intentions. The overall fit of the model was poor (e.g., SRMR = .20; CFI = .71). Consistent with recommendations (e.g., Hayduk, 1987; MacCallum & Austin, 2000), alternative models described in the introduction also were tested.

Table 10
Goodness of Fit Measures for the Path Models

Model	χ^2	df	p	χ^2/df	SRMR	CFI	TLI	IFI	RMSEA
Hyp.: POS Indirect	297.7	30	.00	9.9:1	.20	.71	.56	.71	.25
POS Direct	48.9	15	.00	3.3:1	.02	.96	.89	.96	.12
Feedback Direct	285.3	22	.00	13.0:1	.20	.71	.40	.72	.29
Lik/Sim Direct	296.7	26	.00	11.4:1	.20	.70	.49	.71	.27
Sim Feedback	277.3	26	.00	10.7:1	.17	.72	.51	.72	.26
Revised POS Direct	15.8	14	.33	1.1:1	.02	1.00	.99	1.00	.03

Note. N = 147 dyads. The Initial Model contains all of the initially hypothesized links. POS direct posits a direct relationship between POS and satisfaction, rather than through feedback seeking. Feedback direct posits a direct impact of the four types of feedback seeking on satisfaction. Lik/Sim direct posits direct impact from liking and similarity to satisfaction, repatronage, and word of mouth intentions. Sim feedback posits that similarity directly impacts the four types of feedback seeking and satisfaction. Revised POS Direct has an added path from REP to CSAT.

POS Direct. A model in which POS directly impacts satisfaction, rather than having indirect effects through feedback seeking behavior, provided significantly better fit to the data

than the POS Indirect model ($\Delta\chi^2(15) = 248.71, p < .01$). Fit indices were within the acceptable guidelines (e.g., SRMR = .02; CFI = .96). POS Direct is presented in Figure 7.

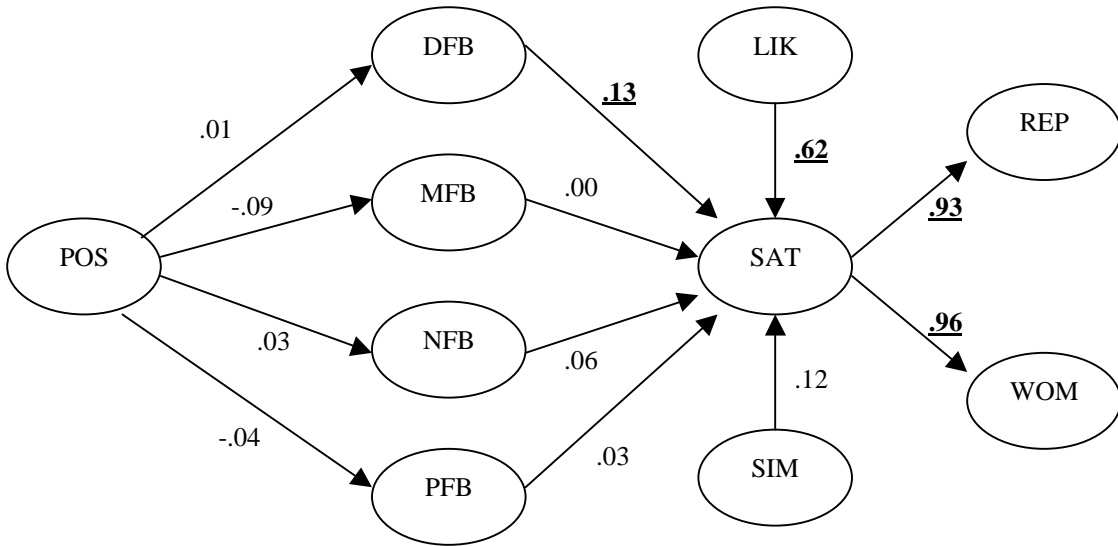


Figure 6. Results of the POS Indirect Model. Standardized path coefficients are reported. Paths significant at $p < .05$ are underlined.

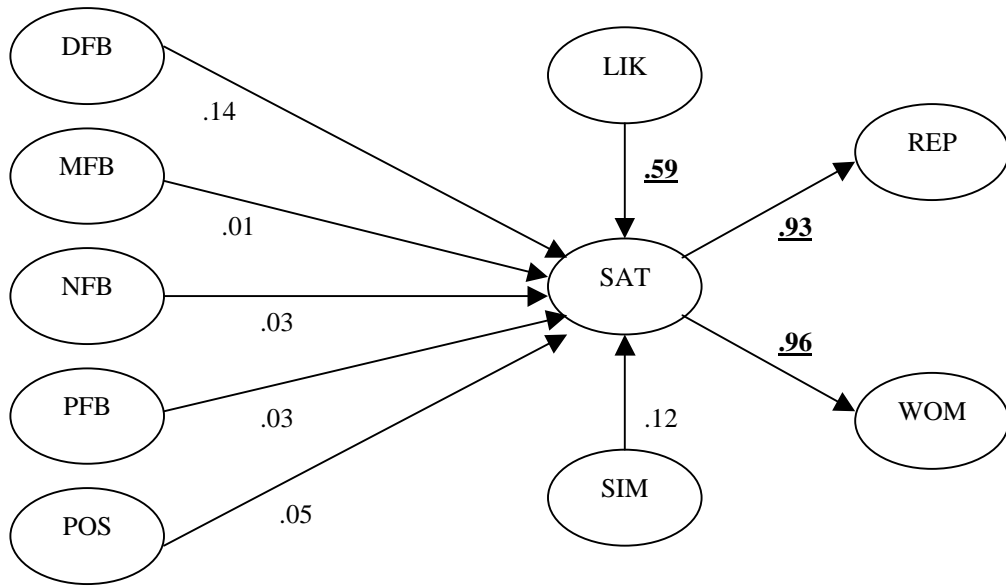


Figure 7. Results of the POS Direct Model. Standardized path coefficients are reported. Paths significant at $p < .05$ are underlined.

Feedback Direct. Another alternative model proposed direct links from feedback seeking behavior to customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. This model, Feedback Direct, provided a significantly worse fit than the POS Direct model ($\Delta\chi^2(7) = -236.33, p < .01$). Fit indices indicated a poor fit to the data (e.g., SRMR = .20; CFI = .71). Feedback Direct is presented in Figure 8.

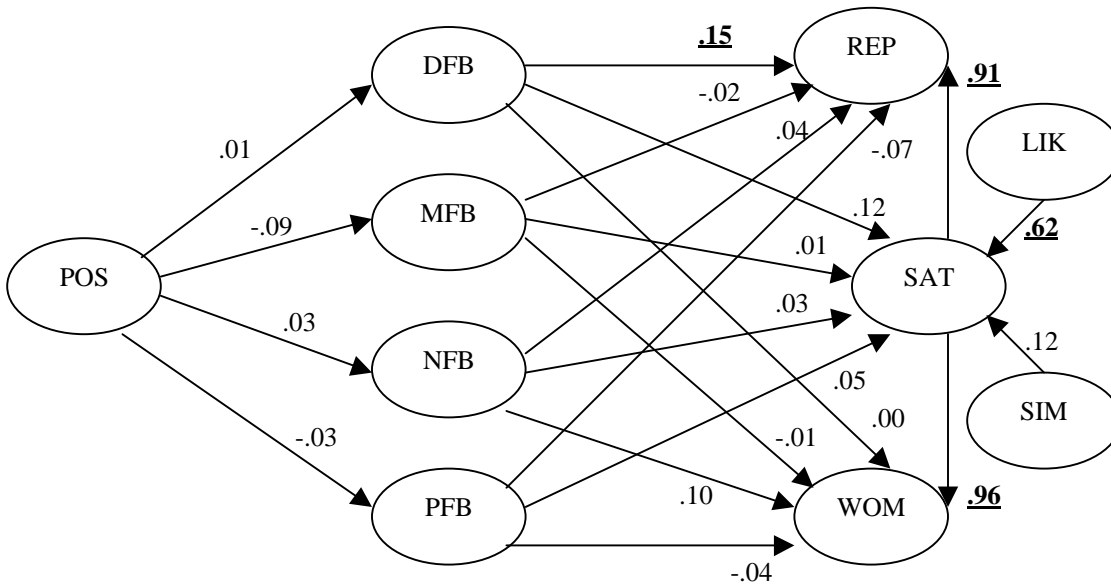


Figure 8. Results of the Feedback Direct Model. Standardized path coefficients are reported. Paths significant at $p < .05$ are underlined.

