



How to become more customer oriented?

The influence of structural employee empowerment on customer orientation of an internal function in a complex organisation



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Leiden, 31 March 2021

Acknowledgements

You have opened the first page of my study, which means I have come to the end of it. With mixed feelings I have to say as the Master of science in Business Administration at the Radboud University has been enjoyable, interesting, and brought me exactly what I was hoping to find. I have immersed myself in this world from the very first subject about social systems theory to all the other subjects that provide inside through different perspectives in how to best design organisations that act both responsible towards their people and towards society. It has also been a joy to be part of group 51, a close network of students which allowed for a light-hearted student atmosphere during classes, as well as engaging discussions, led by strong professionals from the Radboud University. It made it even more worth to not miss any of the evening classes. Also, I would like to thank my colleagues at NCIA, who offered me all the support and information to conduct the study and remained eager for the results.

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Leiden, 31 March 2021

Monique

Summary

At the center of this study is the transformation of the internal Human Resources (HR) function at the NATO Communications and Information Agency (NCIA). NCIA is NATO's largest body and acquires, deploys, and defends communications systems for NATO's political decision-makers and military commands. The internal HR function supports NCIA with attracting, developing, and retaining engaged high performing employees. In November 2019 it was decided to transform the HR organisation structure (the operating model) to better align the HR services to the needs of the organisation. The goal of the transformation was to become more business-driven, more customer oriented. In support of the transformation, the Head of HR at NCIA is interested to understand how customer-oriented behaviour of HR-employees can be improved. Past research indicates that structural employee empowerment positively influences customer orientation. As such, the purpose of this study is to provide recommendations to the Head of HR at NCIA about how to improve customer-oriented behaviour of HR-employees by providing insight in the difference between the desired and actual state of structural employee empowerment of HR-employees. To include different perspectives on this topic, perceptions from different groups are considered and compared as well. For one, the perception of HR-employees about how they perceive being empowered compared to how HR-managers perceive they facilitate empowerment of HR-employees. For two, how HR (HR-employees and HR-managers) perceives their own level of customer orientation compared to how the organisation (the internal customer) perceives customer orientation of HR.

It concerns a practice-oriented, diagnostic gap analysis study. The sources of information are literature in the field of empowerment, customer orientation and complex organisations, surveys in HR and in the organisation, and documentation about the HR transformation. Overall, the conclusions are:

HR-employees perceive being structurally empowered, although not in all areas at the level of the desired state. HR-managers perceive facilitating empowerment of HR-employees to a stronger extent than HR-employees perceive they are being empowered. In the area of customer orientation, there is a difference of opinion between HR and the internal customer. In the eyes of the internal customer, HR does not engage in customer-orientated behaviour at the desired level. Based on these conclusions, recommendations are presented to increase structural employee empowerment to enhance customer orientation of HR-employees.

In addition to the practice-oriented part of this study, there is also a theoretical part. The dependent variable customer-oriented behaviour has been slightly modified in this study compared to the referenced study, by adding a fifth dimension ('satisfaction') to the composition of the variable. This to provide a more nuanced concept of the variable but also to assess in a more detailed way the underlying relations between each of the dimensions of structural employee empowerment and the dimensions of customer-oriented behaviour. Based on the results, these relations could be pointed out exactly. The added dimension to the concept of customer-oriented behaviour, proved to be of added value.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The organisation of scope in this study is NCIA, one of NATO's bodies. NATO itself, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, was founded on 4 April 1949 by 12 country members at the time. It was founded in response to the Second World War to commonly strive for peace and at the same time organise themselves by way of a treaty that offers each member support from the other members should one be attacked. The purpose of NATO is *“to guarantee the freedom and security of its members through political and military means”*, consulted from (<https://www.nato.int>). Currently 30 nations have joined NATO.

1.1 Research scope

NCIA, NATO Communications and Information Agency, is NATO's largest body with about 3000 organisation members and acquires, deploys, and defends communications systems for NATO's political decision-makers and military commands. NCIA is also on the frontlines against cyber-attacks, working closely with governments and industry to prevent future debilitating attacks. NCIA's mission is to *“Lead NATO's digital endeavour”*, consulted from (<https://www.ncia.nato.int>). Its purpose is supporting NATO bodies and nations with information and communication technology. For example, during the COVID-19 period, all Ministers of Defence needed to be able to hold meetings in a digital secure environment as they could not physically come together, which was enabled through NCIA. Or the ever-increasing importance of cyber security and the importance of secure satellite communication that are amongst NCIA's priorities. The people that work there, consist of about 55% of civilian employees, 25% military employees and 20% contractors. Military employees are appointed by their nation to temporarily work for NCIA in the capacity of a non-military job. They fulfil a civilian task for a fixed period, mostly three years. Once the period is over, they return to their home country and another military will be sent to continue with the job. Civilian employees can only be hired if they are from any of the 30 nations and they are hired through standard recruitment procedures.

Employees are located in Brussels (Headquarters), Mons and The Hague. Besides these locations, there are also civilian and military employees that support military exercises 'in the field' and they are located across Europe, at various sites. Within NCIA, most jobs are IT related jobs, like for example (technical) engineers, analysts, IT architects, project managers and service delivery jobs. Next to these, there are also functions (groups of professionals) that fulfil a supporting role to all business entities. Like Finance, Communication, Legal and Human Resources. These are the so-called 'enabling' functions.

This study focuses on one of these enablers, the internal Human Resources function at NCIA, further on articulated as HR.

1.1.1 Human Resources at NCIA

HR has a supportive role to the entire NCIA, meaning that the NCIA organisation members (employees and managers) are considered HR's 'internal customers'. The HR function consists of about 50 roles of which currently about 40 are filled. The people are located in Brussels, Mons, and the Hague. HR is responsible for supporting NCIA with attracting, developing, and retaining engaged high performing employees. By doing so, HR's mission will be realised to support the organisation in delivering their own strategy. HR support is offered at different levels. Starting at an operational/administrative level like registering personal data of all employees, contracts, leave, reporting HR metrics, performing payroll and day-to-day support to individual organisation members. Followed by a tactical level where the support can be characterised as providing specialist advice and services to individuals and/or managers in the organisation. For example, supporting the enhancement of performance management, performing recruitment, onboarding new hires, and developing training programs for individuals and/or teams. At a more strategic level, this support can be characterised as cooperating with senior management in a forward looking way to analyse what is needed in the organisation to improve high performance of employees and engaged teams in such a way that the organisation is able to achieve its objectives and deliver its strategy. For example, assessing gap analyses in current skills and needed skills, support in organisational structural changes, supporting culture change and supporting the implementing of a job framework. To be able to work adequately at these different levels of support in this broad variety of areas, a smooth working operating model is needed. Which was not the case at the time.

The operating model and the performance of the HR function within NCIA were assessed by an external organisation in the summer of 2019. This assessment concluded that on various aspects HR did not deliver products and services to the organisation conform their requirements. It also showed that the HR structure itself, the way it was organised (the operating model), was not effective in the delivery of its own processes. Furthermore, it showed that HR activities were coordinated unsatisfactorily and that the basic HR activities offered insufficient support to what the organisation actually needed. Further to that, it was found that there were problems with the required level of knowledge and skills of HR-employees, inadequate communication, a lack of information sharing, a lack of pro-activity in terms of decision making and that in the past insufficient bespoke training was offered to HR-employees to increase their levels of performance. The outcome of the assessment revealed that the described issues led to insufficient customer-oriented behaviour from HR-employees towards their internal customers (other employees and (senior) line management). On the whole, HR was assessed as a merely administrative operational unit instead of a mature function that would be responsive and effective in delivering services to the organisation. Or to put it differently, to be 'business-driven' in all these aspects and have a customer-oriented approach.

1.1.2 Human Resources transformation

Combining all these findings gave cause for a call for change. This change was specified in an HR transformation project that started in November 2019. A transformation aimed at re-designing the HR operating model (change in structure), based on the HR business partner framework (Ulrich, 1997). The aim of the HR transformation was to become a ‘business-driven’ function, designed for delivering pro-actively and adequately required services to the organisation. The HR business partner framework focuses on deliverables and not on actual work or activities of HR and it describes the four key roles that HR professionals should fulfil to realise a business-partner relationship. These four roles are those of the strategic partner, the employee champion, the change agent, and the administrative expert (Ulrich, 1997, p. 25). As such, the model is designed for effective and efficient process delivery and a more customer-oriented way of working to align with the needs of the business. With business we mean the organisation.

As it stands today, feedback from internal customers (employees and managers) makes it clear that despite the change in structure and change in the way services are delivered, currently the internal customers perceive the interaction with HR not yet as satisfactory. This feedback is provided through email exchanges and conversations between internal customers and HR. It points to a lack in engagement with internal customer’s needs and therefore misses aligned support. Ultimately, a lack of customer-oriented behaviour means that HR will not be able to create added value. Without that understanding of the needs, the newly designed and implemented HR operating model will not be successful because how can processes be designed that align with organisational needs? How can truly be understood what the HR deliverables should be to support achievement of goals at organisational level? Therefore, the Head of HR at NCIA is keen to understand how customer-oriented behaviour of HR-employees can be improved.

1.1.3 Structural employee empowerment

Preliminary exploration of literature demonstrates that a variety of antecedents of customer-oriented behaviour have been studied, for example organisational commitment, personality traits, climate for service, job satisfaction, perceived organisational support and employee empowerment (Lanjananda & Patterson, 2008; Mechinda & Patterson, 2009). Supported by various studies in the field of customer orientation and employee empowerment, we found that the structural aspect of employee empowerment positively impacts customer-oriented behaviour (Zeglat, Aljaber, Alrawabdeh, 2014; Gazzoli, Hancer, Kim, 2013). Structural refers to policies, processes and practices that make it possible for employees to take responsibility for their own ideas, decisions, and actions in the work context (Zeglat *et al.*, 2014). How ways of working are embedded in the organisation to support employees in taking this responsibility, for example through authority-delegation to lower levels or stimulating sharing ideas between employees and their managers. In all, studies confirm that structural employee empowerment is an influential driver for customer-oriented behaviour.

With regards to this study, it is most likely that a lack of structural employee empowerment gives cause for insufficient customer-orientation from HR-employees at NCIA. Even the more as HR is an internal function embedded within a large political/military organisation that can be characterised as a complex organisation. Meaning that the HR function situates in a highly regulated environment where guidelines, regulation and standardised processes play a dominant role in the way work is performed and behaviours are demonstrated. Everything is based on the hierarchical structure and not so much on the structural empowering of employees. This set-up does by nature contradict with typical environments with high levels of customer orientation where it is all about timely responses and actions that not always fit in with standard lengthy processes.

The choice to explore structural employee empowerment as antecedent for customer orientation in this study is made not only because of the proven positive relation but also because elements of structural employee empowerment can be altered in a highly regulated and complex work environment to the extent that customer orientation can improve.

1.1.4 Complex organisations

The design of the division of work within an organisation is of great importance as it directly refers to how jobs are designed in an organisation (Achterbergh and Vriens, 2010). One job is only a part of the entire network of jobs and the dependency between all those jobs impacts how efficiently and effectively all work is performed within the organisation and how people experience doing the work. NCIA can be characterised as a complex organisation, also referred to as bureaucratic. Not only because of the complex structure of the division of work, but also because the highly regulated way of working, such as the rules, guidance, standardised processes, and strong hierarchy, influences how work is performed. Especially in complex organisations this division of work has created many dependencies between all jobs in the network to the point that it limits efficiency and effectiveness. Which also implies that there is a discrepancy between the need for customer orientation and the lack of it, as customer orientation is about meeting the needs of the customer in an adequately and timely manner. This can be difficult to meet in such a complex structure where there are many dependencies that will inhibit to some extent the ability of HR-employees to meet the needs of their internal customer. It is likely that because of the complex structure there is a low level of structural employee empowerment. And that in itself could well be part of the cause for the low level of customer orientation of HR-employees.

1.1.5 Problem description

The HR transformation project has reached the implementation phase, meaning that the new structure has been implemented and HR-employees have been educated in how to match their ways of working and their processes to this model to allow for becoming a business-driven function. However, the level of customer orientation still needs to increase. There are assumptions as to what causes the remaining low levels of customer orientation, but these are not confirmed nor do these allow for clear ideas of how to improve customer-oriented behaviour of HR-employees. Which is why the Head of HR is seeking

advice on how to improve customer orientation of the HR-employees, taking note of the complexity of the work environment. In agreement with the Head of HR, it is decided to conduct a practice-oriented diagnostic gap-analysis to assess the difference between the desired and actual state of structural employee empowerment of HR-employees.

1.1.6 Additional practice-oriented elements in scope of the study

The Head of HR is also interested to understand how HR-managers perceive their own contribution in empowering their HR-employees and if there are similarities and differences compared to how the HR-employees perceive being empowered. It is therefore decided, as an additional element, to measure a difference in perception between both HR-groups about the level of being empowered (HR-employees) and the level of actively empowering (HR-managers).

Next to that, the Head of HR is also keen to understand to what extent there is a difference between HR (both HR-managers and HR-employees) and the internal customer about the level of customer orientation of HR. A more comprehensive ‘picture’ can be provided by comparing the ‘self-assessment’ of HR with the perspective of the internal customer. As such, it is decided, also as an additional element, to measure the difference in perception between HR and the internal customer about HR’s level of customer-orientated behaviour.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to make recommendations towards the Head of HR about the cause of a low level of customer-oriented behaviour of HR-employees and how that can be improved. This contribution will be made by providing insight in the difference between the desired state and actual state of structural employee empowerment of HR-employees. It concerns a quantitative, practice-oriented diagnostic gap analysis study.

1.3 Research model

To provide recommendations to the Head of HR, specific knowledge is required and specific steps need to be taken to conduct the study. In the following figure 1 this is visualised, and the different steps are explained.

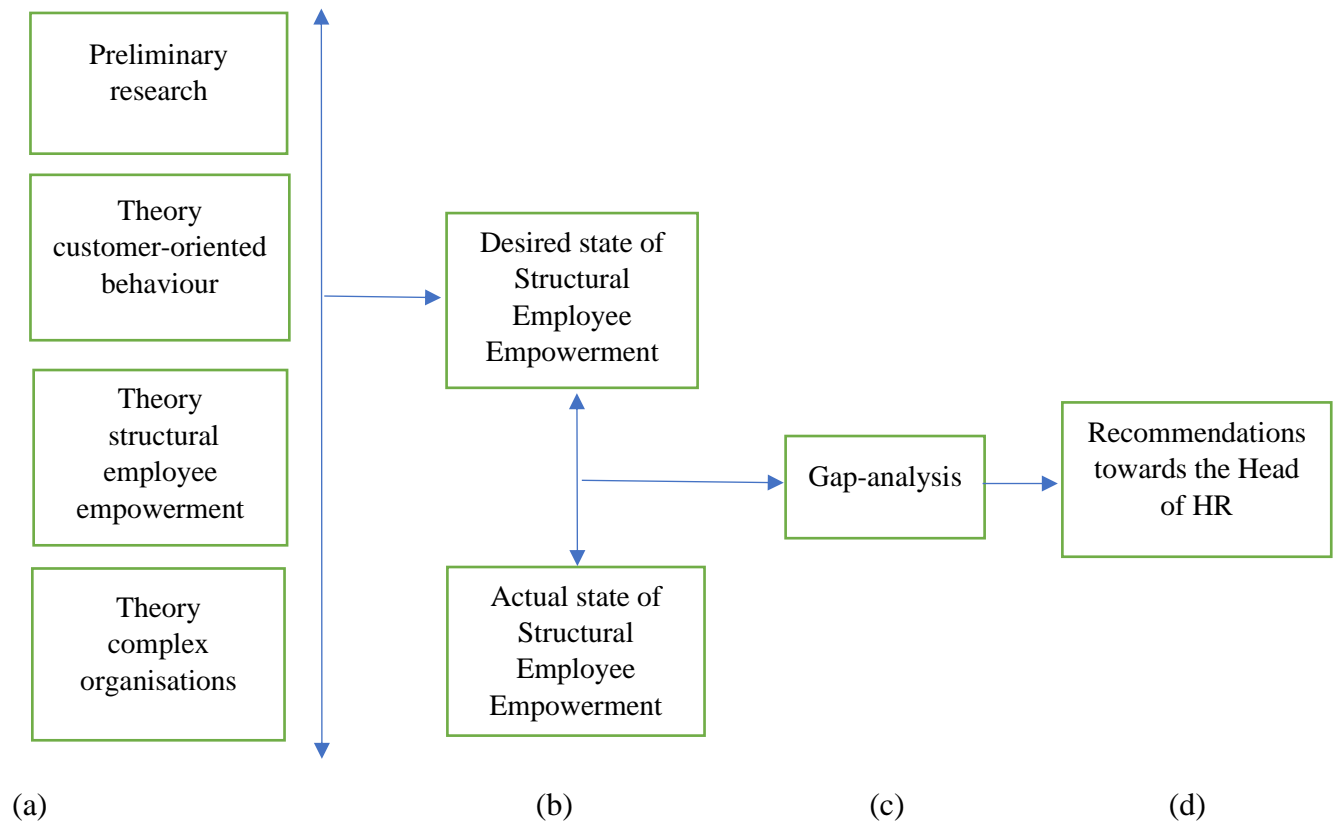


Figure 1. Schematic representation of the research model

The steps to be undertaken and what each step entails:

- a) By exploring literature in the above-mentioned areas, the theoretical framework will be determined. Through that exploration, the desired state (the norm) for structural employee empowerment of HR-employees at NCIA can be defined. In addition, also the desired state (the norm) for customer-oriented behaviour of HR can be described which will be used for the added element in this study to compare perceptions between HR and the internal customer about HR's level of customer orientation.
- b) Subsequently, empirical quantitative research will be conducted to establish the current state of structural employee empowerment of HR-employees at NCIA.
- c) Upon receiving the above-mentioned data, a comparison will be made between the desired state (SOLL) and the current state (IST), which provides the information to prepare the gap analysis.
- d) The gap analysis will be used to articulate recommendations towards the Head of HR at NCIA on how to improve customer-oriented behaviour of HR-employees.

