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Customer Incivility, Work Engagement and Service-Oriented Citizenship Behaviours: Does Servant Leadership Make a Difference?

Abstract

The focus of this study is on *how* and *why* incivility is related to employee outcomes.

Drawing on role theory, the study tests a moderated mediation model in which customer incivility is indirectly related to service-oriented citizenship behaviours via work engagement, and this mediated relationship is moderated by servant leadership. Time-lagged, multisource data from a sample of nurses and their direct supervisors in thirty public hospitals in Romania were used to test the proposed model. The results of generalized multilevel structural equation modelling (GSEM) showed that the relationship between customer incivility and service citizenship behaviours was mediated by work engagement.

Furthermore, this indirect relationship was weaker when employees work under a servant leader. Theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords

Customer incivility, service-oriented citizenship behaviours, work engagement, servant leadership; role theory

Introduction

In recent years, workplace incivility has gained considerable attention from scholars (Schilpzand et al., 2016). Workplace incivility refers to low-intensity deviant acts with ambiguous intent to harm and violate social and workplace norms of courtesy and mutual respect (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). It is a common type of mistreatment in the workplace that covers a wide variety of discourteous and rude behaviours, such as making insulting or demeaning remarks, yelling at others, ignoring their opinions and doubting their competence (Hershcovis, 2011; Guidroz et al., 2010).

In the service sector, workplace incivility can be from sources inside (supervisors and co-workers) and outside (customers) the organization (Schilpzand et al., 2016). In the current study, which is situated in a healthcare service context, the focus will be on outsider or customer incivility. Customer incivility is a major prevalent problem in the service sector, particularly healthcare, and has been found to be more harmful to employees and organisations than other types of incivility at work (Arnold & Walsh, 2015; Guidroz et al., 2010). It is viewed as “unique” because of the social positioning of employees in the service interplay and the recurrent nature of this interplay (Arnold & Walsh, 2015; p.364).

Several studies have investigated the association between customer incivility and employee outcomes. These studies have shown that outsider mistreatment is related to increased levels of psychological strain, emotional exhaustion and distress, as well as reduced levels of psychological wellbeing, service performance and extra-role customer service (Kern & Grandey, 2009; Sliter et al., 2010; Sliter et al., 2012; Adams & Webster, 2013; Wilson & Holmvall, 2013; Shao & Skarlicki, 2014; Arnold and Walsh, 2015). Studies have also begun to uncover the mechanisms and boundary conditions of the customer incivility-employee outcomes relationship (Arnold and Walsh, 2015; Zhu et al., 2019). This study, as will be

discussed below, seeks to provide a new perspective on *how* and *when* customer incivility is related to service-oriented organisational citizenship behaviours (OCBs).

Service-oriented OCBs are prosocial behaviours displayed by employees in service encounters to enhance customer satisfaction (Mostafa, 2019). Examples of such behaviours include working extra hours or staying late at work or skipping lunch to serve customers (Payne & Webber, 2006). These behaviours are generally viewed as one of the major factors affecting customer outcomes and service organisations effectiveness (Subramony & Pugh, 2015; Wang et al., 2018). They are vital in service encounters since it is usually hard to identify beforehand all things service employees have to do in response to unforeseeable customer needs and expectations (Payne and Webber, 2006). Hence, understanding the factors that predict service-oriented OCBs is of utmost importance (Shao & Skarlicki, 2014).

The study first examines the mediating role of work engagement, which reflects “an active state of psychological immersion in one’s work” (Demirtas et al., 2017; p.187), on the relationship between customer mistreatment and service-oriented OCBs. In particular, drawing on role theory, the study proposes that employees will respond to the negative treatment received from customers by becoming less engaged at work and consequently reducing their service-oriented behaviours. Role theory postulates that individuals are social actors who should display behaviours that are suitable to the positions they occupy in the society (Biddle, 1986). In service settings, both the customer and service provider are expected to play a role. If the actual behaviour of the customer deviates from expected behaviour, employees will be dissatisfied, confused and less likely to immerse themselves fully into their work roles (Solomon et al., 1985). Since customer incivility represents a form of social norm violation where role expectations are different from actual behaviour, this study argues that incivility is associated with reduced work engagement and subsequent discretionary behaviours that could be of use to the organisation and its customers.

The study also draws on role theory to test the moderating role of servant leadership on this mediated relationship. Servant leadership focuses on promoting the interests of others and places the good of followers over the self-interest of leaders (Walumbwa et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2013). Servant leaders reduce role uncertainty and show concern for their followers (De Clercq et al., 2014; Zhao et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2017). This, according to role theory, should increase role consensus, which, in turn should motivate followers to become more engaged at work and display service-oriented citizenship behaviours even if mistreated by others (Matta et al., 2015). The choice of servant leadership as a boundary condition in this study is mainly because this leadership style has been found to be a key factor that helps service organisations provide high-quality customer service and promote employee service behaviours (Wang et al., 2018). Therefore, it is likely to buffer the negative influence of customer incivility on employee work engagement and subsequent service behaviours.

As shown in Figure 1, the current study tests a moderated mediation model in which the indirect relationship between customer incivility and service-oriented behaviours through work engagement is conditional on servant leadership.