Liking/Similarity Direct. A model proposing direct effects from liking and similarity to satisfaction and behavioral intentions also provided worse fit than the POS Direct model ($\Delta\chi^2(11) = -247.74, p < .01$). Fit statistics indicated poor fit (e.g., SRMR = .20; CFI = .70).

Liking/Similarity Direct is presented in Figure 9.

Similarity Feedback. Another alternative proposed that perceived similarity impacts feedback seeking behavior and customer satisfaction. This model provided worse fit than the POS Direct model ($\Delta\chi^2(11) = -228.32, p < .01$). The fit of the Similarity Feedback model was poor (e.g., SRMR = .17; CFI = .72; TLI = .51). Similarity Feedback is presented in Figure 10.

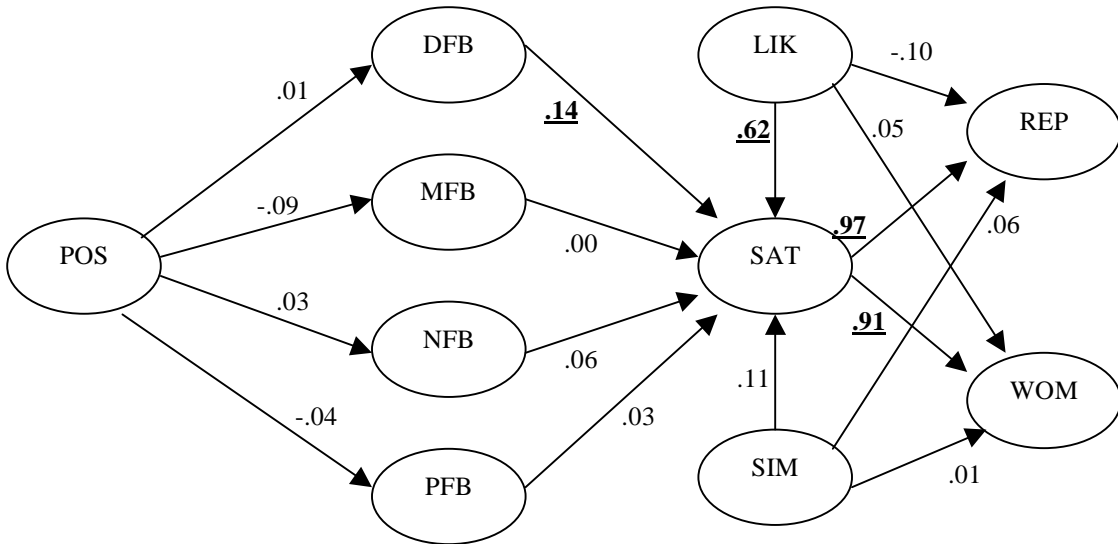


Figure 9. Results of the Liking/Similarity Direct Model. Standardized path coefficients are reported. Paths significant at $p < .05$ are underlined.

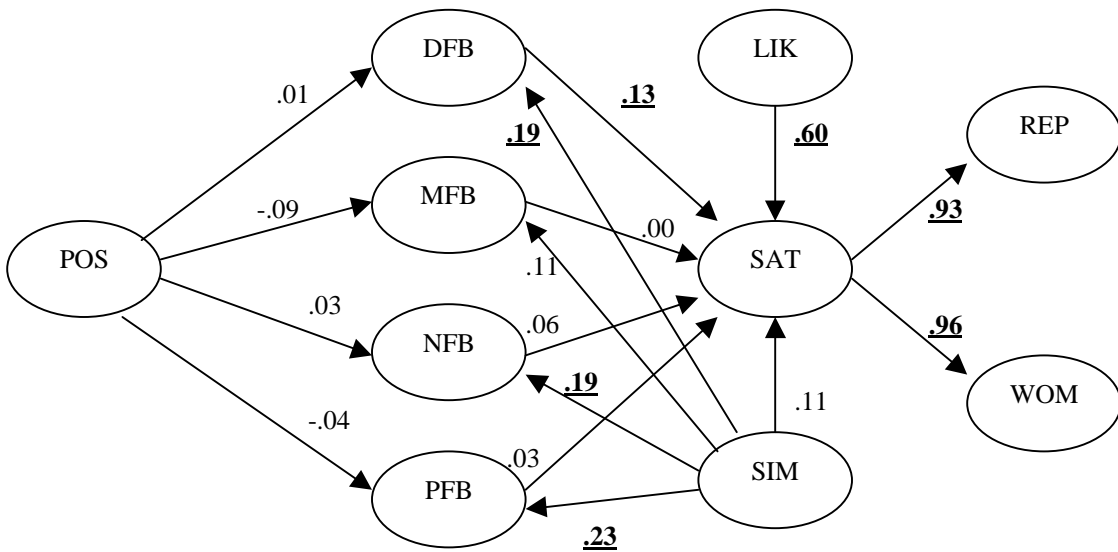


Figure 10. Results of the Similarity Feedback Model. Standardized path coefficients are reported. Paths significant at $p < .05$ are underlined.

Summary of Path Model Findings. The POS Direct model provided the best fit to the data. While the fit indices imply good fit of the overall model, parameter estimates within the model describe the direction and strength of individual paths. Based on the fit of the overall model and the parameter estimates reported in Figure 7, POS, FSBs, liking, and perceived

similarity have a direct impact on customer satisfaction. In turn, customer satisfaction impacts repatronage and word-of-mouth intentions. According to the results presented in Table 10 and Figure 7, the model provides a good fit to the data overall, but not all of the parameter estimates were significant. Customer liking had a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction had a direct, positive impact on both repatronage intentions and word-of-mouth intentions. The parameter estimates from the other exogenous variables, including feedback seeking, POS, and perceived similarity, to customer satisfaction were not significant. Together, the exogenous variables explained 56% of the variance in customer satisfaction; a majority of the variance in repatronage intentions ($R^2 = .87$) and word-of-mouth intentions ($R^2 = .93$) was explained by the full model (i.e., including exogenous and endogenous variables).

Exploratory Analyses

Revised Path Model Based on Modification Indices. Although the POS Direct model provided good fit to the data, the model was modified and retested to see if modifications suggested by the model output would significantly improve the fit of the model. The first modification was to add a path from repatronage intentions to word-of-mouth intentions. The revised model provided significantly improved fit over the POS Direct model ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 33.14, p < .01$). No further modifications would improve the model fit. The revised model is depicted in Figure 11. Given that the modification in this model is data driven rather than theoretically driven, the revised model may be capitalizing on chance in the current sample. Interpretations should be made cautiously and the model should be cross-validated in other research.

Revised Path Model Based on Two Feedback Factors. The best fitting model (i.e., POS Direct) in the current study contains paths from the four types of feedback seeking to customer satisfaction, but none of those paths were significant. However, the bivariate correlations

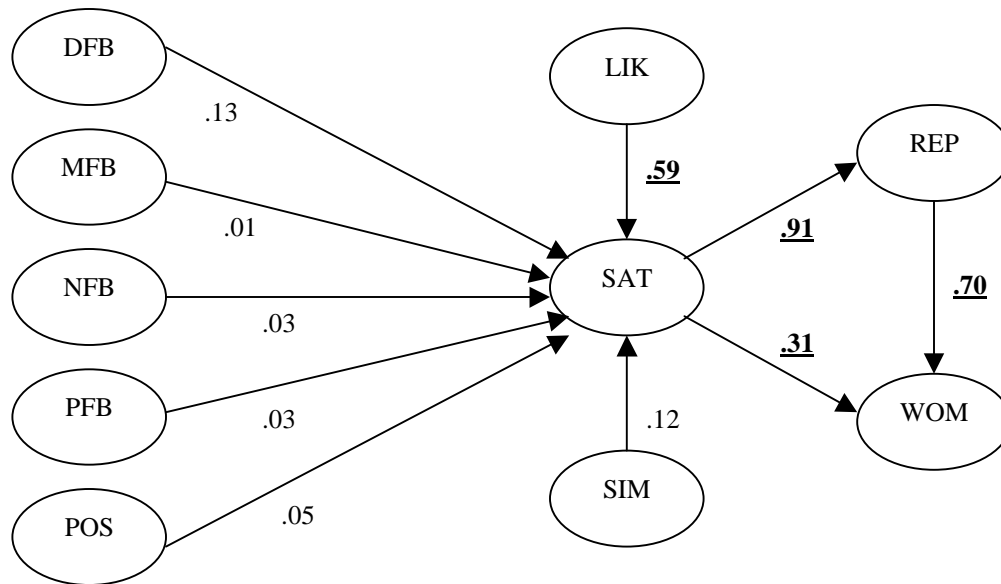


Figure 11. Results of the Revised POS Direct Model. Standardized path coefficients are reported. Paths significant at $p < .05$ are underlined.