1.4 Research question

The research question within this study asks to what extent the current state of structural employee empowerment is at NCIA as it should be to enhance customer orientation. Because the assumption is, that strong structural employee empowerment leads to strong customer orientation.

Consequently, an advice can be articulated to the Head of HR at NCIA about how to improve the low level of customer orientation of HR-employees.

Specific knowledge is required to enable a response to the articulated research question which will be gathered through answers to the below set of theoretical, empirical, and analytical questions.

Also, the below set of questions captures the practice-oriented elements that are added in this study per the request of the Head of HR. Where 'HR' is mentioned in the questions, reference is made to both HR-employees and HR-managers unless it is specified what group within HR is referred to.

Theoretical questions

1. From a theoretical perspective, what is customer-oriented behaviour?
2. From a theoretical perspective, what is structural employee empowerment?
3. From a theoretical perspective, what are complex organisations?
4. What is recognized from a theoretical perspective as the desired state (SOLL) of structural employee empowerment to realise customer-oriented behaviour?
5. What is recognized from a theoretical perspective as the desired state (SOLL) of customer-oriented behaviour?
6. From a theoretical perspective, what are limitations to structural employee empowerment and customer-oriented behaviour in complex organisations?

Empirical questions

7. What is the actual state regarding structural employee empowerment of HR-employees, from their own perspective (IST) at NCIA?
8. To what extent does HR-management at NCIA currently perceive that they facilitate structural employee empowerment of HR-employees?
9. What is the perspective of HR itself about their own customer orientation?
10. What is the perspective of the internal customer about customer orientation of HR?

Analytical questions

11. Which are the similarities and differences between the desired and the actual state regarding structural employee empowerment of HR-employees at NCIA?
12. Which are the similarities and differences between the perception of HR-employees and HR-managers in how they perceive, respectively, being empowered and facilitating empowerment?
13. Which are the similarities and differences between the perception of HR and the perception of the internal customer about customer orientation of HR?
14. Based on the above outcome, what recommendations can be provided to the Head of HR at NCIA?

1.5 Contribution

Practical contribution

Regarding the practical contribution, the results of this study will be useful for HR at NCIA as they are currently transforming the HR function to become a more business-driven function. To have insight in factors of influence on customer-oriented behaviour will help the organisation to understand the mechanism of how to further develop their HR-employees to engage more adequately with their customers. Next to that, the element of measuring a difference in perception about the level of perceived and facilitated empowerment (respectively HR-employees and HR-managers) provides additional information that can be used in determining next steps. As will also be the case where it regards the additional insight into any difference between HR and the internal customer about how each of them perceives the level of customer orientation of HR. Measuring empowerment and customer orientation among different stakeholders enables comparing the various perspectives and evaluations and can possibly be used for giving advice about measures for improvement.

Theoretical contribution

So far it has been explained what the practice-oriented scope of this study is, which forms the main part of the study. There is, however, also a theoretical contribution. In the study undertaken by Zeglal *et al.*, (2014), the impact of structural employee empowerment on customer-oriented behaviour is measured through different dimensions of structural employee empowerment against a generic concept of the dependent variable customer-orientated behaviour, which is composed of two dimensions. In comparison, in this study the dependent variable has been defined in a more detailed way. The scale for customer orientation developed by Donovan and Hocutt (2001), which consists of four dimensions, is used, and is modified slightly by adding a fifth dimension. Not only to provide a more nuanced composition of the dependent variable but also as it allows a more detailed assessment of the underlying relations. A more detailed study enables pointing out exactly strengths in relations between the dimensions of structural employee empowerment and the dimensions of customer-oriented behaviour to get a better understanding of the key relations between both variables.

The theory-oriented question in this context asks how the different dimensions of structural employee empowerment relate with each of the dimensions of customer-oriented behaviour.

1.6 Preview

In the following four chapters relevant information will be provided to answer the theoretical, empirical, and analytical questions that are articulated in section 1.5. Firstly, in chapter 2, the theoretical framework will be explained as well as the global conceptual model. Subsequently the dependent variable customer orientation and the independent variable structural employee empowerment will be explained based on literature. Further to that, complex organisations will be explained from literature, including their limitations on both variables, to follow-up with a description of what structural employee empowerment should look like to realise high levels of customer-oriented behaviour.

Based on the theory in chapter 2, in chapter 3 the methodology will be explained including choices made regarding the empirical research at NCIA. In chapter 4 all empirical findings will be presented and analysed whereupon in chapter 5 conclusions will be provided as well as the recommendations to the Head of HR at NCIA. The thesis will be concluded with a reflection.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

In the previous chapter the purpose of the study and the way to conduct it have been explained. In this chapter, literature in the area of customer-orientated behaviour and structural employee empowerment will be reviewed to answer the theoretical questions. Following that, hypotheses will be posed that relate to the theoretical part of this study in which relations between the variables are assessed. The chapter will end with a description of the desired state (SOLL) of structural employee empowerment and of customer-oriented behaviour of HR-employees at NCIA.

2.1 Global conceptual model

In any organisation the processes, people, products, or services are directed at servicing the customer. Whether it is a profit organisation providing products, a consultancy firm providing advisory services or non-profit organisations providing community services, encounters between the employees and external customers will take place. As achieving organisational goals is partly dependent on the success rate of these encounters, most organisations focus on training and developing their ‘customer-facing’ employees to engage in customer-oriented behaviour. Can we however not say that ideally the same principle applies to interactions within the organisation? A so-called internal ‘customer-provider’ relationship that stimulates employees from various teams to treat each other as ‘internal customer’ with the aim to improve service delivery and ultimately to achieve the organisational goals. Naturally, one might expect that as a side outcome, internal customer orientation also positively influences external customer-orientation.

Looking more closely at the concept of an internally oriented ‘customer-provider’ relationship, it would mean that also the enabling functions in an organisation, like an HR function, connects with other employees outside HR as if they are their internal customers. They would focus on how to meet the needs of the internal customer adequately and timely and how that can be improved, what factors are of influence on customer orientation. In chapter 1 this was elaborated on by explaining the impact of structural employee empowerment on customer orientation.

In the following figure 2 the global conceptual model is presented. This demonstrates how the concepts structural employee empowerment and customer-oriented behaviour are related.

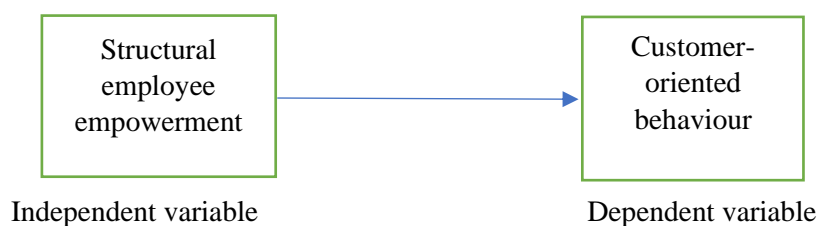


Figure 2. Schematic representation of the global conceptual model

The assumption is, that if the organisation makes it possible for HR-employees to become structurally empowered, they will be able to respond to internal customers in such a way that it meets their needs. We can assume this as in many studies the structural employee empowerment concept in relation to customer orientation has been examined and consequently been proven to have a positive impact (Zeglal *et al.*, 2014; Gazzoli *et al.*, 2013).

2.2 Customer orientation

2.2.1 Background of customer-oriented behaviour

Studies related to behaviour of employees stem from social science with its origins in the mid twentieth century. Around 1980 the concept of organisational citizenship emerged (Graham, 1991). It studied the behavioural criteria of performance above and beyond the job of the employee and how that was found to be useful for the organisation (Graham, 1991). Useful for the organisation because if most of the population does exceed their job requirements, this will have a positive effect on the performance of the organisation itself. To understand this phenomenon, attention was paid to the aspect of what would move employees to behave out of free choice in taking an extra step, not explicitly described in the employment contract or recognized by the formal reward system. Which was found to be extremely important for an organisation to effectively function (Organ, 1997).

We can all intuitively see that this kind of behaviour is important to an organisation at the aggregate level. It will only have the positive effect on the performance of the organisation as this kind of behaviour is demonstrated by most employees across the entire organisation.

Building on the previous, another concept was developed which was called pro-social behaviour. This added the element of personal beneficial effects should people demonstrate that kind of behaviour. Meaning that not only the organisation would benefit as a whole, but also groups and even individuals within that organisation would benefit from showing positive, helping behaviour towards others (Lee, 2001).

Going through literature it is interesting to see how the concepts build on general positive, helping, attitudes by choice towards something that is more specifically pointed at seeing 'the other' as your customer.

This latter was given attention in marketing theory first, as an interesting concept to improve customer satisfaction. Hence, customer-oriented behaviour became a topic of studies in marketing because it was assumed by marketers that market-oriented firms would outperform their competitors and achieve a higher level of customer satisfaction (Donovan, Brown, Mowen, 2001). The focus in these studies was on service employees who would directly interact with external customers. These employees were after all the representatives of the organisation and they would be the ones leaving an impression and experience with their customers. Another field of studies taking an interest in customer orientation, was the field of internal marketing. According to Pappasolomou (2006) it is the objective of internal marketing to strive in your organisation for motivated and customer conscious employees for the

organisation to achieve service excellence (Papasolomou, 2006). There should be a strong emphasis on the customer's needs among the employees themselves as if it is embedded in the culture of the organisation. Papasolomou (2006) describes how organisations implement entire internal marketing programs to change employee's attitudes. Drake *et al.*, (2005) stated that implementing internal marketing can lead to competitive advantage of the organisation by improving retainment of the workforce, stronger individual performance, better teamwork, and more effective overall communications (Drake *et al.*, in Papasolomou, 2006).

2.2.2 Definition of customer-oriented behaviour

Coming to a clear definition of customer-oriented behaviour we found it is described in many ways. For example, Pimpakorn and Patterson (2010) refer to it as “a willingness of subordinates to behave with a favourable attitude and deliver a high quality of services to customers”, in Zeglat *et al.*, (2014). In the sales context another definition was provided by Saxe and Weitz (in Donovan & Hocutt, 2001) as “the degree the salesperson practices the marketing concept by helping satisfy customer needs”. In these descriptions the focal point is the relation between sales representatives of the organisation and the external customer and therefore not specific enough for this study. A further exploration led to the following description of customer-oriented behaviour which for the purpose of this study covers most adequately all relevant elements, described by Zeglat *et al.*, (2014, p. 57) “*the ability to identify, evaluate, understand, and meet customer needs*”.

It is not a given that people engage by nature with others in such a way that it becomes a constructive interaction where the balance is set right between the needs of the other and the possibilities to serve that need. That comes with a set of behaviours of which some people by nature have a stronger tendency to than others. The personality traits of HR-employees, however, are not within the scope of this study as we consider creating the appropriate working conditions the first prerequisite to lay the foundation for stronger customer orientation.

2.2.3 Customer-oriented behaviour at HR

Looking at the ambition of the HR function to become more customer oriented, the following reasoning can be applied: first know who your customer is, so that their needs can be identified and understood, subsequently the required services can be delivered and ultimately the customer is satisfied with the entire experience in the delivery process. Donovan and Hocutt (2001) developed a scale that measures the customer orientation for employees in any service environment and it suits our purpose.

This scale consists of the following four dimensions:

(1) need to pamper the customer, which is adapted in this study to ‘need to care for the customer’ because of the context. It refers to making the customer feel special, as if each customer were individually important to the one providing the service;

- (2) need to read the customer's needs, which is adapted in this study to 'need to understand the customer's needs' to map with the context. It refers to anticipating the needs of the customer;
- (3) need for personal relationship, which refers to enjoying getting to know or connecting with the customer on a personal level;
- (4) need to deliver the service required, which refers to delivering the intended services on time, to perform the service task correctly.

These dimensions match, albeit some word adaptations to better match with the context, with the previously mentioned reasoning that follows the way HR-employees should enact customer-orientated behaviour. After all, HR is a supportive function within the organisation. It supports all employees, managers, and the senior leadership team at operational, tactical, and strategic level. Interacting with the internal customer at a less detached way by taking care of their needs, enjoying getting to know them at a more personal level, engaging with them to identify and understand their needs to enable delivering services adequately.

(5) In this study, satisfaction is added as dimension, referring to the level of satisfaction about services delivered and the service experience. This dimension is complementary to the other four and the combination of these five dimensions provides a nuanced composition of the customer-oriented behaviour concept.

2.3 Structural employee empowerment

2.3.1 Background of structural employee empowerment

Employee empowerment stems from social science studies. Zeglal et al., (2014) refer to the theory of McGregor who developed 'Theory Y' to explain that employee's motivation, productivity, and participation can be stimulated by allowing them autonomy and flexibility in their jobs to make decisions when appropriate. A dominant finding in the empowerment literature is that an empowered workforce will lead to achieving a competitive advantage which makes it for organisations in general important to know how to increase employee empowerment (Matthews, Diaz & Cole, 2002). Further exploration of literature shows that empowerment is often discussed from two perspectives, the organisational (structural) one and the psychological one (personality traits). Kanter (in Chang, 2007) argued that of these two perspectives the impact of organisational structure on organisational behaviour is greater than that of employee personality traits (psychological perspective of empowerment).

Because the organisation can enable employees to contribute to achieving its goals by distributing formal power, allowing autonomy to make decisions. Whereby formal power is explained in terms of articulating clearly defined tasks and linked flexibility appropriate in the work environment. Next to formal power there is also informal power which refers to relationships between colleagues, management outside and inside the work environment (Pradhan & Panda, 2019) which can indirectly have an influencing role in how to achieve results in one's job. Power is not an individual personality

trait nor is it created in that sense. Power is derived from organisational structures and power itself is defined by Kanter (in Laschinger, 1996) as the ability to get things done within the organisation.

Another perspective on the topic is offered by Conger and Kanungo (1988), who state that employee empowerment can be viewed as two different constructs: empowerment as a relational construct and as a motivational construct. The first pointing to the perceived power or control that an individual has over another (or an organisational unit over another unit). The latter referring to individuals when they perceive that they have power or when they believe they can adequately cope with events, situations, and/or the people they confront.

