Coping with Customer Participation through Improvisation

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ABSTRACT

Customers have always played an important role in professional services, contributing experience, knowledge and personality traits. More recently, due largely to the increasing amount of information available to the public and the increased feeling of empowerment this affords, customers have begun to participate more in service encounters. As the amount of interaction between the customer and the service employee increases, so will the variance in service design and delivery. The uncertainty created by increased customer participation has been found to contribute to frontline employee role stress. This study explores the role of frontline employee improvisation as a buffer in variable customer interactions. We propose that improvisation will weaken the positive effect of customer participation on employee role stress. We suggest that the ability to improvise is a resource for employees which, when combined with customer participation, is a source of benefit, value or stimulation, all of which help frontline employees perform their jobs better.