[Please Insert Figure 1 About Here]

This study makes several contributions to the literature. First, prior research on the relationship between customer incivility and employee outcomes has been mostly grounded on Hobfoll's (1989) conservation of resources (COR) theory (e.g. Sliter et al., 2010; Sliter et al., 2012; Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). The focus of COR theory is on individual reactions to environmental events that influence resources (Hobfoll & Schumm, 2009). Based on COR theory, scholars argue that customer mistreatment drains employees resources, and to conserve or prevent further resource loss, employees withhold citizenship behaviours from

customers (Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). This study draws on role theory to provide a new perspective on the relationships between customer incivility, servant leadership and employee outcomes. As noted before, the focus of role theory is on behaviours that could be expected from an individual in a particular position within a specific social context (Biddle, 1986). Role theory is regarded as useful for advancing the understanding of work engagement and OCBs (Matta et al., 2015), and its use could provide a cohesive framework for understanding the proposed relationships. To assess whether work engagement will have a unique effect in explaining the link between customer incivility and service OCBs beyond resource depletion mechanisms, the potential mediating influence of emotional exhaustion will be controlled for in the analysis.

Second, even though prior research has examined workplace social support as a boundary condition of the effect of customer incivility (Zhu et al., 2019), there are still calls for more research on the moderators or buffers of the relationship between customer incivility and employee outcomes (Sliter & Boyd, 2015; Schilpzand et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2019). This study extends the literature by proposing that servant leadership could attenuate or buffer the negative relationship between outsider incivility, work engagement and consequently service-oriented OCBs. By so doing, the study also responds to calls for research integrating the leadership and incivility literatures, especially that there is a “pressing need” to understand which leadership behaviours help reduce the negative effects of mistreatment on employees (Kaiser, 2017; p.111). Servant leadership is distinct from related leadership theories and has been found to predict additional variance in perceived supervisor support, the previously identified boundary condition of the relationship between customer incivility and extra-role service behaviours (Zhu et al., 2019), and other work attitudes and outcomes above and beyond that of transformational leadership and leader–member exchange (Ehrhart, 2004). Therefore, servant leadership is regarded as a “unique

leadership theory that can extend researchers' knowledge about leadership processes and outcomes" (Walumbwa et al., 2010; pp. 518-519).

Finally, because of the important role of work engagement in service jobs, there have been calls for more research on the antecedents of service employees work engagement and the boundary conditions in which it is more likely to take place (Mostafa, 2019; Zhu et al., 2019; Zheng et al., 2020). This study answers these calls by assessing the role of outsider mistreatment on work engagement, particularly when service employees work under servant leaders. The study tests the proposed relationships using a sample of nurses from public hospitals in Romania. Incivility is very common in healthcare occupations and its rise in hospitals has strong implications for the effectiveness and satisfaction of all healthcare staff, especially nurses (Guidroz et al., 2010).

Customer Incivility, Work Engagement and Service-Oriented OCBs

Customer incivility or mistreatment could be simply defined as inappropriate interpersonal treatment received by employees from customers (Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). It involves different types of impolite and disrespectful actions, such as yelling at employees or making inappropriate comments to them or unreasonably criticising them (Guidroz et al., 2010; Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). Since service employees interact more often with customers than co-workers or supervisors, customer mistreatment occurs more frequently in service organisations, such as health care organisations, than other types of mistreatment (Guidroz et al., 2010; Sliter et al., 2012; Arnold & Walsh, 2015; Sliter & Boyd, 2015). Therefore, this type of mistreatment is viewed as a daily hassle that is "particularly powerful and lamentably common" in the service sector (Sliter & Boyd, 2015; p.225).

Service encounters between customers and employees or service providers could be viewed from a role theory perspective (Solomon et al., 1985). Role theory postulates that people are social actors whose behaviours are mainly dependent on how their roles evolve

and how they are defined. Roles, according to the theory, are linked to designated social positions and are brought about by normative expectations (Biddle, 1986). In service settings, each “actor” (e.g. customer or service provider) plays a role. This role consists of a group of learned and relatively standardised behaviours. When customers and service providers read from the same “script” which contains information about an individual’s own expected behaviour and the expected behaviour of others, the service encounter will be satisfying. However, if participants in service encounters fail to read from the same script, problems may arise (Solomon et al., 1985). In other words, for successful service encounters to take place, actors or role players must be able to predict the behaviours of each other.

Rude, impolite and uncivil treatment from customers towards employees is a violation of social norms (van Jaarsveld et al., 2010). Therefore, customer incivility towards service employees is viewed as a break of the normative script of a service interaction (Henkel et al., 2017). This deviation from scripted behaviours or discrepancy between role expectations and actual behaviours could result in increased confusion since the service encounter does not follow a predictable sequence anymore (Solomon et al., 1985). It will increase employees’ job demands which, in turn, will limit their physiological and psychological effort and result in higher fatigue (van Jaarsveld et al., 2010). Moreover, it will increase employees’ feelings of anger and decrease their feelings of happiness, and will make it difficult to comply with emotional display rules which dictate the emotions employees should express to conform to social and organisational norms (Rupp & Spencer, 2006). All this should lead to a decrease in work engagement and subsequent service-oriented OCBs (Matta et al., 2015).

Roles are a “key component” of work engagement (Matta et al., 2015; p.1689). Kahn (1990) relied on role theory to develop the concept and defined engagement as the harnessing of the self into one’s work role. Kahn (1990, 1992) further described engaged employees as those who are connected and engrossed in their role performances. According to Kahn (1990;

p.700), self and role are existent in “some dynamic, negotiable relation in which a person both drives personal energies into role behaviours (self-employment) and displays the self within the role (self-expression)”.