between all four FSBs and satisfaction are significant (see Table 9). One potential reason for the significant correlations but non-significant path estimates could be multicollinearity among the FSB scales. If the FSB scales are strongly correlated, their shared variance could reduce the unique variance each contributes to satisfaction. The result could be non-significant path estimates for each individual feedback seeking variable, although feedback seeking behaviors as a group may explain a significant portion of variance. As reported in the boundary spanner CFA, the best fit was achieved with the FSB scales as four distinct constructs. However, strong correlations among three feedback seeking variables (i.e., direct, positive, and negative feedback seeking) suggest that the measures share significant variance. Further, an exploratory factor analysis yields two interpretable factors. Consistent with those tested in the boundary spanner Two FSB factor model, the first factor consists of direct inquiry, positive, and negative feedback seeking and the second factor consists of monitoring items. It is possible that when respondents think about seeking positive or negative feedback, they automatically think of directly asking for

the feedback, even though the positive and negative feedback seeking items are intended to be strategy-neutral (i.e., avoid reference to direct inquiry and monitoring). That is, positive and negative feedback seeking may share significant variance with direct inquiry such that individual effects on satisfaction are not significant. To investigate whether feedback seeking variables conceived in this manner would have a significant impact on customer satisfaction, a path analysis was conducted based on the best fitting POS Direct Model, with two feedback seeking variables: monitoring and active feedback seeking (DFB, NFB, PFB; mean = 3.01; SD = .87; $\alpha = .93$). The results, reported in Table 11, indicate that the model provides a good fit to the data (e.g., SRMR = .02; CFI = .95). In addition, as shown in Figure 12, the path estimate from active feedback seeking to customer satisfaction is significant, while the path from monitoring to customer satisfaction remains non-significant. In this model, 57% of the variance in customer satisfaction is explained by the exogenous variables in the model.

Table 11
Goodness of Fit Measures for the Exploratory Path Model With Two Feedback Factors

Model	χ^2	df	p	χ^2/df	SRMR	CFI	TLI	IFI	RMSEA
POS Direct w/ 2 FSB	47.3	11	.00	4.3:1	.02	.95	.87	.95	.15

Note. N = 147 dyads. This model is based on the POS Direct Model with two feedback seeking factors: monitoring and active feedback seeking and includes all items.

Demographic Variables. Although not included in the assessed path models, demographic variables may provide further insight into the relations among constructs in the models.

Correlations among all variables are reported in Table 9. Specifically, boundary spanners' organizational tenure was negatively related to all four types of feedback seeking behaviors.

Tenure of the relationship was positively related to POS, negative feedback seeking, and direct

inquiry. Customer relationship tenure also was positively correlated with customer satisfaction, repatronage intentions, word-of-mouth intentions, and customers' liking of boundary spanners.

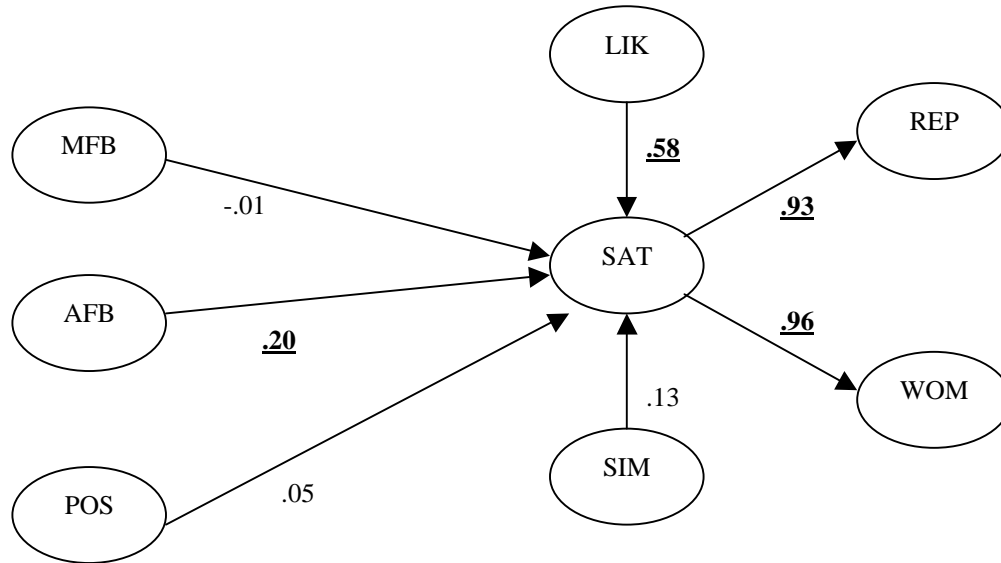


Figure 12. Results of the Exploratory Two FSB Factors Model. Standardized path coefficients are reported. Paths significant at $p < .05$ are underlined.

Independence of Data Issue

One important assumption underlying structural equation modeling using maximum likelihood estimation is that the data are independent. In the current study, multiple clients were sampled for most boundary spanners to maximize the completed dyads in the sample. Given this procedure, there are some instances in which boundary spanners responded multiple times with regard to different client relationships. In the field of market research, it is common for boundary spanners to service multiple clients concurrently. Only very large accounts receive a service provider dedicated to one account, and even in that case there are multiple client contacts with the client firm. In fact, more than 90% of boundary spanners reported working with multiple clients. On average, boundary spanners reported working with 9.96 client organizations (median = 6.0; SD = 10.15) and 18.76 client representatives from those organizations (median = 10.00; SD = 22.27) at any given time. Conversely, clients also work with multiple boundary spanners. On

average, the clients in this sample work with 6.03 different research firms (median = 4.0; SD = 6.80). The level of interest in the current study is the service relationship developed between two people (i.e., boundary spanner and client) over time. Every boundary spanner response and every combination of dyads are unique (i.e., no two dyads contain the same service provider and client), therefore every relationship is unique. Because the current study is interested in the unique relationships between each service provider and client pair, data from all dyads were valuable and retained for the analyses. Further, with the exception of the POS measure, all constructs pertaining to the relationship were specifically worded at the dyadic level, regarding a specific partner. In other words, each boundary spanner was asked to describe his or her feedback seeking behavior with regard to a particular client, not his or her feedback seeking behavior with clients in general. Clients were asked to describe their satisfaction with a particular boundary spanner, not with the firm in general.

The sole exception to this rule is the construct of perceived organizational support. Given that POS conceptually exists at the individual level, it is not expected to vary within a boundary spanner across service relationships. Therefore, all observations for the POS variable are not independent. Within the current sample, 188 out of 292 boundary spanner survey responses (64%) are unique. Additionally, 109 out of 147 dyads (74%) contain unique boundary spanners. In order to assess this issue of dependent data, the best fitting model from the boundary spanner CFA and the proposed and best fitting structural models also were tested using only unique boundary spanner responses (i.e., independent data). For boundary spanners with multiple responses, a single response was randomly selected for inclusion in the tests of unique boundary spanners and unique dyads such that each boundary spanner was represented only once. The results are reported in Table 12.

Comparing all boundary spanner responses to the unique boundary spanner responses, results of the CFAs were nearly identical. The results for the initially proposed path model and the POS Direct model also were quite similar for the unique and total sets of dyads. Path estimates also were nearly identical for the unique and total set of dyads on both models (see Figure 13). As such, the inclusion of multiple boundary spanner responses in the boundary spanner CFA and the tests of path models did not appear to significantly impact the estimation of model fit or parameters within the model.