Elucidating a bit further on the concept of psychological empowerment, Spreitzer (1996), who studied social structural characteristics of psychological empowerment, states that the way an individual orientates oneself to their job, can be explained through impact, competence, meaning and choice. Jobs, however, need to be designed in such a way that they facilitate the previous. That they provide opportunity for people to orientate to their own role with a mindset of sensing to have impact, competence, meaningfulness, choice. Referring to working conditions and meaning that working conditions are the foundation of either providing for opportunity or forming constraints in mindsets and behaviours (Spreitzer, 1996).

So, for people to perceive that they actually have impact, find tasks meaningful and feel that they are competent and can make task related choices, there are requirements to be met from the way the organisation facilitates and supports people. As we noted previously, behaviours demonstrated in an organisation, are amongst others, a result of working conditions. And working conditions as an approach for this study is interesting, as it focuses on exploring the factors that can be examined within the organisational structures but also at individual job level.

2.3.2 Definition of structural employee empowerment

Proceeding on that last thought, the approach of structural employee empowerment is set as the focus in this study. And further examination in this field led to the elaboration on Kanter's theory (in Allen, Winston, Tatone, Crowson, 2018) in which the distribution of formal and informal power was defined by way of information sharing (formal, informal information), offering support to employees (feedback, guidance from supervisors and peers), resources (time, money, material) and offering opportunity (learning, opportunity for growth). According to Pradhan & Panda (2019), structural empowerment explores the power employees exercise in their jobs, and it concentrates on the structure of the organisation. They add that the autonomy and freedom provided to employees, through organisational structures, allows them to take decisions by themselves and take responsibility for their actions.

A further description of structural employee empowerment by Bateson (in Papasolomou, 2006) is that employees who feel empowered are "more customer-focused, interact with customers with more warmth and enthusiasm, have great source of ideas about how best to serve the customer, are much quicker in responding to customer needs, are more likely to respond positively to service failures, and

tend to feel better about their jobs and themselves” (Papasolomou, 2006, p. 200). Which shows the direct link between structural employee empowerment and customer orientation.

In a study conducted by Mei-Liang and Kuang-Jung (2010) within the financial services industry in Taiwan, the influence of organisational characteristics from the perspective of employees was taken to empirically test its effects on the behaviour of employees. In their study they explored the antecedent’s market-oriented culture (how within the organisation the end customer is the centre point of orientation), perceived organisational support (the perception of care and support from the organisation) and transformational leadership. The latter involves inspiring, encouraging and having personal consideration for employees. It involves accepting overall benefits and values of the organisation to act to the advantage of the organisation (Mei-Lung, Kuang-Jung, 2010). It would stimulate behaviour of employees, like showing enthusiasm whilst doing their job by delivering services, possessing professional knowledge relevant to the products and service, and correctly addressing customers by their names (Mei-Lung, Kuang-Jung, 2010).

The results of their study demonstrate that all three antecedents, a market-oriented culture, perceived organisational support and transformational leadership positively influence customer-oriented behaviour and through that service quality (Mei-Lung, Kuang-Jung, 2010). This shows how not only organisational characteristics, like placing the customer at the centre of attention, is an influencing factor but also support mechanisms and type of leadership style on engaging in customer orientation are. There are multiple factors in the work environment that play a role in stimulating customer orientation.

As a precise definition, the following is found to be most adequate: “structural empowerment describes how employees perceive the organization’s structures or working conditions as enabling, motivating aspects to perform their jobs (Allen *et al.*, 2018, p. 127). Meaning the way the organisation supports employees in allowing them to make job related decisions themselves, if they have access to strategic information, if information is shared between themselves and their manager, if they experience having the appropriate knowledge and skills, if they feel recognised and if they perceive opportunity to develop themselves.

2.3.3 Dimensions of structural employee empowerment

Reading through various studies and the dimensions of the concept of structural employee empowerment, we found that there is extensive overlap in dimensions. To map these to the organisation context and the core problem in the performance of HR, as described in section 1.2, we found the following six dimensions that emerged in literature most appropriate. These dimensions are “communication, access to information, knowledge and skills, decision-making authority, opportunity, and recognition” Zeglal *et al.* (2014); Laschinger (2012); Pradhan & Panda (2019); Hennig-Thurau (2004); Melhem (2004).

In relation to the theoretical part of this study, which aims to assess relations between the independent and dependent variable, hypotheses are articulated per each of the following described dimensions.

Communication

Communication refers to opening channels among employees and between employees and management to exchange information. It entails both upward and downward communication in any area relevant to their jobs. Open communication will help in serving the customer and meet their expectations. Not having accurate information about job content related items, makes it hardly possible for HR-employees to adequately service their customer. Next to the internal communication to obtain relevant information, communication will also support HR-employees in sharing this with their colleagues and discuss it to create a better understanding of how different topics are related. Which in turn will allow them to get a broader understanding of how to best serve their internal customer. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be articulated:

H1: The more open and accurate communication, the higher the level of customer-oriented behaviour.

Access to information

Access to information refers to organisational information about the organisation's vision, mission, strategy, and objectives. According to Spreitzer (1996), that kind of organisational information allows the employees to oversee the "big picture" so that they can develop frames of reference to understand their own jobs in the entirety of the organisation's activities. Employees need to understand the organisation's strategy in relation to the mission, the organisational objectives and how that relates to their own personal objectives. It will also allow for 'sense-making' in terms of meaning and purpose (Spreitzer, 1996). Without the link between the organisation's mission, strategy and extracted objectives from that, it will be difficult for HR-employees to relate their own work and objectives to those of the organisation. Also, in terms of understanding what the different organisation entities do, what kind of services and products they deliver and how that connects throughout the entire organisation. That will be better understood upon receiving the appropriate information. In that sense, we can articulate the following hypothesis:

H2: The higher the degree of access to information, the higher the level of customer-oriented behaviour.

Knowledge and skills

Knowledge and skills refers to having the knowledge of the job content and context which will enable employees to solve customers' problems and answer customers' questions promptly, saving time and effort for the customer, the manager and themselves. It also refers to having an adequate level of skills, through which employees will be able to implement appropriate actions, think about adequate approaches to customer questions, will be reliable and fast in their responses and will provide effective

solutions. It is also a key element in the HR business partner framework (Ulrich, 1997, p. 24) as that focuses on the differentiation in expertise and skills of different roles in HR. As such, the following hypothesis can be articulated:

H3: The more knowledge and skills, the higher the level of customer-oriented behaviour.

Decision-making authority

Decision-making authority refers to giving employees the opportunity to make their own job decisions with the proper actions, within their job context. In the event HR-employees can decide and action timely on handling an internal customer's request, within their job context, that internal customer will perceive being supported at that moment. As such the following hypothesis can be articulated:

H4: The more decision-making authority within the job context, the higher the level of customer-oriented behaviour.

Opportunity

Opportunity refers to offering the possibility to enhance employee's competencies and skills necessary to carry out additional responsibilities and activities with high performance. It also motivates employees intrinsically, diversifies their competences portfolio and increases their feelings of job security and career development which will have a positive effect on their behaviours. Learning opportunities can be focused on diverse areas within one's job, with the purpose to develop further in that job, but can also focus on areas outside the current job. It will increase customer orientation as they become the expert in their field which is in line with articulating unique HR skills as defined in the HR business partner framework (Ulrich, 1997). To that extent the following hypothesis can be articulated:

H5: The more development opportunities to enhance high performance, the higher the level of customer-orientated behaviour.

Recognition

Recognition refers to feedback systems in place to support employees in stimulating appropriate behaviours. In this sense it refers to providing feedback from managers about how employees do their work and recognize them for how that positively contributes to the overall HR objectives. It explains how their performance levels are seen by superiors and peers. It also involves feedback among employees themselves. Recognition is vital for feeling involved and stimulates engagement. Hence, the following hypothesis can be articulated:

H6: The more recognition, the higher the level of customer-oriented behaviour.

It is likely that some of the six dimensions have a stronger effect on the dependent variable than others, also in light of the complexity of the organisation. Another assumption is, that these dimensions are

somehow related. For example, if employees have opportunities to develop themselves, this might increase their level of knowledge and skills.

2.4 SOLL situation

In this section we will look at what it would look like in practice at NCIA if HR-employees are structurally empowered and as such are engaging in customer orientation. This refers to the SOLL situation, the desired state for both structural employee empowerment and for customer-oriented behaviour. However, before we describe the SOLL situation, first we will explain what difficulties arise in complex organisations regarding both variables. This is important to investigate as it will not change the described SOLL situation for both variables, but it will impact the extent to which the SOLL situation can be achieved.

2.4.1 Complex organisations

Organisations can be described as social systems (Achterbergh & Vriens, 2019). In this respect ‘social’ refers to the people that make up this system by way of interacting with each other. Without a group of people that interact, there is no organisation. Of impact on the interaction are the strategy and the goals of the organisation as they influence the way people interact. Also, the culture (behavioural patterns) is of influence on the interaction of the people. Equally impactful is the structure of the organisation. According to Achterbergh and Vriens (2019), an organisational structure (or distribution or division of work) can be described as ‘a network of related tasks’ (Achterbergh and Vriens, 2010, p. 231). They refer to tasks as transformations, as there is a begin state followed by a transformation process which leads to an end-state. These transformations can be decomposed into sub-transformations (*parts* and *aspects*). *Parts* refer to a part of a transformation (for example the process of doing the laundry and dividing this into clusters of work like sorting, washing, drying, ironing, and storing). *Aspects* refer to the transformation entirely but then one *aspect* of it (for example doing the laundry only for trousers in terms of sorting, washing, drying, ironing, and storing).

In an organisation, each task is made-up of a grouping of these sub-transformations which is assigned to an organisational unit (individual, team, department). Tasks consist of an operational element (performing the work) and a regulatory element (making decisions to deal with disturbances to facilitate the operation). The difficulty in the design of the organisation evolves around how to assign tasks and to connect them into a network of tasks in such a way that disturbances are minimised, and the network of tasks consists of sufficient regulatory authority to deal with disturbances. In complex organisations transformations are decomposed simultaneously into many *parts* and *aspects* and by that creating many dependency relations between the tasks. Also, regulatory tasks are separated from operational tasks which leads to strong hierarchies, multiple management layers. This implies more dependencies and the complexification of the entire coordination of the web of diverse tasks. The result is that different organisational units are dependent on each other to take charge of realising a task begin-to-end. The consequence is a lack of overview over all work activities and results. Also, errors occur, and people

will not be able to solve these errors because for that they are dependent on others. They do not have the overview, nor do they have the regulatory authority to solve problems or disturbances. This typically happens in bureaucratic organisations where tasks (transformations) are decomposed into many *parts* and *aspects*. Not only the operational element of tasks (performing the activities) but also the regulatory elements (making decisions to solve issues) are decomposed into *parts* and *aspects*. Bureaucratic organisations are therefore complex because their structure is made complex (Achterbergh and Vriens, 2010).

Next to that, following Achterbergh and Vriens (2010), NCIA is a ‘functionally designed’ organisation which means that it is organised by grouping all specialist functions into specific functional areas for the purpose of a specific service or product. These specific specialisms are located in one place within the organisation. This also applies to the enabling functions like HR, Finance, Legal. Functional areas are not integrated in other parts of the organisation, they operate on their own and situationally connect with other units when a task requires this. The advantage of this kind of structure is that all specific knowledge and expertise is grouped together which allows for knowledge sharing and learning from each other but similarly this causes many dependency relations between diverse organisational units. Closer cooperation, clear communication is essential for example between the HR function and other organisational departments to deliver services adequately. This functionally designed structure is, albeit the advantages, a complicating element when looking at what is needed to create more customer-oriented behaviour.

2.4.2 Norm structural employee empowerment (SOLL)

From a theoretical perspective the norms will be described in this section. To specify the norms for structural employee empowerment and customer orientation, this study makes use of respectively the dimensions defined by Zeglal *et al.*, (2014) and Donovan (2004) as have been explained in sections 2.2.3 and 2.3.3.

In the desired state, when there would be high levels of structural empowerment of HR-employees, there would be a communication flow to enable all colleagues to do their work. Everyone within HR would be kept pro-actively updated by their manager with relevant information and vice versa they would share relevant information with their manager. They would use information in discussions among themselves to sharpen their ideas of how to better deliver their services. There would also be a high degree of access to strategic, relevant information for all employees to oversee how their work fits in the organisation’s operations. Information of the organisation’s objectives, strategy, and updates to these would be commonly accessible to all. HR-employees would have all relevant information and would trust being kept up to date continuously. Also, they would feel empowered to take decisions themselves within the scope of their job. They would be able to make decisions themselves and being held responsible for their actions. Also, HR-employees would have the required levels of knowledge and would have the skills needed to perform their jobs and deliver adequate and timely services to the

internal customer. Further to that they would have sufficient learning opportunities to become better at their job and at some point demonstrate excellent performance levels, enabling them to offer fast and effective solutions and pro-active offering of advice where needed. This would also include opportunities to explore and grow in areas outside their current job remit to enhance development of a diverse set of knowledge, skills, and competences. And ultimately, they would be recognised for their performance by both colleagues and their managers which would stimulate appropriate behaviours. This would then motivate them in their job and that would become a positive cycle in which motivation leads to outstanding performance and outstanding performance would be recognised and lead to motivation etc. As openness would arise in which all members of the HR function would provide each other feedback and in their turn be receptive to receiving feedback as well, the learning curve would steepen as all would integrate it in their performance. Because of the aforementioned, the entire HR population would be equipped through information, communication, having the knowledge and skills, training, decision-making authority, and recognition to provide services in an outstanding manner to the internal customer.

2.4.3 Norm customer-oriented behaviour (SOLL)

In the desired state, the HR function would deliver services in such a way that the internal customers would perceive getting genuine individual attention and perceive that their requests are being taken care of. They would perceive that their needs are understood and responded to in a professional manner showing required levels of expertise. They would further perceive an element of personal relationship enriching the encounters they have, and they would perceive that the services they require are delivered adequately and timely. In the event services are not delivered in time, they would be kept up to date about the state and progression of their request or alternative solutions would be offered. This would give them the confidence their requests are being looked after in a professional way. They would perceive the service delivery to the extent they would be highly satisfied with the services provided and with the service experience.

In addition to the above, as presented in the following table 1, the described desired levels of the dimensions will be translated into numerical values to be able to measure the actual state of both variables. A Likert scale of 1-5 will be used. The scores 1 and 2 will be considered low values. Score 3 will be considered neutral and scores 4 and 5 will be considered high values. If the results show that on average values are above 4, the norm value 'good' has been reached. Reaching this norm value means achieving the desired state as described previously.

	Variable	Dimensions	Norm
Dependent	Customer-oriented behaviour	Need to care for the customer Need to understand the customer's needs Need for personal relationship Need to deliver the service required Satisfaction	Score levels: 1-2 = largely insufficient > 2-3 = insufficient > 3-4 = sufficient > 4-5 = good
Independent	Structural employee empowerment	Communication Access to information Knowledge and skills Decision-making authority Opportunity Recognition	Score levels: 1-2 = largely insufficient > 2-3 = insufficient > 3-4 = sufficient > 4-5 = good

Table 1. Overview of the variables, their dimensions, and the desired state by means of a norm

Limitations to structural employee empowerment and customer orientation in complex organisations

Combining the previously described characteristics of complex organisations and the norms for both variables, a paradox can be seen between those. To reiterate the nature of complex organisations, the following definition of bureaucracy by Robins (in Papasolomou, 1996, p. 560) is also applicable to NCIA: “A structure with highly routine operating tasks achieved through specialisation, very formalised rules and regulations, tasks that are grouped into functional departments, centralised authority, narrow spans of control, and decision making that follows the chain of command.” This will influence the limitations in empowering HR-employees at NCIA. Especially this is likely to occur in the area of decision-making authority and opportunity. Jobs are focused on small sub-tasks, there is a strong hierarchy and the existing numerous dependency relationships create difficulties for people to have overview and provide ‘on the spot’ solutions. Providing flexibility in authority delegation will be limited due to the strong hierarchy and the narrow scope of jobs. Further to that, in the chain of command, approval processes are cumbersome and difficult to oversee. As a consequence, delays occur and interventions are difficult to initiate, also because of a lack of ownership in the sense of where to go. Errors are likely to occur when requests are handled through various teams or individuals who work in so called ‘silo’s’ and do not feel responsible or accountable for the result. Where it regards

opportunities for further personal development, rotation between jobs to experience other type of tasks or picking up projects or activities within and outside their direct job remit, might not be possible due to inflexible processes in this regard. This will limit employee’s development to high performance and upskilling themselves in a broader area outside their own job, which decreases their ability to anticipate and approach customer requests in a solution-oriented way. Aforementioned limitations in structural employee empowerment, will affect the extent of engaging in customer orientation as this latter one is characterised by adequately identifying, evaluating, understanding and timely meeting customer needs.