According to role theory, individual behaviours are usually in line with how their roles develop and are defined. Roles could expand or contract, and individuals will give personal resources to fulfil the social demands of their roles and accomplish their tasks (Kahn et al., 1964). In service settings, one of the main means through which roles could develop and expand is through becoming involved in self-initiated behaviours that go beyond the call of duty, promote the organisation’s image to outsiders, and help increase customer satisfaction (i.e. service or customer-oriented OCBs). Even though such behaviours are generally viewed as extra-role behaviours, individuals may expand their roles and define them more broadly, thus including service-oriented OCBs into their set of in-role behaviours (Matta et al., 2015).

As individuals become more engaged in their work roles and strongly attached to them, they will be more likely to engage in activities beyond their specific role requirements, such as service-oriented OCBs, and will view such activities as a “natural part” of their roles (Matta et al., 2015; p.1692). These assumptions are supported by recent research, which has shown that work engagement is positively related to service-oriented OCBs (e.g. Mostafa, 2019). On the contrary, employees with low levels of work engagement, as those experiencing incivility from customers, are less likely to use their expertise and skills in helping others and serving them, even if they have the ability to facilitate customers’ needs and make extra-role contributions (Bakker & Xanthopoulou 2013; Luu, 2019). Such employees will be unlikely to view such contributions as a part of their roles because their conception of the customer’s role is different from the customer’s notion of that role. Less engaged workers are emotionally withdrawn and less prepared to exert effort (Moliner et al.,

2008; Lyu et al., 2016). They have lower dedication and enthusiasm, and lack persistence and passion for efficient completion of tasks. Therefore, they are less likely to have enough energy to go the extra mile and display discretionary service-oriented OCBs (Lyu et al., 2016). Accordingly, it is proposed that customer incivility will be associated with reduced service-oriented OCBs through restraining work engagement.

Hypothesis 1: Work engagement mediates the relationship between customer incivility and service-oriented OCBs.

The Moderating Role of Servant Leadership

Servant leadership has been recently defined as “an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community” (Eva et al., 2018; p.4). Servant leaders generally view themselves as not only responsible for the success of the organisation, but also responsible for their subordinates wellbeing, empowerment and growth, as well as the wellbeing of the community and even the society as a whole (Eva et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2018; Lemoine et al., 2019). Thus, the distinctive focus of servant leadership is on “serving multiple stakeholders” (Lemoine et al., 2019; p.152).

Servant leadership is “holistic” in nature and incorporates different dimensions that are not totally addressed in other styles of leadership such as transformational, ethical and authentic leadership (Sendjaya & Cooper, 2011, p.417). For example, contrary to transformational leadership, which focuses mainly on motivating subordinates to achieve organisational objectives, servant leadership focuses on subordinates and their goals and aims (Hoch et al. 2018). Furthermore, in contrast to both ethical and authentic leadership, which also comprise moral elements, servant leadership is mainly concerned with the welfare of all

stakeholders of an organisation including subordinates and the wider society (Neubert, et al. 2008).

Based on role theory, this study posits that employees who experience customer or outsider incivility will be engaged in their work when they work under a servant leader. Role theory postulates that role behaviours are interdependent and the extent to which behaviours are viewed as appropriate is determined by others. In service settings, besides customers, *others* could also be supervisors or leaders. Leaders are important for role assignment and employees, as role players, will have to adjust their role behaviours according to the communication and feedback received from leaders regarding role expectations. If leaders and employees are in agreement, role consensus (i.e. the extent to which an individual's expectations or perceptions of the role conform with the expectations of the role senders; Matta et al., 2015) will be high (Solomon et al., 1985).

Servant leaders are generally viewed as role models who possess all the necessary knowledge required to reduce role uncertainty at work and increase role clarity (Zhao et al., 2016). When employees perceive low levels of uncertainty and know exactly what they are expected to do and how, they identify more with their work. This increased identification should be associated with increased levels of work engagement even if mistreated by others (Mostafa, 2019). Also, by communicating the value of ethical behaviour and highlighting to followers the importance of their work and how it contributes to the organisation and society as a whole, servant leaders are likely to enhance employees awareness of what is expected of them (Vullings et al., 2020). This should increase dedication at work, persistence and enthusiasm even in the case of customer incivility. Furthermore, servant leaders selflessly serve followers, treat them with respect and try to meet their needs via providing personal support and guidance (De Clercq et al., 2014; Newman et al., 2017). This demonstrates to employees that their supervisors are concerned and care about them (Sousa & van

Dierendonck, 2017) and contributes to the development of high quality social relationships between leaders and subordinates (Mostafa & Abed El-Motalib, 2019). This, in turn, should increase role consensus. As proposed by role theory, this consensus should reduce the tension produced from the discrepancies in expectations resulting from dealing with rude and impolite customers and should lead to increased levels of work engagement (Kahn et al., 1964). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Servant leadership moderates the relationship between customer incivility and work engagement, such that the negative relationship between incivility and engagement will be weaker when servant leadership is high compared to low.

Servant leaders are service-oriented leaders who selflessly strive to support and benefit others before themselves (Greenleaf, 1977). Besides striving to serve others, servant leaders also focus on preparing their subordinates to serve. They shape subordinates service-oriented values and reorient their self-concern to concern for others not only inside the organisation, but also outside (van Dierendonck et al., 2014; Eva et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2018). They empower followers to become prosocial agents or catalysts who could make a good difference in other people's lives (Eva et al., 2018).