Table 12
Comparison of GOF Measures for the Unique and Total Dyads

Model	χ^2	df	p	χ^2/df	SRMR	CFI	TLI	IFI	RMSEA
BS CFA									
Total BS Responses	677.9	220	.00	3.1:1	.07	.89	.88	.89	.09
Unique BS Responses	533.2	220	.00	2.4:1	.07	.89	.87	.89	.09
Proposed Path Model									
Total Dyads	297.7	30	.00	9.9:1	.20	.71	.56	.71	.25
Unique Dyads	202.3	30	.00	6.7:1	.20	.73	.60	.74	.23
POS Direct Model									
Total Dyads	48.9	15	.00	3.3:1	.02	.96	.89	.96	.12
Unique Dyads	28.4	15	.00	1.9:1	.02	.98	.93	.98	.09

Note. Total BS, $n = 292$. Unique BS, $n = 188$. Total dyads, $n = 147$. Unique dyads, $n = 109$.

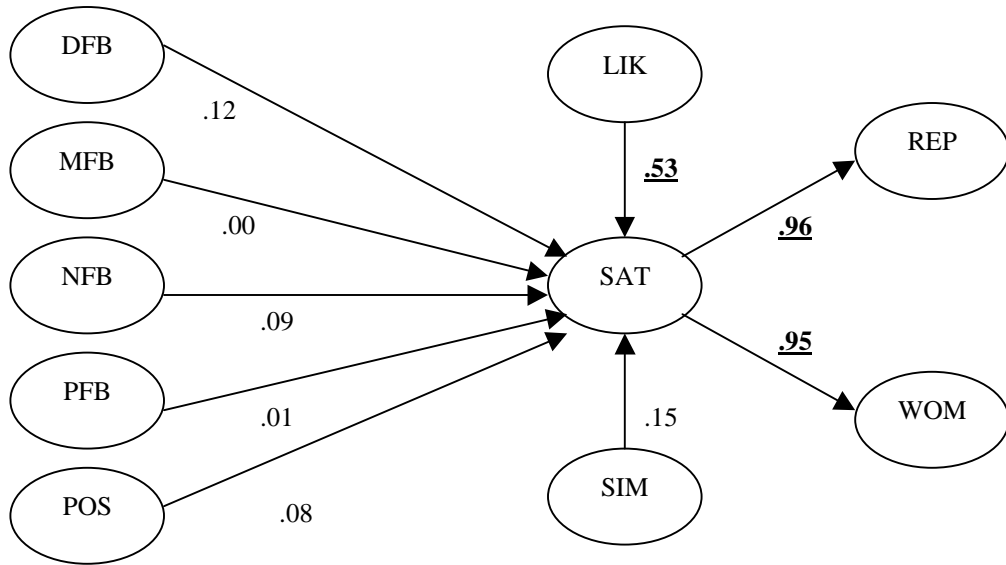


Figure 13. Results of the POS Direct Model among unique dyads. Standardized path coefficients are reported. Paths significant at $p < .05$ are underlined.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships among boundary spanner perceptions of organizational support, boundary spanner feedback seeking behaviors, customer liking, customer perceived similarity to boundary spanners, and customer perceptions of service effectiveness. Although previous investigations have demonstrated links between some of these constructs (e.g., Ashford & Tsui, 1991; Eisenberger et al., 1990; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Fedor et al., 1992; Johnson, 1996; Schmit & Allscheid, 1995; Schneider et al., 1998), this is the first study to investigate these variables together. The good fit of the overall model generally supports the hypothesized relationships between the exogenous variables (i.e., POS, feedback seeking behaviors, perceived similarity, and customer liking) and customer satisfaction, which in turn, impacts repatronage and word-of-mouth intentions. These results are discussed below.

A Note on Model Interpretation

In the structural equation modeling literature, there is some debate regarding determination of model fit and interpretation of the model (Bollen & Long, 1993). A structural equation model with good fit provides an indication of the general pattern of relationships among the constructs under study (Fan & Wang, 1998). Therefore, once a model with good fit is identified, researchers tend to interpret the pattern of relationships among variables in the full model. However, some researchers recommend that the component fit of the model (i.e., direction, strength, and significance of individual parameter estimates) be examined as well (e.g., Bollen & Long, 1993; Fan & Wang). Based on the belief that both are important to interpreting results, the current study will discuss both overall model fit and component fit. First, the overall pattern of relationships in the best fitting model will be discussed. Next, the component fit of the

model will be discussed for parameters that were significant in the model, followed by parameters that were not significant in the model.

Summary of the Best Fitting Model: POS Direct

Among the models tested in the current study, the best fitting model, POS Direct (see Figure 7), proposed that boundary spanners' POS, feedback seeking behaviors, customer liking, and perceived similarity directly impact customer satisfaction. In turn, customer satisfaction leads to repatronage intentions and word-of-mouth intentions. The POS Direct model fit the data well suggesting that it is appropriate to interpret the model. The model suggests that boundary spanner perceptions (i.e., POS) and behaviors (i.e., feedback seeking) have an impact on customer satisfaction. When boundary spanners feel supported by the organization, customers are more satisfied. When boundary spanners seek more frequent feedback in the form of direct inquiry, monitoring, positive, or negative feedback from their customers, customers are more likely to be satisfied. The model also suggests that customers' judgments of the boundary spanner also impact customer satisfaction. Customers who like the boundary spanners and/or perceive them to be similar to themselves are more likely to be satisfied customers. Further, the model provides support for the proposition that customer satisfaction leads to intentions to return for future service needs (i.e., repatronage intentions) and to recommend the boundary spanner to other prospective customers (i.e., word-of-mouth intentions). These findings imply that service firms can improve customer satisfaction and the likelihood of recommendations and repeat business by providing support to boundary spanners and matching customers with boundary spanners they like and perceive to be similar to themselves. It also implies that boundary spanners can improve the satisfaction of their customers by seeking feedback.

Significant Model Parameters

Customer Satisfaction to Behavioral Intentions. As predicted, the current study found that customer satisfaction impacted customer repatronage and word-of-mouth intentions. In fact, the path estimates shown in Figure 7 indicate that customer satisfaction had strong effects on these behavioral intentions. Specifically, the model explained 87% of the variance in repatronage intentions and 93% of the variance in word-of-mouth intentions. Although previous research had not addressed satisfaction and behavioral intentions within a particular service relationship, the current results are consistent with similar studies of customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. The current results are consistent with Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) general model, in which attitudes predict behavioral intentions. These findings also are consistent with previous research regarding attitudes and behavioral intentions in a service context. For example, Zeithaml and her colleagues (1996) found that across multiple industries (i.e., insurance, retail, and technology), customers' perceptions of service quality had an impact on their intentions to recommend the company to others and intentions to return to the company for future business. The Zeithaml study focused on customers' perceived service quality and behavioral intentions associated with the company as a whole, compared to the current study's focus on customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions regarding the particular boundary spanner who delivered the service. This study extends previous research by establishing the impact of satisfaction on behavioral intentions in service relationships. The current results highlight the importance of satisfaction with a *particular* boundary spanner in determining a customer's intentions to continue doing business with the boundary spanner. Increasing satisfaction with existing customers benefits the firm in two important ways: increasing the likelihood of future business from existing customers and increasing the likelihood that existing customers will help bring new customers to

the boundary spanner and the firm. Given that obtaining new customers costs significantly more than retaining existing customers (Reicheld & Sasser, 1990), and that current customers have the potential to assist in recruiting new customers by word-of-mouth (Rucci et al., 1998), service firms should place a high priority on ensuring that their existing customers are satisfied.

Customer Liking to Customer Satisfaction. Customer liking of the boundary spanner was one of the social aspects of the service relationship that was proposed to impact satisfaction. According to the current findings, customer liking has a significant, positive impact on customer satisfaction. When a customer likes a boundary spanner, that customer is more likely to be satisfied with the service provided by the boundary spanner. Consistent with this finding, previous research has shown a positive relationship between supervisors' liking of subordinates and supervisors' performance ratings of subordinates (Judge & Ferris, 1993; Tsui & Barry, 1986; Wayne & Ferris, 1990). In the performance appraisal literature, this finding has been interpreted in two ways. One possibility is that supervisors are more likely to attend to and recall positive performance information for subordinates they like. Another possibility is that supervisors provide more performance-related information to subordinates they like, allowing these subordinates to actually perform better. While the current study does not provide a test of these potential underlying mechanisms, it does support the proposition that customer liking influences ratings of customer satisfaction.