2.5 Definite conceptual model

Based on the previous section’s descriptions of the variables, their dimensions and their anticipated relations, the definite conceptual model can now be presented. Based on this model, the IST and SOLL of HR-employees as regards structural empowerment, will be reviewed.

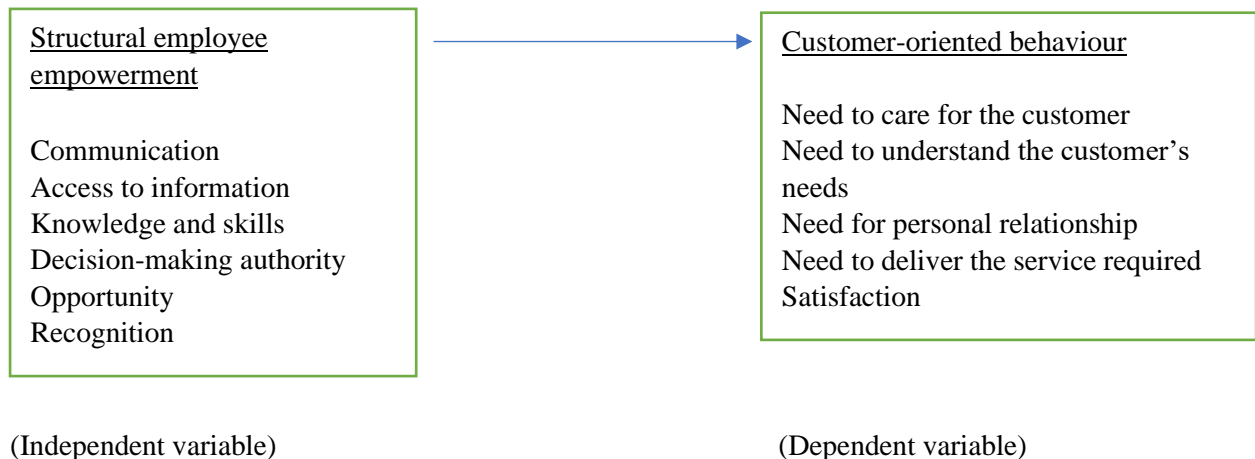


Figure 3. Definite conceptual model

Chapter 3. Methodology

In the previous chapter, literature has been reviewed and related to that the definite conceptual model has been presented which presupposes a positive influence of structural employee empowerment on customer orientation within HR at NCIA. Regarding structural employee empowerment, the dimensions “communication, information sharing, knowledge and skills, decision making authority, opportunity and recognition” are in scope of this study. This chapter provides insight in how the empirical questions stated in chapter 1 will be answered, by explaining the methods used to conduct the study. First the empirical questions will be addressed, followed by a description of the research strategy and how the data is obtained. Subsequently it is explained how the questionnaires are developed and how the data will be analysed. In the last section will be explained how relations between the variables will be assessed, in relation to the theoretical part of this study.

In chapter 1 the empirical questions have been stated. These are the following:

- What is the actual state regarding structural employee empowerment of HR-employees, from their own perspective (IST) at NCIA?
- To what extent does HR-management at NCIA currently perceive that they facilitate structural employee empowerment of HR-employees?
- What is the perspective of HR itself about their own customer orientation?
- What is the perspective of the internal customer about customer orientation of HR?

3.1 Research strategy

To provide answers to the empirical questions, a practice-oriented diagnostic gap analysis study will be conducted. Next to the gap analysis, the study also captures perceptions between different groups about the variables. Besides the practice-oriented part of the study, there is also a theory-oriented question to be answered about the specific relation between the dimensions of both variables. Therefore, a quantitative study is considered most appropriate. With the obtained data it will be possible to assess the gap analysis, it will be possible to test differences in perceptions of the groups and it will be possible to assess the relation between the variables. To do so, three different surveys will be conducted to obtain data from three groups of respondents. A distinction is made between HR-employees and HR-managers and a third group of respondents (non-HR) consists of the internal customer.

The surveys are conducted by using an online survey tool, SurveyMonkey, as this works fast in collecting responses as opposed to hard copy questionnaires. Especially as this is more practical in this large organisation and taking into account that people are located in different countries. It is also a common way in the organisation to retrieve information about various topics, which means people are familiar with this way of working, albeit there is a risk of survey ‘fatigue’ that needs to be considered.

3.2 Obtaining data

Three samples are needed to obtain the required data, one for HR-employees, one for HR-managers and one for the internal customer. To measure the HR-employee's (41) perception, data is collected through a questionnaire, and all of them are asked what they think of their own customer orientation and how they perceive their own level of structural employee empowerment.

To measure the HR-manager's (8) perception, all of them are asked through a separate questionnaire what they think of their own customer orientation and how they think they facilitate HR-employee's empowerment.

It is anticipated not to achieve a 100% response rate, people need to voluntarily take part in the survey and cannot be forced, only gently 'nudged'. Based on the control variables, it will be possible to assess if certain teams within the HR function are not or poorly represented in the responses which then needs to be taken into account during the analysing of the data.

To measure the internal customer's perception, the aim is only to obtain their opinion in this respect. This concerns merely measuring what they think in general of HR's level of customer orientation, it does not apply to themselves. Of course, the aim is to get as many responses as possible, but a specified representation or percentage of respondents is not needed for this purpose.

3.2.1 Three questionnaires

Focusing on the conceptual model, literature about customer-oriented behaviour and structural employee empowerment has been reviewed to find commonly cited dimensions to ensure that all aspects of the variables are represented. All dimensions have been verified with the Head of HR and another senior HR-manager to explore if these cover the areas of the variables as complete as possible, referring to the omitted variable bias.

In the next step, to be able to measure all dimensions, validated scales adapted from existing research were selected from the following authors: Parasuraman (1991), Melhem (2004), Spreitzer (1996), Hennig- Thureau (2004), Donovan (2004), Donovan and Hocutt (2001). Reliability has been reviewed for Cronbach's alpha of the used scales. The scale for customer orientation consists of five dimensions: care for the customer (4 items), understanding needs (4 items), enjoy connecting (2 items), deliver services (4 items), satisfaction (4 items). The scale for structural employee empowerment consists of six dimensions: communication (4 items), access to information (4 items), knowledge and skills (4 items), decision-making authority (4 items), opportunity (3 items) and recognition (3 items).

To make it possible to measure the selected items, a 5-point scale is used ranging responses from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

As information is needed from three different groups, three different questionnaires have been developed each ending with two comment boxes. These boxes allowed each respondent to input any

idea about how they might be better supported in fulfilling their role and to provide comments about the questionnaire itself.

HR-employee's questionnaire

The HR-employee's questionnaire starts with a brief introduction and instruction about the set-up of the questionnaire and then falls into 2 parts: the first part asks about the dependent variable customer orientation and the second part asks about how they perceive their own level of structural employee empowerment.

To avoid the risk of not including specific factors that might, albeit indirectly, influence the results, control variables are added for the HR-employee questionnaire. It can be anticipated that tenure within HR as well as age, gender and type of contract influence the results. Therefore, these are added as control variables in the questionnaire for the HR-employees.

HR-manager's questionnaire

The HR-manager's questionnaire starts with a brief introduction and instruction about the set-up of the questionnaire and then falls into 2 parts: the first part asks about the dependent variable customer orientation and the second part asks about how they perceive their facilitation of empowerment of HR-employees. Questions about customer orientation are similar to the questions in the HR-employee questionnaire to be able to combine the data in a later stage. Questions about structural employee empowerment are mirrored to those for the HR-employees to compare the data in a later stage.

For the HR-managers questionnaire no control variables are added as it would not allow for anonymity in such a small group of respondents.

Internal customer questionnaire

The questionnaire for the internal customer starts with a brief introduction and explanation and then asks about HR's level of customer orientation through the five dimensions. These are generically articulated questions, not relating to any specific HR individual or topic. Questions are mirrored to those of the HR questionnaires to be able to compare data in a later stage.

3.3 Pre-empting measurement errors

Prior to launching the questionnaires, to pre-empt any measurement errors in the three questionnaires, the following has been actioned. Upon finalising the questionnaires, all items have been checked for clear articulation (is it clear what is being asked) and if each question has a logical link to the supposed dimension (face validity). Both inside the HR team as well as an external reviewer have been asked to go through the questions. To avoid that respondents 'automatically' respond to all questions in the same way (common method bias) the questions are articulated in a brief, concise way. Questionnaires are clear, oversee-able, to-the-point and not taking more time per respondent than 15 minutes to complete. In the questionnaires for HR, it starts first with the dependent variable followed by the independent

variable to avoid respondents answering the dependent variable by way of scores per the independent variable (Doorewaard & Tjemkes, 2019).

The questionnaires were tested in the SurveyMonkey tool to check how it worked, looked, if all was clear and what time it took to complete them. Socially desirable responding was considered a realistic possibility. Questions were therefore not too much focused on relationships between manager and employee as people tend to answer those more positively. Also, the message emphasized that the data would be treated in confidence, all questionnaires were conducted with the guarantee of anonymity for all respondents to feel safe to answer honestly to all questions.

To structure and allow for later checking, a codebook has been created that shows all items and their codes. It is a scheme that shows the variable, its dimensions, and the translation into items/questions and finally a unique code per item/question.

To minimise non-response, in the communication towards HR, time has been taken in advance to give a heads-up to all of them in various meetings related to the HR transformation project, explaining that this survey would be launched to support the transformation. And that their participation would be vital. Thorough attention was given to the content and tone of voice of the message. The survey was positioned as a supportive element to the HR transformation. And that it would not take too much of their time, to a maximum of 15 minutes to encourage them to participate. Invitations for taking the questionnaires for HR were sent by email, two separate ones, and were open for 2.5 weeks. HR has been reminded three times per e-mail in that period, including one reminder from the Head of HR.

To prevent any coverage errors, the recipients of the questionnaires were selected manually, to avoid any outsider taking the survey for HR.

As regards the survey for the internal customer, an article was placed on the intranet under 'corporate news'. After three days it was included in the weekly newsletter which was sent per email to the entire organisation. The article asked them to tell HR how they think HR is doing, now one year after the launch of the HR transformation (which was communicated one year ago as a necessary change to better serve them as internal customer). The request to participate in the survey was promoted as a brief action to their own benefit as well as it would help HR in improving in this area, asking not more than 10 minutes of their time to participate. It was also verbally promoted in senior management meetings to provide better visibility. Here it was also explained how anonymity would be guaranteed, that there would be no consequences for either the respondent nor the HR teams and how data would be used.

3.4 Data analysis

The three datasets will be created in excel and the items in the datasets will be matched to the codes, using the codebook.

To assess the raw data in the three datasets against errors in input in the responses (although generated by the tool), descriptive statistics will be applied. The mean and standard deviation will be calculated

for each item. The ‘centre measures’ will also provide a preview over how respondents think about topics and whether there seems to be similar thinking or big differences in the way they responded (Doorewaard and Tjemkes, 2019). Ideally all data shows a ‘normal distribution’ to perform following statistical techniques optimally (Doorewaard & Tjemkes, 2019) so this will be calculated as well. More precisely assessing the kurtosis and skewness is part of that as it will explain how data are distributed. Missing values in the responses will be checked in each of the three datasets. Should there be relatively many missing responses per specific respondent, those can be removed. Or should this meet the requirements, when it occurs that a single item has been left open by a respondent, the average of all other responses for that item can be used for the missing answer as that will not distort the overall outcome.

The control variables in the questionnaire for HR-employees will be re-coded to numerical values to include those in the analysis. The answers from the two open comment boxes in each of the questionnaires will first be separately analysed to see if coding is needed.

Response rates will be checked for the two HR respondent groups to determine if that provides sufficient data to proceed. As this applies to the entire HR group, sufficient responses are needed to draw conclusions that can be applied to the entire population, referring to internal validity. External validity does not apply as conclusions will not be drawn to apply to other groups outside HR.

3.4.1 Validity and reliability of the scales

Validity refers to the degree it measures what is supposed to be measured (Doorewaard & Tjemkes, 2019). To test this, factor analysis will be used to determine cohesion between the items of each scale, also referred to as construct validity (Doorewaard & Tjemkes, 2019). This will be done through principal components analysis (PCA) as that will help in preparing for the hypothesis testing and assessment of relations. Prior to PCA, data need to be checked for Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) to assess if PCA testing can proceed. Any decision following deviations showing in tests, will be justified in chapter 4. PCA will test the cohesion among items per scale (a factor) but also distinctions between the scales. Also referred to as convergent validity (items belonging together for each intended factor) and discriminant validity (distinction between factors, whilst grouping items per factor).

To assess how ‘free of random error’ the scales are (Pallant, 2001), for each scale it will be checked if the items naturally belong together in that scale and therefore measure the same dimension. Referring to internal consistency to be measured through the coefficient Cronbach’s alpha. A minimum of 0.7 is required.

3.4.2 Gap analysis

The gap analysis in this study focuses on the desired state (SOLL) and actual state (IST) of structural employee empowerment of HR-employees. This will be done by comparing the norm for structural employee empowerment, for each of the six dimensions, against the actual state. The actual state will

be measured through the mean of each dimension and the difference will be manually determined by comparing norms against actual means.

Comparing opinions of groups

Other gaps to explore are those of comparing opinions of groups. To test for significant differences between HR-managers and HR-employees about their perception of structural employee empowerment, we will make use of the independent samples t-test technique. Significant refers to the chance of the results not being correctly stated (Doorewaard & Tjemkes, 2019). That chance should be an exceedingly small chance, in this study the chance should not exceed 5% ($p \leq 0.05$). Testing will be done by comparing the mean of both groups with each other. This same technique will be used to test for significant differences between HR and the internal customer about HR's customer orientation.

3.4.3 Hypothesis testing and correlations

Upon finalising the analyses of the practice-oriented part in the study as explained in the previous section, the analysing of the relation between both variables will be done in regard to the theoretical part of this study. First an assessment will be conducted at the level of all dimensions of structural employee empowerment against one generic concept of customer-oriented behaviour, per the articulated hypotheses in chapter 2. This to establish if there are effects and to what extent they differ per dimension. Following that, the next step will be made to take it one level deeper, to assess the relations between the individual dimensions of both variables.

To test the relation between the variables, the HR-employee dataset will be used. The hypotheses will be tested through standard multiple regression analysis. The multiple regression analysis allows for analysing which dimensions of structural employee empowerment have the most influence on customer-oriented behaviour. And to what extent these explain the variance (R^2) in customer orientation. As a next step, the individual relations will be assessed for Pearson's correlations, to assess relations and strengths in relations between each of the dimensions of structural employee empowerment and each of the dimensions of customer-oriented behaviour.

3.5 Research ethics

All collected and used data related to this study will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Rough data will not be shared with any organisational member. The end results, the recommendations, will only be shared with the Head of HR at NCIA. And the end results will be packaged in such a way, only at an aggregated level, that it can not be traced to an individual or a specific team. None of the data will be used for any other purpose than for this study nor can it have any negative impact on individuals in the organisation. Only the researcher will receive it and as such have insight in the rough data. Any follow-up communication related to the conclusions and recommendations, will be part of the current HR transformation project and not part of this study. Regarding the results derived from the data from the internal customer, a high-level outcome will be published on the portal. This will also be packaged under the HR transformation communication.

Chapter 4. Results and Analysis

In this chapter, the results based on the analysed data will be presented. These results aim to answer the empirical questions stated in chapter 1. The structure of this chapter follows first a description of how all data is assessed for quality and how the measurement scales are assessed for validity and reliability. Subsequently, the actual results of the analyses will be presented starting with all practice-oriented results. First, the results of the assessed gap analysis about the IST and SOLL of HR-employee's structural employee empowerment will be presented. Followed with a presentation of the results of the difference in perception between HR-employees and HR-managers about structural employee empowerment (how the first group perceives being empowered, how the second group perceives facilitating empowerment). Subsequently, the results of the assessment of the difference in perception between HR and the internal customer about HR's customer orientation is presented. This part ends with information about the open comments provided by the respondents in the questionnaires.