In the service sector, servant leaders are more likely to emphasize the importance of prioritizing customers' needs and satisfying them (Wang et al., 2018). As a result, besides becoming more engaged at work, service employees working under a servant leader are also likely to display extra-role service performance behaviours even if customers are rude or impolite (Wang et al., 2018; Zheng et al., 2020). As discussed before, for such employees, going "beyond the call of duty" and displaying positive behaviours that support the social structure of the organisation is regarded as a natural part of their roles (Matta et al., 2015). Accordingly, it is proposed that the indirect relationship between customer incivility and

service-oriented OCBs via work engagement will be weaker when employees work under a servant leader.

Hypothesis 3: Servant leadership moderates the indirect relationship between customer incivility and service-oriented OCBs via work engagement, such that the mediated relationship will be weaker under high than low servant leadership.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The data were collected from nurses and their direct supervisors in thirty public hospitals in Romania using paper and pen questionnaires. Each hospital's management nominated a contact person. This person was responsible for distributing the questionnaires and collecting them back after completion from the nurses and their supervisors.

To minimise common method bias concerns, the dependent variable, service-oriented OCBs, was measured from supervisors while the other variables were measured from nurses. Furthermore, nurse data were collected through two surveys at two different phases (Podsakoff et al., 2012). In the first survey (at Time 1), nurses rated customer incivility, servant leadership, and two of the control variables in the study (i.e. transformational leadership and neuroticism). In the second survey, which was collected after two weeks (i.e. at Time 2), nurses provided data on the mediating variable, work engagement and another control variable (i.e. emotional exhaustion). Service-oriented OCBs were measured from supervisors after another two weeks (i.e. at Time 3). A cover letter, which informed all participants that their involvement in the study is voluntary and assured them anonymity, was attached to each questionnaire.

The supervisor survey was distributed to 79 supervisors, and 44 were returned, representing a response rate of almost 56%. As regards nurses, the first survey was distributed to 450 nurses, and 401 were returned (89% response rate). Out of the 401 nurses,

339 completed the survey at Time 2 (84.5% response rate). Most of the supervisors were female (64%), were less than 50 years old (65%), and had 10 years or more of tenure with their current hospital (79%). Of the 339 nurses in the final sample, 81% were female, 53% were aged below 40, and 63.4% had 10 years or less of tenure with their current hospital.

Measures

Brislin's (1970) back-translation procedure was employed to translate all the questionnaire items from English into Romanian. All measures were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Servant Leadership. Liden et al.'s (2008) 28-item scale was used to measure servant leadership. Four items measured each of the seven dimensions of the construct (i.e. emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically). Sample items are "My supervisor cares about my personal well-being" (emotional healing), "My supervisor is always interested in helping people in our community" (creating value for the community), "My supervisor can solve work problems with new or creative ideas" (conceptual skills), "My supervisor gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that I feel is best" (empowering), "My supervisor provides me with work experiences that enable me to develop new skills" (helping subordinates grow and succeed), "My supervisor does what she/he can do to make my job easier" (putting subordinates first), "My supervisor would not compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success" (behaving ethically). The alpha coefficient for the measures of the seven dimensions ranged between 0.872 and 0.932.

Outsider incivility. In healthcare or hospital settings, outsider or customer incivility could come from patients or their visitors (Nabb, 2000; Guidroz et al., 2010). A 10-item scale developed by Guidroz et al. (2010) was used to measure nurses' general experience of

outsider incivility. Sample items include “Patients/visitors make insulting comments to nurses” and “Patients/visitors are condescending to me”. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.920.

Work engagement. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) was used to measure work engagement. Five items were used to measure each of the three dimensions of engagement (i.e. vigor, dedication and absorption). Sample items are “At my job, I feel strong and vigorous” (vigor), “I am enthusiastic about my job” (dedication), and “When I am working, I forget everything else around me” (absorption). Cronbach’s alpha was 0.906 for vigor, 0.910 for dedication and 0.920 for absorption.

Employee service-oriented OCBs. Service-oriented OCBs were assessed with four items from Payne & Webber (2006). In line with recent research on service-oriented behaviours and performance (e.g. Wang et al., 2018; Mostafa, 2019; Zheng et al., 2020), these items were rated by supervisors. Sample items are “This employee works extra hours to serve patients” and “This employee comes in early or stays late to serve patients”. The alpha coefficient was 0.871.

Controls. Employees’ gender, age and organizational tenure were controlled for in the analysis. Women have lower job expectations than men and are usually satisfied with less at work (Furnham, 2012). They are also generally more sensitive and understanding of the social environment and the needs of others (Lin, 2008). Therefore, prior research and meta-analyses have shown that female employees demonstrate higher levels of work engagement and citizenship behaviours than males (Hakanen et al., 2019; Mackey et al., 2019). Older and longer tenured workers have more resources to manage work demands because they accumulate more work and organisational related knowledge over time, and their skills and values match their organisation’s demands and culture. Consequently, these workers have been found to be more engaged and exhibit more citizenship behaviours than younger and

shorter tenured employees (Ng & Feldman, 2008; Ng & Feldman, 2010; Kim & Kang, 2016; Hakanen et al., 2019).