Non-significant Model Parameters

Perceived Similarity to Customer Satisfaction. While there is a path from perceived similarity to customer satisfaction in the best fitting model, the parameter estimate was not significantly different from zero, indicating that perceived similarity did not account for a significant amount of unique variance in customer satisfaction. Both liking and perceived

similarity had significant bivariate relationships with customer satisfaction, with liking having the stronger correlation. When liking and perceived similarity were considered together with other predictors of customer satisfaction, similarity did not account for additional unique variance over and above the variance accounted for by the other variables.

This is the first study to examine liking and perceived similarity as predictors of customer satisfaction in service relationships. Previous research has found that supervisors who perceive subordinates as similar to themselves receive higher performance ratings (e.g., Pulakos & Wexley, 1983; Turban & Jones, 1988; Wayne & Liden, 1995; Zalesny & Highhouse, 1992). In previous research examining both perceived similarity and liking as predictors of supervisor performance ratings, Wayne and Liden found that both liking and perceived similarity were correlated with supervisors' ratings of subordinate performance, and with each other. This finding is consistent with the current study. However, in their model, the path between perceived similarity and performance ratings was significant but the path from liking was not; this is the opposite of the current study's findings. Wayne and Liden's findings indicate that in the prediction of supervisor performance ratings, perceived similarity appears to be a stronger predictor than liking.

Inconsistent findings for the effects of perceived similarity and liking on customer satisfaction versus performance evaluations may stem from the different contexts in which those evaluations are made. In conducting performance reviews, supervisors may formally or informally evaluate subordinates for a promotion. In doing so, when supervisors perceive subordinates to be similar to themselves, they may provide more favorable evaluations. This could stem from an implicit belief that subordinates similar to themselves make good candidates for promotion. In a service relationship, customer satisfaction ratings are a type of performance evaluation for the boundary spanners delivering the service. Customers likely have a different perspective when

evaluating their satisfaction with a boundary spanner than supervisors do with subordinates. Customers are recipients of a customized service from boundary spanners. Customers are not likely to evaluate boundary spanners for placement in the customers' role, potentially making perceived similarity a less important contributor to ratings of boundary spanner service delivery. Hence, although the customers may have a tendency to rate boundary spanners perceived to be similar to themselves more favorably (i.e., as supported by the significant correlation), perceived similarity itself does not explain unique variance in satisfaction (i.e., supported by the non-significant path estimate). Rather, when customers like the boundary spanners they work with, they are more likely to be satisfied with the service delivered by those boundary spanners.

Feedback Seeking Behaviors to Customer Satisfaction. In the current study, feedback seeking behaviors were proposed to directly impact customer satisfaction. Based on the best fitting model, none of the paths from individual feedback seeking behaviors to customer satisfaction were significant. However, the exploratory analyses indicate that when direct inquiry, and positive and negative feedback seeking are combined into a single feedback seeking factor, that factor had a significant impact on customer satisfaction, explaining unique variance over and above the other variables in the model (e.g., customer liking). These results indicate that although the four feedback seeking variables do not explain a significant portion of unique variance *individually* in the best fitting model (i.e., POS Direct), these three feedback seeking behaviors taken together do explain significant variance in customer satisfaction. Thus, boundary spanner feedback seeking behaviors, particularly direct inquiry, positive and negative feedback seeking, positively impact customer satisfaction.

Previous research has examined bivariate relationships between feedback seeking and performance measures. The significant relationship between direct inquiry and satisfaction found

in the current study is consistent with previous research demonstrating a significant relationship between direct inquiry and other performance measures, such as managerial effectiveness (Ashford & Tsui, 1991) and self-ratings of job performance (Farr et al., 1999). However, one study (Fedor et al., 1992) found a negative relationship between direct inquiry and performance (as measured by grades in helicopter pilot training). Hence, the current findings for direct inquiry are similar to those obtained for managerial effectiveness and self-ratings of job performance, but diverge from those obtained for pilot trainees. Pilot trainees were in the initial phases of a structured 10-month helicopter pilot training program. As such, they were learning a novel task and were presented with the opportunity to ask for feedback from instructors who were on hand. Research was conducted in the first two phases of training, in which specific skills are taught (i.e., visual flight operation and basic instrument usage). Those who were lower performers had more of a need for feedback in attempting to master the specific tasks of flying a helicopter, explaining the negative correlation between direct inquiry and performance. Conversely, those who had mastered the skills had less of a need to request feedback. Comparatively, in a customer service situation, the roles and responsibilities of boundary spanners are more unstructured, complex, and dynamic. Boundary spanners need to be able to detect and respond to changing customer demands over the course of the relationship. Boundary spanner effectiveness lies in the satisfaction of customers rather than the performance of specific pre-determined tasks. Thus, obtaining feedback through direct inquiry should be useful to boundary spanners tailoring service delivery to customer needs and preferences throughout the duration of the service relationship.

Previous and current findings for monitoring are somewhat mixed as to whether monitoring has an impact on outcomes such as performance and customer satisfaction. In the current study, the best fitting model contains a non-significant path from monitoring to customer

satisfaction. The current results also found no bivariate relationship between monitoring and customer satisfaction. Consistent with these non-significant bivariate correlations, Fedor and colleagues (1992) found no relationship between monitoring and performance in helicopter pilot training. However, other studies found a positive relationship between monitoring and performance measures, such as managerial effectiveness (Ashford & Tsui, 1991) and self-ratings of job performance (Farr et al., 1999). In the current study, frequency of monitoring behavior was high, while standard deviation was rather small (i.e., mean = 4.37; SD = .64), indicating potential range restriction in the monitoring scale. It appears that the boundary spanners in this sample report a great deal of monitoring behavior with their customers. This may restrict the ability to find a relationship between monitoring and other variables, such as satisfaction, in this study. Further, by definition monitoring consists of feedback gathered without a request. Feedback obtained through monitoring is inherently dependent upon boundary spanners' perceptions and interpretations of customers' behaviors, and thus susceptible to perceptual errors. To the extent that feedback obtained through monitoring is inaccurate, it would not be expected to provide a boundary spanner with the necessary information to improve service delivery and customer satisfaction.

Taken together, inconsistencies among past findings and between past and current findings indicate that the relationships between feedback seeking and performance and/or satisfaction may be more complex than initially hypothesized. For example, the effects of feedback seeking behaviors on performance may be moderated by other variables such as clarity and usefulness of feedback received. There is a large body of research regarding what constitutes effective feedback (e.g., Baron, 1988; Ilgen et al., 1979; London & Smither, 1995). According to that research, feedback should be clear, specific, frequent, and relevant to aspects of performance

under the recipient's control. It should come from a credible source and should be delivered immediately (London, 1997). These characteristics of effective feedback also may come into play in the relationship between feedback seeking and satisfaction. For example, if feedback received is not clear, or deals with factors outside the control of the boundary spanner, it is of little use to boundary spanners, and likely will not result in greater customer satisfaction. Further, repeated failed attempts at obtaining useful feedback may reduce the frequency of feedback seeking in the future. If feedback characteristics such as usefulness moderate the relationship between feedback seeking and customer satisfaction, this could explain the mixed results obtained in previous research and the current study.

Another explanation for the inconsistencies among past and current research findings for direct inquiry and monitoring is the source from whom feedback is sought. The current study investigated feedback sought by boundary spanners from their customers, while past studies investigated feedback sought by other types of employees from their managers (and sometimes peers and subordinates). While the current study focused on feedback sought only from customers, boundary spanners might also seek feedback from their managers and other employees internal to the organization. In fact, boundary spanners might seek different types of feedback from managers than customers. For example, for feedback about routine procedures, such as developing client proposals, boundary spanners might be more likely to seek feedback from managers. For feedback about custom project specifications, they might be more likely to seek feedback from customers. Future research should address the frequency and types of feedback sought by boundary spanners from constituencies inside (e.g., managers, peers, subordinates) and outside (e.g., customers) the organization.