In the last part of this chapter, regarding the theoretical part of this study, the results of the assessed relations between the variables structural employee empowerment and customer-oriented behaviour are presented through standard multiple regression. Followed by the results of the assessed relations between the sets of individual dimensions of both variables.

4.1 Quality of the data

The three datasets were generated through the online tool SurveyMonkey into an excel file. Using the codebooks as explained in the previous chapter, all items were coded similarly in the datasets. For the HR-employee dataset, the control variables were coded as well as they contained categorical variables (nominal and ordinal values).

Screening for any errors and cleaning of data

All variables in the three questionnaires, excluding the control variables in the HR-employee dataset, have been assessed for frequency (minimum and maximum values) to check against outstanding values. Also, the data of the non-control variables have been checked against the mean, standard deviation, and missing values to further assess any outstanding issues.

4.1.1 Missing values

The HR-employee's dataset contained in total input from 34 questionnaires, of which nine single missing values spread across all items were missing. In these cases, there was a maximum of two missing values per item overall in the entire dataset, so no difficulties were met regarding single items.

Where it occurred, the concerned questionnaires held one missing value in total, with one exception where there were two missing values in a questionnaire. In this latter case, these missing values occurred in two different dimensions.

Upon the check against missing values, there were no questionnaires deleted from the dataset, considering the requirements not to exceed 10% of missing values per item and not to exceed 10% of missing values per questionnaire (Doorewaard & Tjemkes, 2019).

Missing values have been replaced in all cases by the average of other respondents' answers to that specific item, rounded to a score of '4' in all cases as the average was between 4- 4.5. This would not distort the overall picture. Also, the score '4' was checked against the average of scores in that specific dimension to assess any deviation, which was not the case.

One questionnaire was complete except for three missing control variables. Two could be filled in with score 1, which represents 'I prefer not to share this'. The last one, about contract type was left open to exclude this item in the analysis.

The HR-management dataset contained input from six questionnaires and revealed zero missing values.

The internal customer dataset contained input from 246 questionnaires of which 17 questionnaires were extracted with missing two or more values. These were deleted in their entirety from the dataset (listwise deletion), which left a total of 229 questionnaires. Following this, there were 21 single missing values remaining, with a maximum of one missing value per questionnaire, and a maximum of four missing values per item overall in the entire dataset. These missing values were replaced with the average of other respondents' answers to that item, leading for all to a score '3' as the range was between 2.8-3.4 for those.

4.1.2 Assessing Normality

The three datasets have been assessed for distribution of scores for each item. This has been done through the norm values for kurtosis and skewness $-1 < +1$ (a reasonable normal distribution). Kurtosis referring to how steep or flat the distribution of scores is, whether scores are spread widely or not. Skewness referring to a distribution that is more towards the left or to the right, whether scores tend to respectively favourable answers or less favourable answers.

The HR-employee dataset meets this requirement for both norm values for 19 out of the 40 items. For 33 out of the 40 items, the norm value for skewness is met, for 23 out of 40 items the norm value for kurtosis is met. The HR-management dataset shows that 12 out of the 40 items meet the requirements for both the value norms for kurtosis and skewness. For 30 out of 40 items the norm value is met for skewness, 12 out of 40 items meet the value norm for kurtosis. Both datasets reveal more issues with kurtosis than with skewness. Revealing more difficulty with spreading widely than with tendencies to the left or right. The internal customer dataset meets the requirements for all 18 items for both skewness and kurtosis, demonstrating a normal distribution of the data.

In chapter 5 it will be discussed to what extent in the further analysis it matters that not for all items the norm values have been met. So, to what extent the reliability or validity of the results is decreased.

4.1.3 Response and non-response analysis

All questionnaires have been open for two weeks. To both HR-employees and HR-managers reminders have been sent by email for three times, including a message from the Head of HR. The questionnaire for the internal customer was also open for two weeks on the intranet. To partake in the survey, required a number of actions ('clicks') from people. From opening the article, to opening the link to the questionnaire and then actually taking and finalising the survey. The results from that survey will only be used to analyse the opinion of the respondents about how they perceive working with members of the HR function. The data will not be used to conclude anything *about* the respondents themselves. As such, a total of 246 responses, of which 229 are used, is considered sufficient for this study.

In the following table 2, an overview is provided including the control variables of HR-employee responses, to determine the representation of responses for the entire group. Overall, the response rate of the HR-employees is 82.9%, of HR-management it is 75% and the response rate of the internal customer is 8.3%. For all three respondent groups, sufficient responses have been collected to further work on analyses. The control variables reveal that the largest group of respondents has been working in HR between 0-3 years (in total 47.1%) and the largest group of respondents is between 41-50 years old.

Group	Description	Population	Sent	Received	Representation (%)	Response rate
HR-employees	Gender	41	41	34		82.9 %
	Not shared			4		
	Female	25	25	20	80.0 %	
	Male	16	16	10	62.5 %	
HR-employees	Type of Contract	41	41	33		82.9 %
	Not shared			1		
	Civilian employees	19	19	16	84.2 %	
	Military employees	3	3	3	100.0 %	
	Contractors	19	19	14	73.7 %	
HR-employees	Tenure			34		
	0-3 years			16	47.1 %	
	4-7 years			9	26.5 %	
	8-11 years			5	14.7 %	
	12-15 years			2	5.9 %	
	>16 years			2	5.9 %	
HR-employees	Age			34		
	Not shared			1	2.9 %	
	20-30 years			2	5.9 %	
	31-40 years			8	23.5 %	

	41-50 years			16	47.1 %	
	>51 years			7	20.6 %	
HR-managers	All	8	8	6		75 %
Internal customer		About 3.000 organisation members	Published on the portal	246 (of which 229 are used)		8.3 %

Table 2. Details samples

4.2 Quality of the measurement scales

To explore the underlying relationship among the dimensions of the variables, a principal component analysis (PCA) is performed for the HR-employee and internal customer dataset, to assess convergent validity and discriminant validity of the scales. For the HR-management dataset, this was not possible due to the fact that this sample was too small.

To measure reliability of each scale, which refers to the internal consistency as to the degree that all items that make up the scale are linked together (Pallant, 2019), they are assessed against the Cronbach alpha coefficient. The norm for the coefficient is a minimum of 0.70. This assessment has been performed separately for the three datasets (see table 5,6,7 for the outcomes of the assessments).

4.2.1 HR-employee dataset validity and reliability

To explore if similar dimensions are distinguished within each of the variables, as theoretically defined in the conceptual model, PCA has been applied for both the customer-oriented behaviour scale and the structural employee empowerment scale. Ideally, there are five dimensions distinguished for customer-oriented behaviour and six dimensions for structural employee empowerment, with the appropriate items grouped together per dimension. That would reveal that items belong together in that dimension (convergent validity) and in parallel that they diverge from the other dimensions (discriminant validity). As is projected in the following table 3, PCA reveals that there are five components extracted with an eigen value >1 for customer-oriented behaviour. Although it reveals extracting five components, however, the appropriate items are not accurately grouped per dimension. Also, the majority of items do not meet the criterium for convergent validity (loading on one component with values < -0.7 or >0.7) and instead load low on multiple components.

Component Matrix ^a					
	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
ND4	.861				
ND1	.738	-.331			
SAT3	.725		-.364		
ND3	.723				
SAT1	.706				.366
NU2	.669		.322		
SAT4	.655		-.343		
NU4	.617	.520			.351
SAT2	.610	-.303	-.395	-.353	
NC2	.596	-.327	.317	.445	
NPR2	.583	.467	-.400	.385	
NC4	.580		.354		-.490
NC1	.573		.407	.511	
NU1	.565	.531			
NU3	.528				-.504
NPR1	.531	.575	-.337		
NC3	.387	.300	.543	-.444	
ND2	.506	-.402		.300	.514

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
a. 5 components extracted.

Table 3. Principal Component Analysis for the customer-oriented behaviour scale, HR-employee dataset, N=34

Regarding the scale for structural employee empowerment, the following table 4 projects that six components are extracted with an eigen value >1. However, also here the items are not grouped per one appropriate dimension, except for ‘Recognition’, and reveal issues with many items loading low on multiple components. Hence, convergent validity cannot be confirmed for this scale.

Component Matrix ^a						
	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
REC3	.793				-.301	
REC2	.785				-.366	
DMA1	.754					
OPP2	.742			.417		.339
REC1	.724					
OPP3	.682					.323
COM3	.679	-.311				-.380
OPP1	.667	-.300		.339		.347
COM4	.602		-.484	-.303	.309	
COM1	.583		.409		.312	
KS1		.856				
KS2		.842		.328		
DMA3		.610	-.414			.321
DMA4	.457	.597		-.371		
KS4	.346	.487	-.440			
AI4		.482			-.391	
AI3	.485		.767			
AI2	.550		.697			
AI1	.359		.569		.549	
KS3		.442	.467	.304		
DMA2	.418	.487		-.503		
COM2	.416		.316	.475		-.312

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
a. 6 components extracted.

Table 4. Principal Component Analysis for the structural employee empowerment scale, HR-employee dataset, N=34

PCA while using Varimax rotation for both scales together, reveals that when extracting two components, only 39.99% of total variance can be explained (of which 23.2 % by the first factor on

which all items of customer-oriented behaviour load, albeit half of the items not with high loadings). Five components need to be extracted to reach a total variance explained of 60%, the minimum required. Discriminant validity cannot be confirmed.

Although PCA does not confirm the dimensions as defined in the conceptual model, on theoretical grounds it is decided to continue with these dimensions per each of the variable.

The problems with validity might well be caused by the smallness of the size sample. In chapter 5 this will be taken into consideration whilst presenting conclusions.

As regards the reliability of the scales, the internal consistency, high values in the following table 5 show that internal consistency is good for both scales.

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach alpha
Customer oriented-behaviour	18	0.904
Structural employee empowerment	22	0.862

Table 5. Reliability HR-employee dataset, N=34

4.2.2 HR-manager dataset validity and reliability

This dataset is too small for any statistical assessment for validity so only the reliability scores are presented in the following table 6, revealing that reliability is good for both scales, especially for the customer-oriented behaviour scale.

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach alpha
Customer oriented-behaviour	18	0.898
Structural employee empowerment	22	0.792

Table 6. Reliability HR-manager dataset, N=6

4.2.3 Internal customer dataset validity and reliability

Regarding this dataset, PCA reveals that there is one component extracted with all items loading high. Revealing that PCA does not confirm the five dimensions of the variable customer-oriented behaviour as defined in the conceptual model.

Regarding the reliability of the scale, as presented in the following table 7, this can be confirmed as the coefficient reveals a high value of 0.981.

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach alpha
Customer oriented-behaviour	18	0.981

Table 7. Reliability internal customer dataset, N=229

4.2.4 Mean and standard deviation of scales per dataset

The following table 8 presents the data about how HR-employees perceive their own customer orientation and how they think about their own level of structural empowerment. This dataset reveals a positive tendency in the responses (to the right of the middle score 3), especially in the area of customer orientation. Regarding the empowerment part, there appears a split between the first 3 scales with higher means and the last 3 scales that reveal relative lower means; ‘decision making authority’, ‘opportunity’ and ‘recognition’.

Variable	Dimension	Scale mean	Standard deviation
Customer oriented behaviour	Need to care for the customer	4.625	.349
	Need to understand the customer’s needs	4.331	.383
	Need for personal relationship	4.162	.736
	Need to deliver the service required	4.404	.537
	Satisfaction	4.412	.518
Structural employee empowerment	Communication	4.382	.395
	Access to information	4.132	.489
	Knowledge and skills	4.198	.507
	Decision making authority	3.618	.485
	Opportunities	3.294	.898
	Recognition	3.882	.710

Table 8. Mean and standard deviation HR-employee dataset, N=34

The following table 9 presents the data about how HR-managers perceive their own customer orientation and how they think they facilitate structural employee empowerment of HR-employees. Overall, the responses reveal a positive tendency, to the right of the middle score 3. Especially scores in the first part of customer orientation show high means. Confirming that HR-managers believe their customer orientation to be strong.

Variable	Dimension	Scale mean	Standard deviation
Customer oriented behaviour	Need to care for the customer	4.417	.645
	Need to understand the customer’s needs	4.250	.524
	Need for personal relationship	4.333	.753
	Need to deliver the service required	4.250	.742
	Satisfaction	3.917	.875

Structural employee empowerment	Communication	4.833	.303
	Access to information	4.542	.431
	Knowledge and skills	2.875	.877
	Decision making authority	3.625	.467
	Opportunities	3.833	.658
	Recognition	4.500	.182

Table 9. Mean and standard deviation HR-manager dataset, N=6

In the area of structural employee empowerment, also they show confidence by high scores on communication, access to information for employees and recognition to employees. Exception is the scale ‘knowledge and skills’ with a deviating score at a relatively low level. This scale measures what HR-managers think of the level of knowledge and skills HR-employees have to perform their job. As regards ‘decision-making authority’ and ‘opportunity’, whether they believe employees have sufficient room to make their own job-related decisions and have sufficient opportunities to acquire new skills, scores are relatively lower just below 4.

The following table 10 presents the data that tell us about how the internal customer perceives customer orientation from all HR members that they have contact with. The overall responses reveal a less favourable tendency in responses as compared to the responses of HR themselves, with means more around the middle value around 3 and for the scale ‘need for personal relationship’ an even more distinct mean with a score to the left (below 3).

Variable	Dimension	Scale mean	Standard deviation
Customer oriented behaviour	Total Need to Care	3.374	.929
	Total Need to Understand	3.099	.966
	Total Need Personal relationship	2.865	1.033
	Total Need to deliver	3.291	.999
	Satisfaction	3.315	1.017

Table 10. Mean and standard deviation internal customer dataset, N=229

In Annex F, all SPSS output related to the validity and reliability of the scales per dataset is provided.

4.3 Gap analysis and different perceptions

We will now move forward to the gap analysis of structural employee empowerment of HR-employees, followed with measuring the difference in perceptions of the respondent groups about the variables.

Gap analysis actual versus desired state of structural employee empowerment of HR-employees

The scores revealed in the following table 11 tell us about how HR-employees perceive their own level of structural employee empowerment. These scores are compared against the norm. In chapter 2 the norms were set as average scores between 1-2 are considered largely insufficient, average scores between > 2-3 are considered insufficient, average scores between > 3-4 are considered sufficient and average scores between > 4-5 are considered good. Meeting the desired state means an average score at the ‘good’ level.

Dimensions	Mean	Norm value
Communication	4.314	Good
Access to information	4.312	Good
Knowledge and skills	4.198	Good
Decision-making authority	3.618	Sufficient
Opportunity	3.293	Sufficient
Recognition	3.883	Sufficient

Table 11. Gap analysis HR-employees structural employee empowerment. HR-employee dataset, N=34

Observing the scores, HR-employees scored all structural employee empowerment dimensions on average at the levels sufficient or good (> 3-4 or > 4-5). ‘Communication’, ‘access to information’, ‘knowledge and skills’ are scored in the range > 4-5, albeit they score closer to 4 than to 5, meaning that there is still room for improvement to reach the higher end of this range (closer to 5). Telling us that overall, HR-employees perceive open and accurate communication among themselves and their managers to a high extent which allows them to receive relevant information. They perceive to a high extent having access to information about the strategy and goals of the organisation and HR, so that they understand the ‘big picture’ and can relate to that in their jobs. And they are really confident about having acquired the appropriate skills and knowledge to perform their jobs.

‘Opportunity’ is scored lowest, with quite a distance to the ‘good’ category, in comparison to the other dimensions. Meaning that HR-employees experience to a lesser extent the opportunity to learn new things, to gain new skills or having access to training programs. The dimensions, ‘decision-making authority’ and ‘recognition’ are scored sufficient. The perception of having authority, room to make their own decisions in their job, is perceived to be sufficiently available, but not to a large extent. ‘Recognition’, telling about how they perceive being recognised for their contributions, how they perceive receiving feedback about their performance, is scored sufficiently, albeit a relatively high ‘sufficient’ score.