Both transformational leadership and the personality trait of neuroticism were also controlled for. According to Antonakis (2017), when examining the effect of a leadership style on outcomes, controlling for competing correlated leadership styles is essential for minimising omitted variable bias and establishing incremental validity. Therefore, to assess the incremental validity of servant leadership, transformational leadership was controlled for in the analysis. Transformational leaders support followers and provide an environment in which followers feel positive about their work tasks (Tims et al., 2011; Bottomley et al., 2016). This, enhances employees' feelings of involvement and satisfaction with work and consequently increases their levels of work engagement (Tims et al., 2011). Transformational leaders also inspire employees to perform beyond expectations in a selfless manner (Guay & Choi, 2015). For this reason, transformational leadership has been found to be strongly related to citizenship behaviours (Guay & Choi, 2015; Bottomley et al., 2016). Four items developed by Podsakoff et al. (1990) were used to measure transformational leadership. The items measured four different dimensions: individualized consideration, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation (Bass, 1985). The alpha coefficient was 0.901 for transformational leadership.

As regards neuroticism, employees with high levels of neuroticism are incapable of coping with anxieties (Kim et al., 2009). High neuroticism is also associated with a lack of trust in others and suspicions regarding their motives (Raja and Johns, 2010). As a result, employees high on neuroticism have been found to be less engaged at work and less likely to exhibit citizenship behaviours (Kim et al., 2009; Raja and Johns, 2010). Three items from Judge et al.'s (2003) core-self evaluations scale were used to measure neuroticism. The alpha coefficient was 0.786.

Finally, prior research suggests that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between incivility and citizenship behaviours (Liu et al., 2019). Emotional exhaustion refers to “feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one’s emotional resources” (Maslach, 1993; pp. 20-21). Incivility targets are likely to experience increased exhaustion because of loss of resources. When feeling exhausted, employees will either withhold citizenship behaviours to avoid additional loss of resources, or fail to engage in citizenship behaviours because of absence of resources (Liu et al., 2019). Therefore, to assess whether work engagement will have a unique effect in explaining the link between customer incivility and service-oriented OCBs beyond exhaustion that could arise from resource depletion, the potential mediating influence of emotional exhaustion was controlled for. Eight items from the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI; Demerouti & Bakker 2008) were used to measure exhaustion. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.842.

As recommended by Becker et al. (2016), the hypotheses were tested with and without controls. Since the pattern of findings remained essentially the same, the results with the control variables are reported.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To assess the psychometric properties of the study constructs, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. Item parcels were created and used in the analysis as indicators of the latent variables. Parcels have greater reliability and commonality than individual items. They help reduce the indicator-to-sample ratio and lessen parameter estimates (Little et al., 2013). This is particularly useful with relatively small samples as in the case of this study. However, it is important to note that parcelling also has disadvantages. In particular, parcels could camouflage cross-loadings at the item level (Marsh et al., 2013). Despite this, if the aim of the research is to understand the relationships among latent constructs rather than among items, parcelling is recommended (Williams and O’Boyle, 2008).

For both servant leadership and work engagement, in line with prior leadership and work engagement research (e.g. Mostafa, 2019; Mostafa & Abed El-Motalib, 2019), the parcels were created by averaging each dimension's items. Accordingly, seven parcels were created for servant leadership and three were created for work engagement¹. For the other constructs (i.e. customer incivility, service-oriented OCBs, emotional exhaustion, transformational leadership and neuroticism), the parcels were formed by sequentially aggregating or averaging the items with the highest and lowest factor loadings. This resulted in five indicators or parcels for customer incivility, four for exhaustion, two for service-oriented OCBs, two for transformational leadership and two indicators for neuroticism.

The seven-factor measurement model yielded an acceptable fit ($\chi^2 = 883.638$, $df = 308$, $p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.908, TLI = 0.879, RMSEA = 0.074; Hu and Bentler, 1999). All indicators loaded significantly on their corresponding factors and the factor loadings ranged between 0.745 and 0.959. All composite reliabilities exceeded 0.80 and the average variance extracted (AVE) scores were more than 0.60, which suggests that all constructs had high internal consistency (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Furthermore, as Table 1 shows, the square root of the AVE was more than the correlations between constructs, which indicates that discriminant validity was also achieved (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Analytic Strategy

Nurse ratings were nested under supervisors and supervisors were grouped by hospitals. Additionally, the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) for service-oriented OCBs was 0.451. This indicates the presence of significant between-group variance. Therefore, the

¹ Prior to creating the parcels, a CFA was conducted for a second-order measurement model of servant leadership and a second-order model of work engagement. The seven dimensions of servant leadership and the three dimensions of work engagement were treated as first-order factors, and the observed items of these dimensions were the indicators of the first-order factors. The second-order factor loadings ranged between 0.73 and 0.879 for servant leadership, and ranged between 0.872 and 0.951 for work engagement, and all were significant at the $p < 0.01$ level.

hypotheses were tested using generalized multilevel structural equation modelling (GSEM) with STATA. Consistent with the recommendations of Hofmann et al. (2000), the composite scores of all variables were first grand mean centred. Then, the main mediator variable, work engagement, was regressed on the control variables, outsider incivility, servant leadership and their interaction term (outsider incivility \times servant leadership). The second mediator, emotional exhaustion, was regressed on the control variables and incivility. The outcome variable, service-oriented OCBs, was regressed on the controls, work engagement, emotional exhaustion, outsider incivility, servant leadership and their interaction term (Preacher et al., 2007; Hayes, 2013). All relationships in the model were tested concurrently.