The correlation between negative feedback seeking and customer satisfaction in the current study is consistent with previous research demonstrating a positive relationship between managers' negative feedback seeking and performance (Ashford & Tsui, 1991). There was a positive relationship between positive feedback seeking and customer satisfaction in the current study. In contrast, in their study of mid-level managers, Ashford and Tsui found a negative relationship between positive feedback seeking and managerial effectiveness, as rated by superiors, subordinates, and peers. In that study, the constituents rated both feedback seeking and performance relationships in the same survey, making method bias a concern. Researchers have suggested that respondents' implicit theories about the relationships among the concepts being measured influences the observed correlations (Phillips & Lord, 1986). For example, if constituents have an implicit belief that seeking positive feedback indicates weakness, this might be reflected in a negative correlation between positive feedback seeking and performance, as found by Ashford and Tsui. In the current study, boundary spanners rated their feedback seeking behavior while customers rated their satisfaction. Collecting these data from different constituents in the relationship minimizes concerns with method bias, and raises confidence that seeking positive feedback is positively related to customer satisfaction among the current sample of boundary spanners in service relationships.

Perceived Organizational Support to Customer Satisfaction. One of the hypotheses of the current study was that POS would have a positive impact on feedback seeking behaviors. However, this was not supported. The best fitting model, POS Direct, proposed a direct link from POS to customer satisfaction but yielded a path estimate that was not significant. Further, POS did not significantly correlate with feedback strategy, feedback sign, or customer

satisfaction. Thus, in the current study, there is no evidence that POS impacts satisfaction and FSBs.

The hypothesized link between POS and feedback seeking behaviors in customer service relationships has not been empirically investigated in previous research. However, previous studies have identified a positive link between POS and important employee behaviors in other settings. For example, POS was positively related to employee effort in job performance and employee innovativeness (Eisenberger et al., 1990) and negatively related to absenteeism (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Additionally, it has been shown that both monitoring and direct inquiry are related to perceived management support for career development (Farr et al., 1999). These findings are relevant because they indicate that POS is related to employee performance criteria. The performance criterion in the current study is customer satisfaction with boundary spanner service delivery. While past findings provide a basis for the current hypotheses, the different contexts might account for the divergent findings. In past studies, employees were not boundary spanner service employees and were not rated by customers. Their perceptions (e.g., POS, perceived management support for career development) were related to behaviors directed within the organization (e.g., feedback seeking from managers, innovativeness, absenteeism), not behaviors directed toward customers. Conceptually, the relationship between employee perceptions of support (e.g., POS) and employee behaviors are based on a social exchange relationship between the organization and the employee (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

In the current study, boundary spanners' feedback seeking from customers to enhance satisfaction (which ultimately benefits the organization) was proposed to occur in exchange for boundary spanners' perceived support from the organization. While this proposed relationship is consistent with an exchange theory view, there may be additional variables that are important

when considering social exchange relationships for boundary spanner employees. Specifically, an important distinction between boundary spanners and other employees is that while both have relationships internal to the organization (i.e., with superiors, peers, subordinates), by definition only boundary spanners have relationships external to the organization (i.e., with customers). Thus, boundary spanners develop perceptions of customer relationships in addition to perceptions regarding the internal organization and its members. The relationships developed with customers may be very different than those developed within the organization. On one level, boundary spanners who are supported by an organization generally would be expected to reciprocate by performing well (in this case, by satisfying customers), which benefits the organization. However, because the organization and customers are different constituents, with whom boundary spanners have different relationships, how the organization treats a boundary spanner may not directly translate to how a boundary spanner treats a customer. Specifically, boundary spanners can have low POS, but have a high commitment to customers or personal drive for satisfying customers. Alternatively, a boundary spanner may have high POS yet be unable or unwilling to satisfy a particularly difficult client. Therefore, boundary spanner perceptions might be differentially related to boundary spanners' behavior directed within the organization versus behavior directed toward customers.

Based on this logic, boundary spanners' perceptions of customer relationships (rather than perceptions of their relationship with the organization) likely are more predictive of boundary spanners' behaviors in customer relationships (e.g., feedback seeking from customers). Similarly, boundary spanners' perceptions of the internal organization (e.g., POS, organizational climate and culture) may be stronger predictors of boundary spanners' internally directed behaviors (e.g., organizational citizenship behaviors, feedback seeking from managers) than behaviors directed

toward customers. Future research should address how internal organizational perceptions and exchange relationships and external customer perceptions and exchange relationships differentially impact boundary spanners' behaviors in service relationships. For example, boundary spanners in service relationships may develop commitment to customers independent from their commitment to the organization. Boundary spanners' customer commitment may be more strongly related to customer satisfaction than boundary spanners' organizational commitment.

The only variable POS was related to in the current study was the tenure of the client relationship. That is, the longer the relationship with the client, the more boundary spanners felt that they received organizational support. In the customer service situation, it is reasonable to expect that customers with a longer history with a company may receive more attention and better service from the organization in general. This attention to the customer by the organization might spill over to those boundary spanners in the role of serving long-term customers. For example, boundary spanners serving long-term customers may have easier access to organizational resources needed to serve their customers. Another possibility is that boundary spanners serving long-term customers have greater job security, which is reflected through POS.

Implications

The current study has important practical and research implications. First, increasing satisfaction with existing customers benefits the firm in two important ways: increasing the likelihood of future business from existing customers and increasing the likelihood that existing customers will market the boundary spanner and the firm through word-of-mouth to other potential customers. Service firms should consider the impact of satisfied customers on future business and ensure that boundary spanners also understand the importance of customer satisfaction to the success of the organization.

A second implication is that boundary spanners can increase customer satisfaction by seeking customer feedback through feedback seeking behaviors. Service organizations should recognize the influence that boundary spanner behavior in service relationships has on customer satisfaction. Boundary spanners have complex and dynamic roles in service relationships. Managers typically have little, if any, regular interaction with customers, making boundary spanners the primary contact. Given that managers cannot train boundary spanners for every possible service situation, it is advantageous to the organization to train boundary spanners to obtain the information they need to satisfy customers from the customers themselves. That is, to increase customer satisfaction, organizations should train boundary spanners to seek feedback from their customers.

Third, the current study implies that service firms can contribute to customer satisfaction by ensuring that customers are matched with boundary spanners they like, and perceive to be similar to themselves. In addition to training boundary spanners to seek feedback and tailor their service delivery, service firms can impact customer satisfaction by matching boundary spanners to customers based on potential perceived similarity and customer liking. While matching boundary spanners to customers may take more resources at the start of a customer relationship, it may pay off in terms of satisfaction, repatronage, and recommendations to other prospective customers.

The current results for liking and perceived similarity imply that findings accumulated in the performance appraisal literature should apply at least to some extent in the context of customers' evaluations of boundary spanners. The closeness between customers and boundary spanners in service relationships suggests that customers hold unique information about boundary spanners' performance that supervisors and peers do not have (Cascio, 1995; Lambert et al., 1997), making customer evaluations a valuable part of a holistic performance appraisal program.

If customers provide formal evaluations of employees – and the literature suggests that they already do (e.g., Lambert et al., 1997) – then it would be prudent to understand how customer evaluations compare with more traditional supervisor evaluations. In the performance appraisal literature authors have pointed out the politics involved in performance ratings in the workplace (Longenecker, Sims, & Gioia, 1987). Rather than focusing on accuracy in ratings, these authors note that intentional and systematic manipulation of performance appraisal ratings is frequently used to achieve raters' goals. For example, supervisors may inflate performance ratings to maximize a pay increase, protect an employee with personal problems, or to promote them “up and out”. Alternatively, supervisors may deflate ratings to urge employees to resign or to document poor performance prior to termination. Further, it has been shown that the purpose of performance appraisal impacts performance ratings (Jawahar & Williams, 1997). When raters believe that ratings will be used for administrative purposes (e.g., promotion, termination decisions), ratings are more lenient and less accurate than when ratings will be used for research only.

It is reasonable to propose that factors such as politics and performance appraisal purpose also impact customer ratings of boundary spanners in service relationships. Boundary spanners and employees develop service relationships and social ties through repeated encounters (Guttek et al., 1999). As relationships develop personal and political factors may come into play, such as a customer helping a boundary spanner to maximize a pay increase or protect a boundary spanner with personal problems by inflating satisfaction ratings. In contrast, these factors may play less of a role in service encounters because customers and boundary spanners do not work together regularly and likely have less personal and political motivation to bias satisfaction ratings.

Research regarding the applicability of traditional performance appraisal findings to the customer service context, from service encounters to relationships, is an area ripe for research.

Limitations

As with all research, the current study should be interpreted in light of its limitations.

Cross-sectional Design. One potential limitation is the cross sectional design of the current study. While LISREL enables the testing of causal path models, it cannot unequivocally determine causality using cross sectional data. As discussed, future research should address the nature and impact of components in the current model over time as service relationships develop.