Difference in perception HR-employees and HR-managers about structural employee empowerment

HR-managers have been asked about how they think they support their employees in all dimensions of structural employee empowerment (their active role) except for the dimension knowledge and skills because here they have been asked what they think of the current levels of HR-employees. The difference for all six dimensions is assessed by applying the independent samples t-test technique to establish if there is a significant difference in the mean scores of the two groups. It is not assessing the role of HR-management, it is assessing any difference in perception per each of the six dimensions.

The following table 12 projects the results, showing that overall HR-managers score more positively than HR-employees, however only in the dimensions ‘communication’ and ‘recognition’ this difference

reaches statistical significance. The one dimension that reaches statistical significance but then to the opposite (a negative difference) is ‘knowledge and skills’.

Dimensions	Mean HR-employees	Mean HR-managers	t	df	Mean difference
Communication	4.382	4.833	- 2.650	38	-.451 *
Access to information	4.132	4.542	- 1.917	38	-.409
Knowledge and skills	4.198	2.875	3.593 (equal var na)	5	1.324 *
Decision making authority	3.618	3.625	- .034	38	-.007
Opportunity	3.294	3.833	- 1.399	38	-.539
Recognition	3.882	4.500	- 4.326 (equal var na)	32	-.618 ***

Table 12. Compared means HR-managers and HR-employees for the variable structural employee empowerment

* $p \leq .05$, *** $p \leq .001$, $t = t$ statistic, $df =$ degrees of freedom, equal var na = equal variances not assumed

For ‘communication’ HR-managers perceive strongly that they stimulate open communication between themselves and employees and among employees to share relevant information. Whereas employees perceive internal communication between themselves and their managers to a lesser extent (still at a ‘good’ level but less in comparison to the HR-managers). In the area of having access to strategic information and understanding the vision, goals and strategy of the organisation and HR, both groups perceive this from their own perspective at a similar level. As regards having the required knowledge and skills to adequately do their jobs, HR-management is less confident about these levels than HR-employees are themselves. The largest difference is visible in this dimension. HR-managers score this insufficient, not confirming that HR-employees have the required skills and knowledge. HR-employees, on the other hand, seem to be confident to be having the required knowledge and skills to do their job. In terms of decision-making authority, making sure HR-employees can define their own job responsibilities, making their own job decisions, not needing approval from HR-managers, HR-employees perceive that they have that flexibility at a similar level to what HR-managers believe they offer. However, both groups score this at a sufficient level, not meeting the norm ‘good’. In the area of ‘opportunity’, the availability of training programs, chances to gain new skills, learning new things, there is no significant difference established. ‘Recognition’ reveals that HR-managers perceive to recognize HR-employees for their contributions and supporting them in improving their performance at a higher level than that HR-employees perceive this themselves.

Difference in perception HR and internal customer about customer-oriented behaviour of HR

In the following table 13, results from the independent samples t-test are presented for a comparison of means between HR and the internal customer. The HR-employee dataset and HR-manager dataset regarding the customer orientation related questions are combined for this purpose. The results show that there are statistically significant differences for each of the five dimensions. Providing the

impression that HR has a rather ‘positive’ self-reflection in this regard, perceiving that they give individual attention to customers, understand, and anticipate their needs, enjoy connecting with them personally and deliver services correctly and on time to the satisfaction of the customer against the norm (at a good level). Whereas the internal customer has a more downward nuanced view to this, perceiving these elements to quite a lower extent with the largest difference in the area of the need for a personal relationship.

Dimensions	Mean HR	Mean internal customer	<i>t</i>	df	Mean difference
Need to care for the customer	4.594	3.374	13.774 (equal var na)	126	1.219 ***
Need to understand the customer's needs	4.319	3.099	13.561 (equal var na)	134	1.220***
Need for personal relationship	4.187	2.865	9.854 (equal var na)	69	1.323 ***
Need to deliver the service required	4.381	3.291	9.827 (equal var na)	89	1.090 ***
Satisfaction	4.337	3.315	8.808 (equal var na)	84	1.022 ***

Table 13. Compared means HR (employee and manager datasets combined, N=40) and internal customer on the variable customer-oriented behaviour

*** $p \leq .001$, $t = t$ statistic, $df =$ degrees of freedom, equal var na = equal variances not assumed

Perception customer-oriented behaviour of HR from the perspective of the internal customer

Using the previous table 13 to assess HR’s customer-oriented behaviour in the eyes of the internal customer, none of the dimensions meet the norm level. Four dimensions of customer-oriented behaviour are scored against the level ‘sufficient’, whereas the dimension ‘need for personal relationship’ is scored at the level ‘insufficient’ with a score $> 2-3$, revealing a problem in this area. The dimension ‘need to understand the customer’s needs’ scores rather low at almost 3.0 level (a very low ‘sufficient’).

On another note, looking at any difference between means of HR-employees and HR-managers on how they perceive their own customer orientation, there is no statistically significant difference established for any of the five dimensions of customer-oriented behaviour. Both groups have a similar perspective on how customer oriented they work.

4.4 Open comments

All three questionnaires kept two comment boxes, one for input about how to be better supported to be able to improve service delivery, and one for input on the questionnaire itself. The latter one was not really used, the first one was. In this section the comments are described in terms of categories, described per respondent group.

The HR-employee’s comments are grouped into four categories:

1. A need for efficiency to be able to meet the customer’s expectations. Automation, standardization of long manual processes will help them in delivering services. Problems they

currently encounter are also due to dependencies on other departments which lead to delays in HR services;

2. A need for knowledge sharing within HR is flagged. It is currently insufficiently happening but needed. To share relevant information among themselves so that they will be able to anticipate upcoming changes in things relevant to their work;
3. A request for more feedback (360) from colleagues and the internal customer but also instant feedback from HR-managers is requested to improve their own performance;
4. A need for continuous learning opportunities in terms of training and performing tasks outside their current job. To develop within their job but also across domains to acquire new skills.

The HR-managers comments reveal two types of comments which evolve around:

1. A need for a culture with more room for empowerment, autonomy to make their own decisions, recognition, and less competition;
2. A need for further de-complexification of processes.

The internal customer's comments reveal that there is positive feedback about recent improvement in how HR services the customer. There is more coherence in HR's efforts and better visibility to "who owns what". Also, the implementation of the new HR operating model incorporating the HR Business Partner role, is appreciated. However, there is also a lot of constructive feedback which is grouped into nine categories:

1. A need for simplifying HR processes. The processes are perceived as heavy and complex, and the internal customer encounters many errors that do not help in meeting their needs. Especially recruitment, workforce management and onboarding are seen as (impossible) lengthy processes;
2. A need for communication from HR to stakeholders during processes. A more pro-active way of providing status updates, more responsiveness about requests to the customer and informing more pro-actively about upcoming changes that impact them;
3. A need for a career development process and a flexible lateral transfer process;
4. A need for more clarity about the type of services offered by HR;
5. A need for internal HR alignment in terms of messaging and levels of service. Different HR-members offer different messages and different levels of service, which can be confusing and can be perceived as unfair, so there is a request for internal HR alignment;
6. A need for personal contact with HR, better engagement as well as more care for customers and anticipating their needs;
7. A request to organize and structure HR information better and promote the use of the HR portal;
8. A request to become more visible, more solution oriented and approachable. HR is currently not seen by many in the organisation. This creates a perception that HR is there only to serve senior management and furthermore only to apply rules to customer requests. Whereas there is

a need from the internal customer at individual level as well as at managerial level for an approachable HR function where they can seek advice and support;

9. Centralization is requested to align HR services to all Agency staff;

4.5 Assessing relations between both variables

So far, all results and analyses covered the practice-oriented part of this study. In this section, the theoretical part is covered. Starting with testing the hypotheses as stated in chapter 2 and subsequently taking it one step further to assess specific relations between all dimensions of both variables.

4.5.1 Hypothesis testing

The standard multiple regression has been applied by using the HR-employee dataset to establish if indeed structural employee empowerment effects customer-oriented behaviour. The following table 14 presents the model summary which reveals an R square of .499. Expressing that as a percentage, the model explains 49.9 % of the variance in customer-oriented behaviour of HR-employees. The adjusted R square corrects this value in cases of smaller samples, revealing a value of .388. The model explains 38.8% of the variance in customer-oriented behaviour and reaches statistical significance with $p \leq .01$ which allows us to interpret individual effects.

Dimensions	Model		
	β	t	Standard error
Communication	-.181	-.891	.880
Access to information	.477 **	3.230	.515
Knowledge and skills	.513 **	3.057	.566
Decision making authority	-.020	-.109	.651
Opportunity	-.196	-1.015	.490
Recognition	.133	.549	.779
R square	.499 **		
Adjusted R square	.388 **		
F	4.482		

Table 14. Standard multiple regression customer-oriented behaviour. HR-employee dataset, N=34

** $p \leq .01$, β = standardised coefficient beta

Dependent variable is customer-oriented behaviour

By comparing the contribution of each dimension, using the beta values (standardized coefficients), ‘access to information’ makes the strongest significant (.003) contribution, followed by ‘knowledge and skills’ with a significant (.005) contribution to customer-oriented behaviour. The other dimensions do not significantly contribute.

A similar approach as above is applied but now we have added the control variables ‘tenure’, ‘age’, ‘gender’ and ‘type of contract’. This is done to assess if controlled for the effects of those, the dimensions of the independent variable are still able to predict a significant amount of the variance in customer-oriented behaviour. This reveals that the control variables do not make a significant contribution to explaining a variance in the dependent variable (presented in Annex H). Therefore, the

results presented in previous table 14 are used to decide which of the tested hypotheses 1,2,3,4,5 and 6 as stated in chapter 2, can be accepted or not:

H1: The more open and accurate communication, the higher the level of customer-oriented behaviour.

This hypothesis cannot be accepted, there is no significant effect of open and accurate communication on customer-oriented behaviour.

H2: The higher the degree of access to information, the higher the level of customer-oriented behaviour.

This hypothesis can be accepted, there is a significant effect of access to information on customer-oriented behaviour.

H3: The more knowledge and skills, the higher the level of customer-oriented behaviour. This hypothesis can be accepted, there is a significant effect of knowledge and skills on customer-oriented behaviour.

H4: The more decision-making authority within the job context, the higher the level of customer-oriented behaviour. This hypothesis cannot be accepted, there is no significant effect of decision-making authority on customer-oriented behaviour.

H5: The more development opportunities to enhance high performance, the higher the level of customer-orientated behaviour. This hypothesis cannot be accepted, there is no significant effect of development opportunities to enhance high performance on customer-oriented behaviour.

H6: The more recognition, the higher the level of customer-oriented behaviour. This hypothesis cannot be accepted. There is no significant effect of recognition on customer-oriented behaviour.

4.5.2 Correlations

Correlation is applied as it describes the relation between a set of dimensions in terms of strength and in terms of direction (positive or negative), using Pearson's correlation coefficients. It does not however, state anything about the causality or effects between the variables. We are merely interested to see if there are relations between the sets of dimensions and how strong they are. Values are within the range -1 and 1. Values between .10 and .29 are considered to reflect small correlations, values between .30 and .49 are considered to reflect medium correlations and values between .50 and 1.0 are considered to reflect large correlations, according to Pallant (2019). Also, the significance level has been assessed. The correlations are presented in the following table 15.

Correlations												
		Care	Understand	Pers relationship	Deliver	Satisfaction	Communication	Access to information	Knowledge & skills	Decision-making auth	Opportunity	Recognition
Care	Pearson Correlation	1										
Understand	Pearson Correlation	.658**	1									
Pers relationship	Pearson Correlation	.243	.517**	1								
Deliver	Pearson Correlation	.581**	.647**	.367*	1							
Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	-.096	0,152	.146	.017	1						
Communication	Pearson Correlation	-.096	0,152	.146	.017	1.000**	1					
Access to information	Pearson Correlation	.277	.487**	.412*	.403*	.357*	.357*	1				
Knowledge & skills	Pearson Correlation	.369*	.471**	0,287	.490**	0,111	0,111	0,128	1			
Decision-making auth	Pearson Correlation	.011	.070	.327	.284	.459**	.459**	.203	.510**	1		
Opportunity	Pearson Correlation	-.185	.046	.201	-.129	.513**	.513**	.190	.084	.300	1	
Recognition	Pearson Correlation	-.173	.092	.192	-.090	.705**	.705**	.308	-.017	.400*	.700**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 15. Correlation matrix. HR-employee dataset, N = 34

There is a significant perfect positive correlation between ‘communication’ and ‘satisfaction’. There is on the other hand, no correlation between ‘communication’ and the other dimensions of customer-oriented behaviour. There is also a significant positive medium correlation between ‘access to information’ and the dimensions ‘need to understand’, ‘need for personal relationship’, ‘need to deliver’, and ‘satisfaction’. There is also a significant positive medium correlation between ‘knowledge and skills’ and ‘need to care’, ‘need to understand’ and ‘need to deliver’. The dimensions ‘decision-making authority’, ‘opportunity’ and ‘recognition’ all three reveal a positive medium to high significant correlation with ‘satisfaction’. There are also inter-related significant positive correlations among the dimensions within each separate variable, per the earlier made assumption

Chapter 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In this last chapter we have reached the final phase of the study in which the answers to the analytical questions as stated in chapter 1 will be presented. Based on these, the recommendations to the Head of HR at NCIA will be provided. This chapter is structured into four parts. First, the results of the study will be interpreted. Secondly, conclusions will be drawn based on the interpretations and thirdly, based on the conclusions the recommendations will be provided to the Head of HR. Each section will first discuss the practice-oriented part and after that the theoretical part. The chapter will end with a reflection on this study.

The analytical questions stated in chapter 1, are:

1. Which are the similarities and differences between the desired and the actual state regarding structural employee empowerment of HR-employees at NCIA?
2. Which are the similarities and differences between the perception of HR-employees and HR-managers in how they perceive, respectively, being empowered and facilitating empowerment?
3. Which are the similarities and differences between the perception of HR and the perception of the internal customer about customer orientation of HR?
4. Based on the above outcome, what recommendations can be provided to the Head of HR at NCIA?

5.1 Interpretation of the results

First, the results regarding the practice-oriented part of the study will be interpreted. Starting with the results about the gap analysis of structural employee empowerment of HR-employees, followed by interpreting the differences in perceptions. Lastly, the results of the hypothesis testing, which describe the expected effect of structural employee empowerment on customer-oriented behaviour, and the results of the more detailed assessment of relations will be interpreted.

5.1.1 Gap analysis IST and SOLL structural employee empowerment of HR-employees

Based on the previous table 11 in section 4.3, an overview is presented in the following table 16 which provides the similarities and differences between the desired and actual state regarding the six dimensions of structural employee empowerment of HR-employees, referring to analytical question 1. The column ‘interpretation’ provides a first impression of the analysis. In chapter 2, section 2.4, it has been explained that reaching the norm value ‘good’ means reaching the desired state.

Gap analysis

Dimensions	Mean	Score	Interpretation
Communication	4.314	Good	HR-employees score on average against the norm value 'good'. This score is at the desired level.
Access to information	4.312	Good	HR-employees score on average against the norm value 'good'. This score is at the desired level.
Knowledge and skills	4.198	Good	HR-employees score on average against the norm value 'good'. The average score is at the desired level but considering its lower place in the range, there is some room for improvement.
Decision- making authority	3.618	Sufficient	HR-employees score on average against the norm value 'sufficient'. This average score is not at the desired level.
Opportunity	3.293	Sufficient	HR-employees score on average against the norm value 'sufficient'. This average score is not at the desired level.
Recognition	3.883	Sufficient	HR-employees score on average against the norm value 'sufficient'. This average score is not at the desired level.

Table 16. Interpretation gap analysis IST and SOLL structural employee empowerment HR-employees

5.1.2 Difference in perception HR-employees and HR-managers about structural employee empowerment

Based on the previous table 12 in section 4.3, an overview is provided in the following table 17 regarding similarities and differences between HR-employees and HR-managers about structural employee empowerment. The column 'interpretation' provides a first impression of the analysis. This refers to analytical question 2.