The nonlinear combination of estimators command (nlcom) in STATA was used to estimate the mediation or indirect effect of outsider incivility on service-oriented OCBs via work engagement, and the conditional indirect effect of incivility on service OCBs via engagement at high and low levels of servant leadership. The nlcom command calculates test statistics, standard errors and confidence intervals based on the delta method. The delta method is less sensitive to departures from normality and has been found to produce more accurate confidence intervals than other methods such as the Krinsky Robb and the bootstrap methods, especially when the data is well-conditioned (Hole, 2007).

[Please Insert Table 1 About Here]

Hypotheses Testing Results

The full results of the moderated mediation model are presented in Table 2. Hypothesis 1 predicted that work engagement mediates the relationship between customer incivility and service-oriented OCBs. Incivility was negatively related to work engagement ($\beta = -0.152, p < 0.01$) which, in turn, was positively related to service-oriented OCBs ($\beta = 0.229, p < 0.01$).

Moreover, the indirect effect of incivility on OCBs via engagement was significant ($\beta = -0.035, p < 0.05, 95\% \text{ CI} = -0.065 \text{ to } -0.005$). Together, these results suggest that work engagement mediates the relationship between customer incivility and service-oriented OCBs, providing support for Hypothesis 1.

[Please Insert Table 2 About Here]

Hypothesis 2 predicted that servant leadership moderates the relationship between customer incivility and work engagement. The interaction term of incivility and servant leadership was significant and positive ($\beta = 0.090, p < 0.01$). Figure 2 shows the simple slope plot for this interaction following Aiken and West's (1991) procedure. The relationship between incivility and work engagement was non-significant and weaker when servant leadership perceptions were high ($\beta = -0.043, SE = 0.052, t = -0.84, p > 0.10$) than when servant leadership perceptions were low ($\beta = -0.261, SE = 0.063, t = -4.13, p < 0.01$). Hypothesis 2 was therefore supported.

[Please Insert Figure 2 About Here]

Hypothesis 3 predicted that servant leadership moderates the indirect relationship between incivility and service-oriented OCBs through work engagement. As Table 3 shows, the indirect relationship between incivility and OCBs via engagement was significant and negative when servant leadership was low ($\beta = -0.060, p < 0.05, 95\% \text{ CI} = -0.108 \text{ to } -0.012$) but was non-significant when servant leadership was high ($\beta = -0.010, p > 0.10, 95\% \text{ CI} = -0.034 \text{ to } 0.014$). Moreover, the index of moderated mediation was significant (index = 0.027,

$SE = 0.012$, 95% CI = 0.008 to 0.052). These findings confirm the moderated mediation. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was also supported².

[Please Insert Table 3 About Here]

Discussion

The focus of this study was on *how* and *why* incivility is related to employee outcomes. The study examined the mediating role of work engagement on the relationship between customer incivility and service-oriented OCBs, as well as the moderating role of servant leadership on this mediated relationship. In line with the proposed hypotheses, the study found that work engagement mediates the customer incivility-service citizenship behaviours relationship. The findings also support the moderating role of servant leadership on this indirect relationship.

Theoretical Implications

In this study, role theory was introduced to provide a better understanding of the relationship between customer incivility and service-oriented citizenship behaviours. Consistent with prior research (Zhu et al., 2019), the results revealed that work engagement plays a central role in the customer incivility-service OCBs link as it fully mediates this relationship. In line with role theory, this suggests that rude and disrespectful actions of customers are viewed by employees as a violation of social norms and a break of the normative script of a service interaction (van Jaarsveld et al., 2010; Henkel et al., 2017). It supports the notion that

² The hypotheses were supported without including control variables in the model. Incivility was negatively related to work engagement ($\beta = -0.142$, $p < 0.01$) which, in turn, was positively related to service-oriented OCBs ($\beta = 0.237$, $p < 0.01$). Moreover, the indirect effect of incivility on OCBs via engagement was significant ($\beta = -0.034$, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = -0.056 to -0.009). As regards the moderating role of servant leadership on the relationship between customer incivility and work engagement, the interaction term of incivility and servant leadership was significant and positive ($\beta = 0.059$, $p < 0.01$). Finally, the indirect relationship between incivility and OCBs via engagement was significant and negative when servant leadership was low ($\beta = -0.051$, $p < 0.01$, 95% CI = -0.089 to -0.013) but was non-significant when servant leadership was high ($\beta = -0.017$, $p > 0.10$, 95% CI = -0.040 to 0.006). The index of moderated mediation was also significant (index = 0.037, $SE = 0.018$, 95% CI = 0.004 to 0.073).

expectation discrepancies are “detrimental to work engagement” (Matta et al., 2015; 1702) and confirms that employees with low levels of work engagement will be unlikely to view service-oriented behaviours as part of their roles because their conception of the customer’s role is different from the customer’s notion of that role.

Overall, the study extends the dominant view of the relationship between workplace incivility and employee outcomes. As noted before, scholars have mostly relied on Hobfoll’s (1989) COR theory to understand the consequences of incivility. In particular, it has been proposed that customer incivility reduces engagement in service behaviours because it depletes resources (e.g. Sliter et al., 2010; Sliter et al., 2012; Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). The use of role theory helps offer an alternative view regarding the mechanisms or processes through which customer incivility is related to service-oriented behaviours. Motivational processes such as work engagement are important in service contexts (Zheng et al., 2020). Therefore, future research could examine other motivational-related mechanisms, such as empowerment or work meaningfulness, to advance the understanding of the processes through which customer incivility is related to service employees’ behaviours.