Measurement of Constructs. Another limitation lies in the measurement of constructs in the current study, which included new and modified scales. Some items in the scales of feedback seeking, customer satisfaction, repatronage intentions, and word-of-mouth intentions were developed for inclusion in this study. As a result of the CFA, two feedback seeking items created for the current study and two feedback seeking items modified for the current study were eliminated. Additionally, one item from the POS scale was eliminated; it also was dropped by its developers in publications subsequent to the scale's development (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Although coefficient alphas indicate acceptable reliabilities for all scales, the validity of the measures might be questioned.

Method Bias. Because this study employs self-report methodology, method bias represents a possible limitation. In an attempt to overcome this limitation, the current study collected data from both sources involved in the service relationship – customers and boundary spanners. Boundary spanners provided data on POS and FSBs, while customers provided data on liking, perceived similarity, and the service effectiveness outcome variables. Therefore method bias is only a concern when examining relationships among constructs measured by the same

constituency, such as the relationship between liking and customer satisfaction. However, the poor fit of the one-factor CFA models for both customers and boundary spanners provides some evidence that respondents differentiated among the constructs within each survey.

Model Misspecification. There is a potential limitation with regard to model specification. If important variables or paths are excluded from the model (i.e., the model is misspecified), then the fit of the proposed model could be adversely affected. However, this limitation is applicable to all inferential statistics, and is not unique to the current study. Additionally, it has been suggested that inclusion of too many variables decreases the interpretability of the model (Bentler & Chou, 1987). The current study represents a preliminary exploration into the effects of POS on FSBs, and the subsequent impact of FSBs on service effectiveness. This study attempted to balance the concerns of misspecification and interpretation by including several variables perceived relevant to test these relationships. The study can serve as a prelude to further investigations of service effectiveness and boundary spanner employee behavior, and other potentially important variables have been identified for investigation in future studies (e.g., role clarity, feedback accuracy, feedback usefulness, frequency of feedback received without proactive seeking).

Recommendations for Future Research

Feedback seeking behaviors. The theory underlying feedback seeking is that boundary spanners will seek feedback to enable self-regulation. Feedback seeking is a method of reducing ambiguity and uncertainty; thus feedback seeking should improve role clarity and understanding of customer expectations. Role clarity and customer expectations may be less clear earlier in customer service relationships and they may vary based on the complexity of the project undertaken. Therefore, feedback seeking strategy and sign may vary as a function of boundary

spanners' role clarity and understanding of customer expectations. Longitudinal research that measures role ambiguity and feedback seeking in the development of service relationships over time could shed more light on the role of feedback in self-regulation of boundary spanners.

A recent study investigated other antecedents to feedback seeking not measured in the current study. VandeWalle and his colleagues (VandeWalle, Ganesan, Challagalla, & Brown, 2000) found that the perceived value of feedback seeking directly impacted feedback seeking behavior. Further, they found that a learning goal orientation and had a positive relationship with the perceived value of feedback seeking. Future research should investigate whether and how learning goal orientation and perceived value of feedback operate in customer service contexts.

In the current and most previous studies regarding feedback seeking behavior, there are two potentially important variables that were not included: the usefulness of feedback received, and the frequency of feedback offered *without* proactive seeking. If boundary spanners perceive feedback from customers to be low in usefulness, the feedback is not likely to be used and the frequency of seeking feedback from customers is likely to be reduced. Also, to the extent that customer feedback is freely given without a request, boundary spanners may find less of a need to seek it. These factors could blur the effects of feedback seeking on performance outcomes. In the early parts of this paper, two arguments were made regarding why feedback seeking would have a positive impact on customer satisfaction. One reason is that the feedback obtained, if used, would lead to more effective service delivery. The other reason is that the sheer act of customer participation in the service delivery (by providing requested feedback) would lead to greater satisfaction. To further test these possibilities, future research should measure the usefulness of received feedback, whether feedback was sought or offered without a request, and whether the feedback was actually used. Additionally, longitudinal research that measures role ambiguity and

feedback seeking in the development of service relationships over time could shed more light on the role of feedback in self-regulation of boundary spanners.

Future research should explicitly address customer perceptions of boundary spanners' feedback seeking. For example, do customers perceive seeking positive versus negative feedback in different ways? Does feedback seeking indicate to customers that boundary spanners are eager to please, or that they do not know what they are doing? It also would be useful to know whether customers' perceptions of feedback seeking change over the course of the relationship. For example, feedback seeking may be more acceptable early in a relationship or new project, but may convey a lack of confidence or understanding later in the engagement. Further, given that boundary spanner performance is evaluated by both customers and managers, future research might address the frequency and types of feedback sought from both constituencies. For example, for feedback about routine procedures, such as developing client proposals, boundary spanners might be more likely to seek feedback from managers. For feedback about custom project specifications, they might be more likely to seek feedback from customers.

In order to contribute to actual performance improvement, feedback needs to be accepted and accurately perceived by boundary spanners. The feedback literature outlines several factors that can contribute to the acceptability and accuracy of feedback (London, 1997). For example, the feedback source (in this case, the customer) needs to be credible for the feedback to be accepted (Ilgen et al., 1979). Presumably, boundary spanners may be less likely to seek feedback from less credible sources. Just as some managers are better at providing accurate and timely feedback to their subordinates than others, some customers are likely to provide more accurate and timely feedback than others. Findings in the performance appraisal and feedback literature

should be tested in the service context and utilized to train boundary spanners how to seek, receive, and use feedback effectively.

On a broader scale, investigating the customers' role in receiving good service (e.g., providing accurate and timely feedback) is an interesting avenue for future research. The term "service relationship" implies that both the boundary spanner and the customer have some responsibility in determining service effectiveness. For example, patients (i.e., the customers in health care services) have the responsibility of providing accurate information regarding their symptoms to their doctors (i.e., the boundary spanners) in order to receive good care. Similarly, customers in business-to-business market research relationships need to accurately define the scope and objectives of the engagement to boundary spanners in order to achieve effective service delivery. Providing feedback along the way seems to be a responsibility of customers in these relationships. Future research should investigate this phenomenon, which can help determine which customers are "better" than others. In this case, "better" would be defined as customers who can accurately communicate the scope and objectives of the engagement, and provide necessary feedback along the way. These customers are "better" because their well-articulated needs can be met to their satisfaction, and they will be more likely to return and to recommend the boundary spanner and the firm to other potential customers.

Customer Liking and Perceived Similarity. As noted previously, the divergent findings between the current study and previous research with regard to the effects of liking and perceived similarity on performance is one area to be pursued in future research. A longitudinal design would allow investigation of the progression of the effects of liking and perceived similarity over time.

POS. The current study found no relationship between POS and feedback seeking behaviors. Future research should address how internal organizational perceptions and customer relationship perceptions differentially impact boundary spanners' behaviors in service relationships. Current research on exchange relationships focus on two areas: the relationships employees have with the organization (i.e., POS) and the relationships employees have with their managers (i.e., LMX; Wayne et al., 1997). For boundary spanner employees in service relationships, exchange relationships with customers may represent a third type of exchange relationship that is an important factor in boundary spanner job attitudes and behavior. For example, boundary spanners in service relationships may develop commitment to customers independent from their commitment to the organization. Boundary spanners' customer commitment may be more strongly related to customer satisfaction than boundary spanners' organizational commitment. Future research might shed more light on boundary spanners' relationships with the organization versus relationships with customers and the impact of each on job attitudes, performance, and customer satisfaction.

Customer Behavioral Intentions. As discussed above, a revised path model based on modification indices was tested in addition to the hypothesized models. There was only one modification in the revised model compared to the best fitting model – a path from repatronage intentions to word-of-mouth intentions. Although previous research indicates that the two behavioral intentions are related (e.g., Blodgett et al., 1993), they typically are not referred to in a causal way. To provide a test of whether repatronage actually leads to word-of-mouth intentions, a longitudinal design would be required. Although only one modification was made to this model, it was based on modification indices rather than theory, and may capitalize on chance in the current dataset. Researchers recommend not accepting such revised models as the best fitting

model until the findings have been replicated with a different dataset (MacCallum, 1986; MacCallum, Roznowski, & Newcowitz, 1992).