Difference in perception

Dimensions	Mean HR-employees	Mean HR-managers	Mean difference	Interpretation
Communication	4.382	4.833	-.451 *	There is a significant difference in perception between HR-employees and HR-managers. HR-managers score on average significantly higher than HR-employees.
Access to information	4.132	4.542	-.409	There is not a significant difference in perception between HR-employees and HR-managers.

Knowledge and skills	4.198	2.875	1.324 *	There is a significant difference in perception between HR-employees and HR-managers. HR-managers score on average significantly lower than HR-employees. HR-managers score on average at an 'insufficient' level whereas HR-employees score on average at a 'good' level.
Decision-making authority	3.618	3.625	-.007	There is not a significant difference in perception between HR-employees and HR-managers.
Opportunity	3.294	3.833	-.539	There is not a significant difference in perception between HR-employees and HR-managers.
Recognition	3.882	4.500	-.618 ***	There is a significant difference in perception between HR-employees and HR-managers. HR-managers score on average significantly higher than HR-employees.

Table 17. Interpretation difference in perception structural employee empowerment HR-employees and HR-managers

* $p \leq .05$, *** $p \leq .001$

5.1.3 Difference in perception HR and internal customer about customer-oriented behaviour of HR

Based on the previous table 13 in section 4.3, an overview is presented in the following table 18 about the difference in perception between HR and the internal customer about HR's customer-oriented behaviour, including an interpretation. This refers to analytical question 3.

Difference in perception

Dimensions	Mean HR	Mean internal customer	Mean difference	Interpretation
Need to care for the customer	4.594	3.374	1.219 ***	There is a significant difference in perception. The internal customer scores on average significantly lower than HR.
Need to understand the customer's needs	4.319	3.099	1.220***	There is a significant difference in perception. The internal customer scores on average significantly lower than HR.
Need for personal relationship	4.187	2.865	1.323 ***	There is a significant difference in perception. The internal customer scores on average at an 'insufficient' level whereas HR scores on average at a

				'good' level. The internal customer scores significantly lower than HR.
Need to deliver the service required	4.381	3.291	1.090 ***	There is a significant difference in perception. The internal customer scores on average significantly lower than HR.
Satisfaction	4.337	3.315	1.022 ***	There is a significant difference in perception. The internal customer scores on average significantly lower than HR.

Table 18. Interpretation difference in perception HR and internal customer about customer-oriented behaviour of HR

*** $p \leq .001$

As mentioned in chapter 4, there are no statistically significant differences established for any of the five dimensions of customer-oriented behaviour between HR-employees and HR-managers. Both groups have a similar perspective on how customer oriented they work.

5.1.4 Open comments

Although not statistically tested, the comments provide additional qualitative information that bring some nuance to the statistic information. Caution is needed whilst interpreting this, as we cannot conclude that this information is representative for entire populations. Nor can any conclusion be based on this. Whilst remaining cautious, it is possible to see that there is a common ground among HR-employees, HR-managers, and the internal customer about their perception of a need for simplifying some of the current HR processes. These are perceived as cumbersome, lengthy, causing errors and delays. And the internal customer refers to a lack of transparency in some of the HR processes. HR-employees also refer to dependencies on other departments which cause delays in their own service delivery. Altogether, this can be placed in the context of a complex organisation as previously described. In complex organisations, these types of issues occur and form a hindrance to engaging more in customer orientation.

HR-employees further mention the need for better knowledge sharing within HR, a need for more feedback and possibly a way for 360 feedback including customer feedback. Also, a need for more learning and development opportunities are mentioned to enable further upskilling. HR-managers mention a need for more autonomy for themselves to make their own job-related decisions and a need for a culture of recognition and less competition.

In addition to the point raised about process efficiencies, the internal customer points out areas where improvement is needed. These concern HR's approachability, visibility, anticipating needs, people centricity, flexibility, internal HR alignment and way of information sharing. Becoming more visible, more approachable, to both individuals and management is needed. Needs are expressed for better engagement, a more 'human' flavour in terms of personal contact during encounters with HR and more care for the customer which will also allow for better anticipating their needs. HR is perceived as mainly applying rules, acting rigidly in their ways of working, instead of pro-actively and through a responsive

attitude looking for solutions. Better organized and structured HR information is needed, suggesting better promotion of using the HR portal and providing information about services.

5.1.5 Interpretation of the hypothesis testing

The theoretical part of this study aimed to empirically test the relation between the independent and dependent variable, per the hypotheses posed in chapter 2, and next to that take it one step further to assess relations at individual dimension level. The results of the hypothesis testing confirm the relation between structural employee empowerment and customer-oriented behaviour within HR at NCIA.

In the standard multiple regression, the variance explained by structural employee empowerment towards customer-oriented behaviour is 38.8 % (adjusted R square) and the model reaches statistical significance with $p \leq .01$. Meaning that a relationship between both variables can be confirmed. Furthermore, looking into each dimension individually, we can see by looking at the beta values (standardized coefficients) that ‘knowledge and skills’ makes the strongest contribution to customer-oriented behaviour, followed by ‘access to information’. The other four dimensions ‘communication’, ‘decision- making authority’, ‘opportunity ‘and recognition’ reveal hardly any contribution (very low or even negative values).

In the following table 19, based on the standard multiple regression presented in previous table 14, the results and interpretations are presented.

Hypotheses	Result β value	R/A	Interpretation
The more open and accurate communication, the higher the level of customer-oriented behaviour	-.181	Rejected	Contrary to the expectation, the results reveal that open and accurate communication does not have effect on the level of customer-oriented behaviour of HR-employees
The higher the degree of access to information, the higher the level of customer-oriented behaviour	.477**	Accepted	The level of access to information for HR-employees does have effect on their level of customer-oriented behaviour
The more knowledge and skills, the higher the level of customer-oriented behaviour	.513 **	Accepted	The level of knowledge and skills of HR-employees does have effect on their level of customer-oriented behaviour
The more decision-making authority within the job context, the higher the level of customer-oriented behaviour	-.020	Rejected	Contrary to the expectation, the results reveal that decision-making authority does not have effect on the level of customer-oriented behaviour of HR-employees
The more development opportunities to enhance high performance, the higher the level of customer-orientated behaviour	-.196	Rejected	Contrary to the expectation, the results reveal that development opportunities do not have effect on the level of customer-oriented behaviour of HR-employees

The more recognition, the higher the level of customer-oriented behaviour	.133	Rejected	Contrary to the expectation, the results reveal that recognition does not have effect on the level of customer-oriented behaviour of HR-employees
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Table 19. Interpretation hypothesis testing, standard multiple regression

** $p \leq .01$

In the following figure 4, the results of the hypothesis testing are graphically presented.

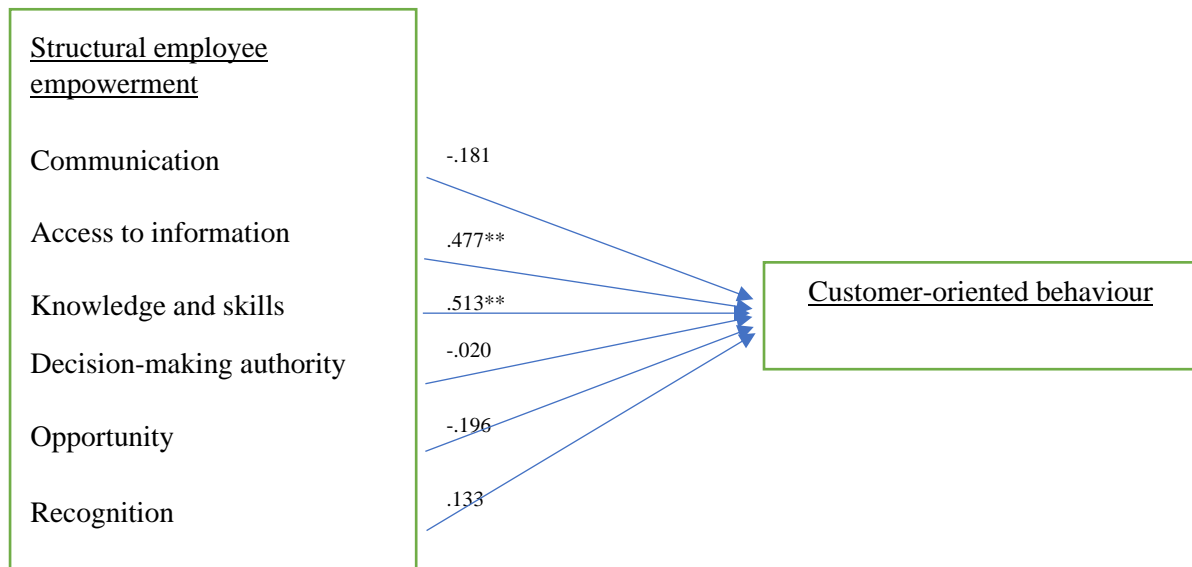


Figure 4. Results hypothesis testing, ** $p \leq .01$

5.1.6 Interpretation of the correlations

Taking it one step further, assessing at a detailed level the underlying relations between the dimensions of each of the variables, the following table 20 presents which dimensions correlate significantly at a medium or high level.

		Correlations				
		Care	Understand	Personal relationship	Deliver	Satisfaction
Communication	Pearson Correlation	-.096	.0152	.146	.017	1.000**
Access to information	Pearson Correlation	.277	.487**	.412*	.403*	.357*
Knowledge & skills	Pearson Correlation	.369*	.471**	.0287	.490**	.0111
Decision-making authority	Pearson Correlation	.011	.070	.327	.284	.459**
Opportunity	Pearson Correlation	-.185	.046	.201	-.129	.513**
Recognition	Pearson Correlation	-.173	.092	.192	-.090	.705**

Table 20. Correlations between the dimensions of structural employee empowerment and customer-oriented behaviour HR-employee dataset, $N = 34$, * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

‘Access to information’ reveals a positive medium correlation with four out of five dimensions of customer-oriented behaviour. ‘Knowledge and skills’ correlates at a positive medium level with three out of five dimensions. ‘Decision-making authority’ correlates at a positive medium level with one out of five dimensions of customer-oriented behaviour and ‘opportunity’ and ‘recognition’ correlate at a positive high level with one out of five dimensions. All dimensions of structural employee empowerment, except for ‘knowledge and skills’, reveal medium to high positive correlations with the dimension ‘satisfaction’. It does reveal that the added dimension ‘satisfaction’ is an important contributor to the concept of customer-oriented behaviour in this regard.

5.2 Conclusions

What can we conclude from all the results? That is what will be presented in this section. But first we will look back at how we started in chapter 1 and how that relates to the results.

In chapter 1 it had been explained that within the HR function at NCIA, a project was launched to transform the HR function both in terms of changing the operating model and in ways of working. The rationale was that previously HR’s performance had been assessed by an external party, which revealed an urgency for performance improvement. One of the key drivers of the transformation was the need for HR to become more customer oriented, meaning to better align to the internal customer’s needs, to establish adequate, pro-active, aligned service delivery at operational and at strategic level. However, upon implementation of the changes through the transformation project, feedback from the internal customer revealed that there was still a lack of engagement with business’ needs to such an extent that creating added value was at risk. Hence, this study was initiated to support in getting a better understanding of influencing factors on customer orientation to explore options to improve in that area. Supported by various studies in the field of employee empowerment and customer orientation, it was found that the structural aspect of employee empowerment positively impacts customer-oriented behaviour. Because NCIA is a large political/military organisation that can be characterised as a complex organisation, this aspect was considered in the study as an influencing factor in customer orientation. The purpose of the study is to make recommendations towards the Head of HR about how to improve customer orientation by providing insight in the difference between the actual state and desired state of structural employee empowerment of HR-employees. The measurements of perceptions regarding both variables were added in this study per agreement with the Head of HR.

Upon exploring literature in chapter 2, defining the methodology in chapter 3, testing empirically in chapter 4, now it is time to provide answers to the analytical questions and realise the purpose of the study.

5.2.1 Specific conclusions practice-oriented part

In this section specific conclusions are presented, the answers to the analytical questions, in the order of starting with how HR-employees perceive being empowered, followed by how HR-managers

perceive that they facilitate empowerment, and subsequently how the internal customer perceives HR's customer orientation.

Structural employee empowerment of HR-employees

Responding to the analytical question, “*which are the similarities and differences between the desired and the actual state regarding structural employee empowerment of HR-employees at NCIA?*”, below conclusions are specified per dimension of structural employee empowerment. Overall, the study reveals that HR-employees feel empowered across all six dimensions albeit at different levels ranging between ‘sufficient’ and ‘good’, leaving some similarities and some gaps when comparing with the norm for the desired state.

1. HR-employees perceive strong internal communication among themselves and between themselves and their manager. Their opinions do not differ from the desired state (mean 4.382), saying that they perceive actively listening to each other, and perceive that their manager encourages them to speak up. There is still room for further developing internal communication to move their overall score a bit up. Looking at the open comments, this is confirmed where reference is made to a need for more sharing of information within HR.

2. ‘Access to information’ is scored at the level of the desired state (mean 4.132). Informing us that HR-employees perceive that they have access to information about the organisation's vision, mission, strategy, and objectives including those of HR itself, and that they understand those. It allows the HR-employees to oversee the “big picture” so that they can develop frames of reference to understand their own jobs in the entirety of the organization's activities.

3. HR-employees perceive that they have mastered the knowledge and skills needed to perform their job and their opinion does not deviate from the desired state (mean 4.198) although this score is at the beginning of the range so there is room for improvement. Their opinion states that they are confident about their ability to do their job.

4. ‘Decision-making authority’ deviates from the desired state as HR-employees shared their opinion about this to be at a ‘sufficient’ level (mean 3.618). Although it is on average a higher score than anticipated at the start of the study, the actual state deviates from the desired state. Informing us that HR-employees perceive to some extent being encouraged to make their own job decisions, in defining their job responsibilities and not needing approval for everything from their manager, but not meeting the desired state. Considering the open comments, it might well be that this score is impacted by the way the organisation is structured, with dependencies across functions in the organisation, and by the complexity of the lengthy and often manual and not oversee-able processes. Taking the limitations of the complex organisation into account and how all different jobs are organised in relation to each other, it might well be that that hinders stronger decision-making authority. Per the explanation in section 2.4 about the complexity of the organisation, a limitation to their levels of decision-making authority was anticipated, because, from what we know, we must consider the highly regulated work

environment, limited potential to regulate their work especially when they face problems or disturbances related to work. Besides that, it will occur that they face a lack of overview due to the many dependency relationships and the strong hierarchical setting. This will unavoidably impact the flexibility for HR-employees to make well informed decisions in a timely manner.

5. HR-employees perceive that they have some opportunity to develop themselves further and learn new skills, but their opinion deviates from the desired state. ‘Opportunity’ is scored at the level ‘sufficient’ (mean 3.294). On this topic HR-employees are the least positive as this is the lowest average score. They perceive to some extent a chance to gain new skills and knowledge in their job and outside their job but not to the extent it is desired. This is also confirmed in the open comments where HR-employees shared their need for more opportunities for learning new skills and develop themselves, compared to what is currently offered to them. Not only referring to training programs, but also to perform tasks outside their current job to acquire new skills.

6. ‘Recognition’ deviates from the desired state as HR-employee’s opinions are scored at the level ‘sufficient’ (mean 3.882). HR-employees perceive to some extent being encouraged by their manager to provide each other regular feedback, being recognized and being supported by their manager in their performance but the actual state deviates from the desired state. This is in line with open comments, where they are asking for more direct feedback from management and from the internal customer. An assumption is that because of a lack of feedback, this impacts their self-reflection on their own level of knowledge and skills.

Facilitation of empowerment by HR-managers

Responding to the analytical question “*which are the similarities and differences between the perception of HR-employees and HR-managers in how they perceive, respectively, being empowered and facilitating empowerment?*”, HR-managers perceive themselves facilitating empowerment of HR-employees to a stronger extent than HR-employees perceive they are being empowered. The specific conclusions are presented below, revealing the similarities and differences.