The study also extends knowledge regarding the moderators or buffers of the relationship between outsider mistreatment and service citizenship behaviours. Prior research has shown that employees encountering uncivil treatment from customers engage in extra-role customer service only when they have high supervisor support (Zhu et al., 2019). This study extends previous research and offers insight about the role of servant leadership in coping with outsider mistreatment. As noted before, servant leadership is holistic in nature and incorporates dimensions that are not addressed in other leadership styles (Sendjaya & Cooper, 2011). It is concerned with the welfare of all of organisational stakeholders including subordinates and the wider society (Neubert, et al. 2008). The study findings revealed that servant leaders are important for reducing the negative consequences of outsider

mistreatment on service employees. In particular, servant leadership helped attenuate or buffer the negative relationship between outsider incivility, work engagement and consequently service-oriented OCBs. This suggests that servant leaders help reduce role uncertainty and increase role consensus, which, as proposed by role theory, motivates employees to become more engaged at work and display service-oriented citizenship behaviours even if disrespectfully treated by outsiders.

Previous studies linking incivility and leadership have mainly focused on negative leadership styles such as abusive supervision (e.g. Lyu et al., 2016), and very few studies have considered positive leadership behaviours (e.g. Arnold & Walsh, 2015). The focus in this study was on servant leadership because this leadership style has been found to be one of the major factors that help promote employee service behaviours (Wang et al., 2018). The fact that servant leadership was found to moderate the relationship between outsider mistreatment, work engagement and consequently service-oriented OCBs helps contribute to the incivility and leadership literatures, and underlines the importance of considering other positive leadership styles such as ethical or authentic leadership when examining the consequences of workplace incivility.

Finally, this study enhances the understanding of the antecedents of service employees work engagement and the boundary conditions in which it is more likely to take place. Previous research suggests that employees work engagement is of big importance in the service sector (Mostafa, 2019; Zheng et al., 2020). Therefore, identifying the factors that can enhance employees' engagement and the conditions in which job demands will give rise to it is of high significance (Zhu et al., 2019). This study has shown that service employees working under servant leaders will handle outsider mistreatment more efficiently and will be more engaged than employees who don't work under such leaders. Future research may wish

to consider other antecedents and boundary conditions of service employees work engagement.

Practical Implications

The study findings show the importance of minimising customer incivility in service organisations as much as possible. Even though organisations do not have much control over customers, they could still reduce incivility through a number of strategies. For example, service organisations could seek continuous feedback from customers to ensure that service failures are properly and quickly addressed. This will help ensure that good quality service is provided to customers and will consequently reduce uncivil treatment from them (Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). Organisations also need to ensure that employees are properly selected, trained and prepared. Knowledgeable and skilled employees are more likely to meet customer expectations and, therefore, will reduce the probability that customers be uncivil (Sliter et al., 2012). Organisations could also adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards customers who mistreat employees. Besides reducing incivility, this will also signal to employees that the organisation cares about their respect and dignity. For example, many hospitals use signs to remind patients as well as their families and visitors to be respectful and courteous to staff (Shao & Skarlicki, 2014).

The findings also suggest that servant leadership plays an important role in reducing the negative effect of customer incivility on work engagement and consequently service-oriented behaviours. Therefore, service organisations should seek to promote servant leadership. This could be through using servant leadership behaviours as a basis for selecting supervisors in service organisations. In particular, organisations could choose supervisors based on qualities like integrity, service orientation and altruism (Mostafa & Abed El-Motalib, 2019). Organisations could also benefit from offering training for supervisors to display to their subordinates' servant leadership behaviours such as satisfying their needs at

work and supporting them to enhance their career growth (Wang et al., 2018; Mostafa & Abed El-Motalib, 2019). Taking into account the key attributes of servant leadership when designing performance evaluations for supervisors would also encourage supervisors to demonstrate servant behaviours in their everyday work (Ling et al., 2016).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has some limitations. First, even though the causal relationships between the study variables have been delineated theoretically, the cross-sectional design of this research limits the ability to establish causality. Experimental or longitudinal designs are needed to address causality. Second, this study focused on one service-related outcome, which is service-oriented behaviours, and relied on supervisors' ratings of these behaviours. Future research testing other outcomes and relying on more objective measures or indicators of service performance or customer data (e.g. number of customer complaints or customer satisfaction) would help provide a clearer picture of the impact of customer incivility and the effectiveness of servant leadership. Third, the focus in this study was on a single mediator (i.e. work engagement) and a single moderator (i.e. servant leadership) of the relationship between customer incivility and service-oriented OCBs. It is possible that other factors such as prosocial motivation, which refers to an individual's desire or willingness to advance the wellbeing of others (Grant & Berg, 2011), may mediate this relationship. Also, factors such as task significance and perceived social impact have been found to be related to increased dedication at work and helping behaviours (Grant, 2008), and could possibly help reduce the negative impact of customer incivility on employee outcomes. Future research may wish to consider these as well as other mediating and moderating variables. Fourth, in this study, the sample size was too small to simultaneously examine the moderating role of the individual dimensions of servant leadership. It is possible that differential effects exist for the different dimensions (van Dierendonck, 2011). Therefore, future research could investigate the

moderating role of the dimensions of servant leadership on the relationship between outsider mistreatment and employee outcomes. The same applies to work engagement (Graça et al., 2019). Future studies could concurrently examine the mediating role of the work engagement dimensions on the relationship between incivility and OCBs, and differentiate the influence of each dimension. Finally, the study data were collected from a sample of Romanian public hospital nurses and their supervisors, which limits the wider applicability of the results. To ascertain the generalizability of the findings, the research model of this study needs to be tested in different contexts and countries.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Table 1. Intercorrelations, Reliability Estimates and Descriptive Statistics