Conclusion

The current study was the first to link boundary spanner and customer perceptions, boundary spanner behaviors, and service effectiveness in a single model of effectiveness in service relationships. Consistent with hypotheses, the best fitting model indicated that customer liking directly impacts customer satisfaction, and in turn, customer satisfaction impacts repatronage and word-of-mouth intentions. The combination of direct inquiry, positive and negative feedback seeking also has a direct impact on customer satisfaction. The current study found no significant impact of POS, monitoring, or perceived similarity on customer satisfaction.

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APPENDIX A

POS MEASURE

The next set of questions pertains to your employer, [COMPANY NAME]. Please rate the extent to which you agree/disagree with each of the following statements by circling the appropriate response.

- [POS1] This organization cares about my opinions.
- [POS2] This organization cares about my well-being.
- [POS3] This organization considers my goals and values.
- [POS4] Help is available from this organization when I have a problem.
- [POS5] This organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part.
- [POS6] If given the opportunity, this organization would take advantage of me. (R)
- [POS7] This organization shows little concern for me. (R)
- [POS8] This organization is willing to help me if I need a special favor.

Note. Items marked with an (R) are reverse scored.

APPENDIX B

DIRECT INQUIRY MEASURE

Throughout your working relationship with this client, how frequently did you . . .

- [DFB1] Ask this client for feedback about the service you deliver?
- [DFB2] Ask this client for additional information concerning your service delivery?
- [DFB3] Directly ask this client “how am I doing?”
- [DFB4] Talk to this client about your performance?
- [DFB5] Ask this client for information concerning your performance?
- [DFB6] Directly ask this client for an informal appraisal?

APPENDIX C

MONITORING MEASURE

Throughout your working relationship with this client, how frequently did you . . .

- [MFB1] Pay attention to informal, unsolicited feedback from this client?
- [MFB2] Keep your ears open in case this client gives information about your service performance?
- [MFB3] Eavesdrop on this client to get information concerning your performance?
- [MFB4] Pay attention to how this client acts toward you?
- [MFB5] Pay attention to casual remarks this client makes?
- [MFB6] Pay attention to this client in order to figure out where you stand?

APPENDIX D

POSITIVE FEEDBACK SEEKING MEASURE

Throughout your working relationship with this client, how frequently did you . . .

- [PFB1] Look for positive signs from this client regarding your performance? (new item)
- [PFB2] Seek good news about yourself from this client?
- [PFB3] Seek feedback about what you do well? (new item)
- [PFB4] Ask for feedback from this client when you know it will be good news rather than bad news?

APPENDIX E

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK SEEKING MEASURE

Throughout your working relationship with this client, how frequently did you . . .

[NFB1] Seek information about weaknesses in your performance? (new item)

[NFB2] Prefer detailed, critical appraisals even though they might hurt?

[NFB3] Ask this client to be critical when he or she gives you feedback?

[NFB4] Look for this client's assessment of your shortcomings? (new item)

APPENDIX F

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION MEASURE

- [SAT1] I am satisfied with this (COMPANY NAME) representative as a provider of services.
- [SAT2] Overall, I am satisfied by the service I receive from this (COMPANY NAME) representative.
- [SAT3] All things considered, I find that this (COMPANY NAME) representative delivers satisfactory service.
- [SAT4] I feel that the service provided by this (COMPANY NAME) representative exceeds my expectations.

APPENDIX G

WORD-OF-MOUTH INTENTIONS

Thinking of the service you receive from this (COMPANY NAME) representative, how likely would you be to . . .

- [WOM1] Encourage co-workers and associates to do business with this (COMPANY NAME) representative?
- [WOM2] Say positive things about this (COMPANY NAME) representative to other people?
- [WOM3] Advise others against using this (COMPANY NAME) representative for similar services? (R)
- [WOM4] Recommend this (COMPANY NAME) representative to someone who seeks your advice?

APPENDIX H

REPATRONAGE INTENTIONS

Thinking of the service you receive from this (COMPANY NAME) representative, how likely would you be to . . .

[REP1] Do more business with this (COMPANY NAME) representative in the next few years?

[REP2] Return to this (COMPANY NAME) representative for future service needs?

[REP3] Consider this (COMPANY NAME) representative your first choice to buy market research services?

[REP4] Continue doing business with this representative at (COMPANY NAME)?

APPENDIX I

LIKING MEASURE

- [LIK1] I like this (COMPANY NAME) representative very much as a person.
- [LIK2] I get along well with this (COMPANY NAME) representative.
- [LIK3] Working with this (COMPANY NAME) representative is a pleasure.
- [LIK4] I think this (COMPANY NAME) representative would make a good friend.

APPENDIX J

PERCEIVED SIMILARITY MEASURE

- [SIM1] My (COMPANY NAME) representative and I are similar in terms of our outlook, perspectives, and values.
- [SIM2] My (COMPANY NAME) representative and I see things in much the same way.
- [SIM3] My (COMPANY NAME) representative and I are alike in a number of areas.
- [SIM4] My (COMPANY NAME) representative is similar to me in aspects that I consider important.

APPENDIX K

CLIENT COVER LETTER

Dear [COMPANY NAME] Client,

As part of my doctoral research at Louisiana State University, I am conducting a study on customer service relationships between clients and service providers. The results of this survey will be used to assist [COMPANY NAME] in understanding the views and satisfaction of their employees and clients. I hope you will agree to spend 5 to 7 minutes of your time to complete and return the enclosed survey. Your survey responses are anonymous and will be kept strictly confidential. An overall summary of findings will be presented to [COMPANY NAME], but your individual responses will not be shared. Completion of this survey constitutes your informed consent to participate in this research. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact the principal investigator, Aletta Merz Barnard, M.A., at Louisiana State University, Department of Psychology, Baton Rouge, LA 70803, or by phone at 914-288-3033, or by e-mail: aletta@us.ibm.com; or Gary J. Greguras, Ph.D., at Louisiana State University, or by phone at 225-334-6646, or by e-mail: ggregu1@lsu.edu. You may also contact Charles E. Graham, Chairman, Institutional Review Board by phone at 225-388-1492.

Please return this survey directly to me in the enclosed, postage-paid envelope by **August 25, 2000**. Your participation is greatly appreciated!

Sincerely,

Aletta Merz Barnard, M.A.

APPENDIX L

BOUNDARY SPANNER COVER LETTER

Dear [COMPANY NAME] Employee,

As part of my doctoral research at Louisiana State University, I am conducting a study on customer service relationships between clients and service providers. The results of this survey will be used to assist [COMPANY NAME] in understanding the views and satisfaction of their employees and clients. I hope you will agree to spend 5 to 7 minutes of your time to complete and return the enclosed survey. Your survey responses are anonymous and will be kept strictly confidential. An overall summary of findings will be presented to [COMPANY NAME], but your individual responses will not be shared. Completion of this survey constitutes your informed consent to participate in this research. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact the principal investigator, Aletta Merz Barnard, M.A., at Louisiana State University, Department of Psychology, Baton Rouge, LA 70803, or by phone at 914-288-3033, or by e-mail: aletta@us.ibm.com; or Gary J. Greguras, Ph.D., at Louisiana State University, or by phone at 225-334-6646, or by e-mail: ggregu1@lsu.edu. You may also contact Charles E. Graham, Chairman, Institutional Review Board by phone at 225-388-1492.

Please return this survey directly to me in the enclosed, postage-paid envelope by **August 25, 2000**. Your participation is greatly appreciated!

Sincerely,

Aletta Merz Barnard, M.A

VITA

Aletta Machell Barnard was born Aletta Machell Merz in Columbus, Ohio on March 15, 1973. She grew up in Columbus and graduated with honors from Whitehall-Yearling High School in June, 1991. While in high school, Aletta was vice president of the Marching Ram Band and was named homecoming queen. Aletta attended Denison University in Granville, Ohio. While at Denison, she was president of her sorority, Alpha Chi Omega, and a member of the honors program. She graduated cum laude in May of 1995 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology. That fall, Aletta entered the doctoral program in psychology at Louisiana State University, concentrating on Industrial-Organizational psychology.

Aletta earned her Master of Arts degree in December, 1997. In June of 1998, she left Baton Rouge for a position in the Corporate Market Intelligence group at IBM corporate headquarters in Armonk, New York. She met Steven Barnard at IBM and they married in October of 1999. Today Aletta leads a team of market intelligence professionals conducting worldwide brand image research for IBM. She and her husband make their home in White Plains, New York.