7. Overall, HR-managers perceive that they strongly facilitate empowerment of HR-employees. Although HR-managers tend to be a bit more positive in how they perceive empowering (they score on average higher), there is not a significant difference in opinions regarding the three dimensions ‘access to information’, ‘decision-making authority’ and ‘opportunity’. Stating that HR-managers perceive a facilitative role in making sure HR-employees understand the strategy and goals of the organisation and HR and allowing them flexibility in making their own job-related decisions. HR-managers share the opinion of HR-employees about limited availability of training programs and development opportunities outside current jobs and chances to gain new skills.

8. A statistical difference in opinion is established for ‘communication’, stating that HR-managers perceive to a higher extent than HR-employees do, that they encourage open communication, sharing ideas and having an active listening role to their HR-employees. As the level of HR-employees did not

deviate from the desired situation, there is no 'issue', but it is still interesting to further explore what that difference in perception is based on.

9. Also, a statistical difference in opinion is established for 'knowledge and skills'. This dimension scores the highest difference between HR-managers and HR-employees. Informing us that HR-managers perceive HR-employee's knowledge and skills at an 'insufficient' level. This is an interesting difference, mainly because HR-employees score their own level of how knowledgeable and skilled they are, at the desired level. Revealing a big gap between both their opinions.

10. 'Recognition' also reveals a statistical difference in opinion between HR-managers and HR-employees. HR-managers score this on average high (mean 4.500), stating that they perceive that they encourage HR-employees to give each other feedback, that they recognize HR-employees for their contributions and that they support them in improving their performance. Whereas HR-employees perceive this to a lesser extent. In the open comments HR-employees even shared a need for more direct performance feedback and supportive tooling in that area (like 360 feedback).

HR's customer orientation from the perspective of the internal customer

Responding to the analytical question "*which are the similarities and differences between the perception of HR and the perception of the internal customer about customer orientation of HR?*", overall, the internal customer scores all dimensions significantly at a lower level than HR assesses their own customer orientation. There are no shared opinions. Specific conclusions are presented below.

11. For all five dimensions of customer-oriented behaviour of HR, a statistical difference is established between the perception of HR and the perception of the internal customer. The perception of HR is a combination of HR-employees and HR-managers. There were no statistical differences established between those two HR groups. They share a similar opinion as regards their own customer orientation. This reveals that HR perceives themselves to care for the customer, to consider their problems important and giving individual attention to a higher extent than the internal customer perceives this. Also, this difference applies to the extent HR understands or makes an effort to understand the internal customer's needs, listens and anticipates their needs. Enjoying connecting on a personal level or getting to know their customer is perceived to a higher extent from HR than from the internal customer, even to such an extent that HR perceives this to be at a level 'good' and the internal customer at a level 'insufficient'. Revealing a large gap. Delivering services on time, completing tasks correctly and providing good and prompt service, reveals HR's perception to be significantly higher than the internal customer perceives this to be. Regarding the satisfaction about the level of service provided, the way the internal customer is treated, how satisfied they are with the service experience and how the service is provided, reveals that HR perceives this at a significant higher level than the internal customer perceives this to be. The open comments confirm the above statements as well.

12. In the eyes of the internal customer, none of the five dimensions of customer orientation of HR is scored at the desired level. There is a gap between the actual and desired state for all dimensions.

‘Need for personal relationship’ even scores at an ‘insufficient’ level (mean 2.865). Revealing that the internal customer does not perceive HR to enjoy connecting or getting to know them personally to the extent required. Important to note, the open comments emphasize this through expressing an imminent need for a more ‘human’ approach from HR, and care for them and their requests.

5.2.2 Specific conclusions theoretical part

Part of this study aimed to test the effect of structural employee empowerment on customer-oriented behaviour and to assess how the different dimensions of structural employee empowerment correlate with each of the dimensions of customer-oriented behaviour to get a better understanding of the underlying relations.

A critical note needs to be made in this context before we present the conclusions. In principle, the HR-employee sample was too small to perform good regressions. Leading to, most likely, the fact that convergent and discriminant validity could not be confirmed. Hence, with less certainty firm statements can be made and are therefore nuanced in below articulated conclusions.

13. Structural employee empowerment appears to have effect on customer-oriented behaviour of the internal HR function in the complex NCIA organisation. A change in the first might lead to a change in the latter. The variance, as shown in chapter 4, demonstrates 38.8 % in a model of which statistical significance was established. Which means that 38.8 % of change in customer-oriented behaviour might be explained by structural employee empowerment. Of course, it must be kept in mind that this also means that 60.2% of variance is not explained by structural employee empowerment but by other factors.

14. For the hypothesis testing, it appears that hypothesis 3, *“The higher the degree of access to information, the higher the level of customer-oriented behaviour”*, and hypothesis 4, *“The more knowledge and skills, the higher the level of customer-oriented behaviour”*, can be accepted. Explaining that it is likely that if employees have access to relevant strategic information and high levels of knowledge and skills, they will be able to engage more in customer-oriented behaviour. Because they will be able to respond adequately to customer questions, will be able to implement appropriate actions and will be reliable and fast in their responses and will offer effective solutions.

Contrary to expectations, the other hypotheses appeared to reveal no significant individual contribution to an effect in customer-oriented behaviour and could therefore not be accepted. It might be that characteristics of a complex organisation play a role in this. For example, where overall flexibility is inhibited in the area of decision-making authority, or in limiting opportunities to participate in projects or tasks outside current jobs. The nature of the organisation, the way it is structured, work is organised, governance is set-up, might well limit room for flexibility in these areas which therefore explains a lack of effect of these dimensions on customer orientation.

15. Overall, all HR-employees respond similarly to how they perceive being empowered and engage in customer orientation. There is no significant difference related to their age, tenure, gender, or type of contract.

16. Assessing correlations of dimensions between the independent and dependent variable, the most prominent finding is that all dimensions of both variables seem to relate to each other in diverse combinations. Another prominent finding is that the added dimension ‘satisfaction’ is a valuable added dimension as all the dimensions of structural employee empowerment, except for ‘knowledge and skills’, seem to correlate positively at a medium to high level with it. The following table 21 depicts the exact relations through the orange coloured cells.

		Correlations				
		Care	Understand	Personal relationship	Deliver	Satisfaction
Communication	Pearson Correlation					1.000**
Access to information	Pearson Correlation		.487**	.412*	.403*	.357*
Knowledge & skills	Pearson Correlation	.369*	.471**		.490**	
Decision-making authority	Pearson Correlation					.459**
Opportunity	Pearson Correlation					.513**
Recognition	Pearson Correlation					.705**

Table 21. Depicting relations between the dimensions. Specific medium to high correlations

‘Access to information’ seems to reveal significant correlations at medium level with most of the dimensions of customer-oriented behaviour. The dimension ‘knowledge and skills’ seems to relate to three dimensions, significantly positive at a medium level. These findings for both dimensions are in line with their appeared effect on the generic concept of customer-oriented behaviour, per conclusion 14. The last three dimensions ‘decision making authority’, ‘opportunity’ and ‘recognition’ only seem to reveal significant medium to high correlations with the dimension ‘satisfaction’.

5.3 Recommendations

Responding to the last analytical question, “based on the above outcome, what recommendations can be provided to the Head of HR at NCIA?”, recommendations will be presented in this section. Recommendations follow first the dimensions of structural employee empowerment and than customer orientation. They are based on combined conclusions and for clarity’s sake, each recommendation refers to the conclusions it is based on.

1. The study reveals that communication between HR-employees and HR-managers are in the perception of both groups meeting the desired state (conclusions 1 and 8). There is even so, in the perception of HR-managers, a significant higher level of communication between themselves and their HR-employees. For the short term, further exploring among both groups what this difference is based on, is recommended. Especially as in the open comments this was addressed by HR-employees as something to further improve on. Actions could be taken to facilitate conversations about this outcome

between both groups to further explore their perceptions. For the longer-term attention might be paid to how to embed open communication within HR's way of working, to safeguard for the future the current level achieved.

2. 'Access to information' results reveal meeting the desired state (conclusion 2). As this dimension relates to four out of five dimensions of customer-oriented behaviour (conclusion 16) and reveals an appeared significant effect on customer-orientation generically (conclusion 14), it is important to review if the way relevant information is made accessible for HR- employees, is currently sufficiently embedded in HR's workarounds. This to ensure it is kept at this level.

3. The study reveals that HR-employees perceive themselves to have mastered the knowledge and skills necessary to perform their job. But there is a significant difference in perception about this between HR-employees and HR-managers. Even to such an extent that HR-employees score this at the desired level and HR-managers at an 'insufficient' level (conclusions 3 and 9). To add to that, this dimension reveals relations with three out of five dimensions of customer-oriented behaviour (conclusion 16) and a significant effect on customer-oriented behaviour generically (conclusion 14), stressing its importance. For the short term it is recommended to implement actions that clarify role responsibility, with the needed knowledge and skills, to individual HR-employees by their manager. It can be a first building block, reflecting on what each manager observes as the current level of knowledge and skills of the HR-employees and provide clarity on what is expected, whilst referring to the organizational standards reflected in the role profiles. For the longer term it is recommended to emphasize role expectations in the performance management process, including personal or team development plans that incorporate needs and expectations from both individual and their manager.

4. 'Decision-making authority' does not meet the desired state (conclusion 4) which is also shared by the HR-managers (conclusion 7). As part of this may well have to do with the complexity of the organisation, it is recommended for the short term to continue actions on simplifying HR processes, taking out unnecessary steps or approvals, as it will stimulate ownership within HR and create more flexibility for HR-employees to make their own job-related decisions. For the longer term it is recommended to further explore this within HR, there might be more to gain but that requires a more in-depth assessment.

5. As regards 'opportunity', ways to acquire new skills, the study reveals that HR-employees are the least positive about this in comparison to the other dimensions (conclusion 5). This is supported by HR-managers who acknowledge a lack in training and learning opportunities (conclusion 7). For the short term, it is recommended to incorporate learning actions in the personal or team development plans per recommendation 3. For the longer term it is recommended to assess the possibility for an open, continuous flexible training offer based on a yearly 'needs analysis'. And to explore temporary exchanges of HR-employees across different teams, for example an internal rotation program.

6. The study reveals that HR-employees score ‘recognition’ not at the desired level (conclusion 6) and they also express a need for this in the open comments. Furthermore, there is a statistical difference in opinion between HR-employees and HR-managers about the level of recognition (conclusion 10). For the short term it is recommended to discuss this difference first with the HR-managers and assess how they can integrate continuous feedback and recognition in day-to-day activities, parallel to formal performance review meetings. On the spot feedback and recognition resonates stronger than planned meetings during the year. For the longer term, options to integrate 360 feedback in tooling, including the internal customer’s feedback, could be explored.

7. The study reveals a significant difference between the perception of the internal customer about HR’s customer orientation and how HR perceives this themselves (conclusion 11). For both the short and long term it is recommended to develop customer evaluation at a more granular level considering the different HR centres. It would allow for a more ‘in-depth’ and qualitative way of connecting with the customer. This will enhance a continuous feedback loop between HR and the internal customer in a natural way. Specifically, the word ‘loop’ is used as the strength will be in providing feedback from HR to the internal customer as well. This creates a two-way street, allowing for engagement between both, leading to more clarity and transparency about how it works on each side, and ultimately establishing stronger connections.

8. In the eyes of the internal customer, HR’s level of customer orientation does not meet for any of the five dimensions the desired state (conclusion 12). Following the conceptual model, engagement in customer orientation will increase when structural employee empowerment increases (conclusion 13), which could therefore be considered in internal HR ways of working and as such stimulate a culture of empowerment. Parallel to working on the aspects of structural employee empowerment per the recommendations, for the short-term specific attention could be paid to ‘need for personal relationship’ considering this reveals the largest gap and at the same time was put forward as an imminent need to improve. Possibly by establishing a more personal oriented way of interaction with the internal customer. This could for example be initiated through ‘customer voice’ sessions.

5.4 Quality of the study

A first generic remark is that the study has successfully been conducted. The HR-employee sample showed representativity in percentage of responses and across age, tenure, type of contract and gender and the HR-manager dataset showed this in the percentage of respondents. This means that the results stated, are applicable to the opinion of all HR-employees and all HR-managers even though not 100% of the populations have provided their input. The third sample, the internal customer, proved to be substantial as well for analysis. It was a different approach; a group of respondents was needed to put forward their opinion about HR’s customer orientation. Considering the open request within the organisation, which was not individually addressed to organisation members, the response rate was higher than anticipated.

Quite some information was provided in the open comment boxes by all three respondent groups which does confirm the results. Although this information is not statistically tested, it does not reveal anomalies from the statistical results.

As highlighted previously, for regression purposes, in principle the HR-employee dataset was too small. The dataset showed difficulties with normality and validity. Still, analyses were conducted and taking this into consideration, firm statements could not be made regarding the regression outcomes and have therefore been nuanced in the conclusions section. Reliability was established for all scales in the HR datasets.

5.5 Reflection

This section provides a reflection on the theory used to define the conceptual model, on the theoretical contribution of the study, on the methodology, on the relation to practice, and on the study itself.

The conceptual model, which presupposes a relation between structural employee empowerment and customer-oriented behaviour was well defined. However, at the level of the dimensions for structural employee empowerment, in further research I would focus more on the type of work environment, on the characteristics of the organisation, before specifying the set of dimensions. Because the level of complexity in an organisation impacts flexibility at the level of the dimensions, so it would be worthwhile to explore if any changes could be made to that part of the conceptual model. The used composition of dimensions for customer-oriented behaviour is one I would use again. Especially the added dimension ‘satisfaction’ was complementary and proved to be valuable as it seemed to reveal many medium to high correlations with the dimensions of structural employee empowerment.

This latter links to the theoretical contribution of the study which aimed to assess strengths in relations between structural employee empowerment and customer orientation at a generic level and at a detailed level of the dimensions. The results revealed interesting information, amongst others that two dimensions of structural employee empowerment were dominant in their effect on customer-oriented behaviour. But also that all dimensions of both variables correlate in different combinations.

Assessing a lack of contribution of the other four dimensions of structural empowerment to the generic concept of customer-oriented behaviour, the context of the organisation is likely to play a role in this. As regards the dimension ‘opportunity’, perhaps the fact that there are limited job rotation options, this limits the effect on customer orientation. Possibly, where it regards ‘recognition’, it might be that the current feedback system is not flexible enough to effect customer-oriented behaviour. And in the area of ‘decision-making authority’, a lack of significant impact might be explained by the fact that in a complex organisation where everything is highly regulated and process oriented, there is insufficient room for making one’s own job decisions. But ‘decision-making authority’ does reveal a strong correlation with ‘satisfaction’ so it is an important element in customer orientation to be mindful about. Further research in this area might explore effects of complex organisation structures on decision-

making authority and to what extent it is possible to influence customer-oriented behaviour through this. As it is becoming more and more important, especially in large complex organisations, to respond to stakeholders internally in an adequate way to avoid delays but moreover, to prevent the occurrence of far-reaching errors that are not simply to unravel anymore after some time.

As regards the methodology, overall, I am content with the decisions taken as the results from the study could be analysed and lead to interestingly diverse (nuanced) conclusions which could be used for advice about improvement measures.

Where it concerns current practice, the conclusions are likely to be a confirmation of existing assumptions of the Head of HR. Unexpected perhaps are some of the significant differences in perceptions between the stakeholders. The conclusions also confirm the overall comment from the internal customer that HR's transformation is mostly considered an internal change that is not yet visible to the wider organisation. Hopefully, the recommendations will add to this in that, if followed-up, will create more visibility to HR in a positive way.

In retrospect looking back on this study, it has been quite a journey into a new world, quite enjoyable albeit sometimes perseverance was required as it was quite an intensive project, so to say. I enjoyed the fact that the study covered multiple elements both in terms of practical as theoretical aspects, revealing various perspectives which enriches the study in my opinion.

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Consulted websites:

<https://www.nato.int>

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Annexes

- Annex A: Information HR transformation
- Annex B : Invites to questionnaires
- Annex C: Questionnaires
- Annex D: Operationalisation schedules
- Annex E: SPSS output - descriptive statistics
- Annex F: SPSS output – quality of the measurement scales
- Annex G: SPSS output- independent samples t-tests
- Annex H: SPSS output - hypothesis testing and correlations