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender										
2. Age	-0.022									
3. Organisational Tenure	-0.051	0.686								
4. Neuroticism	-0.063	-0.020	0.071	0.931,(0.928)						
5. Transformational Leadership	-0.079	0.227	0.173	-0.172	0.866,(0.857)					
6. Emotional Exhaustion	0.009	-0.135	-0.145	0.141	-0.472	0.780,(0.861)				
7. Customer Incivility	-0.092	-0.050	0.021	0.503	-0.058	0.037	0.837,(0.921)			
8. Servant Leadership	-0.062	0.254	0.148	-0.175	0.760	-0.492	-0.066	0.777,(0.914)		
9. Work Engagement	0.002	0.160	0.133	-0.173	0.471	-0.754	-0.205	0.574	0.858,(0.893)	
10. Service OCBs	-0.075	0.246	0.228	-0.168	0.457	-0.373	-0.023	0.497	0.476	0.887,(0.881)
Mean	1.83	2.39	2.23	3.23	5.12	2.83	3.05	4.91	5.41	5.32
SD	0.38	0.97	1.14	1.40	1.38	0.99	1.36	1.21	1.09	1.10

Note: Sub-diagonal entries are the latent construct inter-correlations. The first entry on the diagonal is the AVE square root and the second (in parentheses) is the composite reliability estimate; All correlations above 0.15 are significant at $p < 0.01$, correlations above 0.10 and below 0.15 are significant at $p < 0.05$, and correlations below 0.10 are non-significant

Table 2. Results of Moderated Mediation Model

	Work Engagement		Emotional Exhaustion		Service-Oriented OCBs	
	β (<i>SE</i>)	<i>t</i>	β (<i>SE</i>)	<i>t</i>	β (<i>SE</i>)	<i>t</i>
<i>Control Variables</i>						
Gender	0.223(0.156)	1.43	-0.181(0.159)	-1.14	0.200(0.174)	1.14
Age	-0.005(0.077)	-0.07	0.030(0.078)	0.38	0.027(0.078)	0.35
Organizational Tenure	0.051(0.066)	0.77	-0.068(0.066)	-1.03	0.078(0.066)	1.18
Neuroticism	-0.015(0.044)	-0.34	0.109(0.045)	2.43**	-0.076(0.046)	-1.66*
Transformational Leadership	0.101(0.053)	1.89*	-0.265(0.039)	-6.75***	0.100(0.055)	1.79*
<i>Predictor Variable</i>						
Customer Incivility	-0.152(0.044)	-3.47***	-0.037(0.044)	-0.83	0.020(0.051)	0.38
<i>Moderator Variable</i>						
Servant Leadership	0.340(0.063)	5.41***			0.126(0.071)	1.77*
<i>Mediator Variables</i>						
Work Engagement					0.229(0.075)	3.06***
Emotional Exhaustion					0.127(0.075)	1.69*
<i>Interaction Effect</i>						
Patient Incivility \times Servant Leadership	0.090(0.031)	2.91***			-0.028(0.031)	-0.91

Notes: *SE* refers to standard errors* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Table 3. GSEM Results for Servant Leadership as a Moderator of the Indirect Effect of Patient Incivility on Service-Oriented OCBs via Work Engagement

	β (<i>SE</i>)	Indirect Effect	95% CI of Indirect Effect
Low Servant Leadership	-0.060 (0.024)	-2.46**	(-0.108, -0.012)
Mean Servant Leadership	-0.035 (0.015)	-2.30**	(-0.065, -0.005)
High Servant Leadership	-0.010 (0.012)	-0.81	(-0.034, 0.014)

Notes: *SE* refers to standard errors and CI refers to confident intervals.

** $p < 0.05$

Figure 1. The Conceptual Model

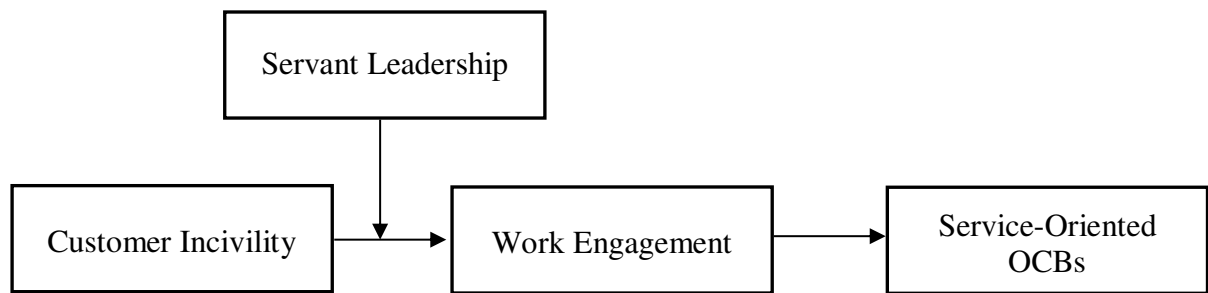


Figure 2. The Moderating Role of Servant Leadership in the Relationship between Customer Incivility and Work Engagement

