

Is Boreout a Threat to Frontline Employees' Innovative Work Behavior?*

Ruth Maria Stock

With the recognition that innovation is the lifeblood of competitive firms, researchers have investigated multiple antecedents of employees' innovative work behaviors. Most studies focus on supportive work conditions, work requirements, or even high work challenges as drivers of innovative work behavior as the extent to which frontline employees (FLEs) generate new problem-solving ideas and transform these into uses during the service encounter. This study focuses instead on a lack of resources at the service encounter. Specifically, boreout is a negative psychological state of low work-related arousal, manifested in three main forms: a crisis of meaning at work, job boredom, and crisis of growth. According to the conservation of resources theory, these three dimensions of job boreout as lack of resources draw energy from FLEs and thus, likely affect innovative work behavior. Data from 142 FLEs and their customers confirm that these dimensions of boreout affect FLEs' innovative work behavior, though in varying ways. A crisis of meaning at work and crisis of growth both impede innovative work behavior, but job boredom has no effect. Furthermore, support provided by customers moderates the relationships of these three boreout dimensions with innovative work behavior in unique ways.

Innovation is the lifeblood of competitive firms (Atuahene-Gima, 2003; Leenders and Wierenga, 2008), and practitioners and academics alike endorse the view that innovative employees contribute to firm success (Axtell et al., 2000; Smith, 2002; Unsworth and Parker, 2003). In particular, the ability of frontline employees (FLEs) to be innovative at the customer interface appears critical because products have become increasingly interchangeable (Cho and Pucik, 2005; Payne, Storbacka, and Frow, 2008). Firms such as Fujitsu thus define the innovation behavior of their FLEs as a critical requirement for serving customers in a superior manner (QinetiQ, 2008). FLEs are those employees who have frequent personal interactions with customers, with the purpose of serving them (Karatepe and Kilic, 2009; Zablah, Franke, Brown, and Bartholomew, 2012). As such, they come to know their customers through direct interactions and should be able to offer new ideas and solutions for meeting customer requirements (Ramdas, Teisberg, and Tucker, 2012).

Innovative work behavior by FLEs, defined as the extent to which FLEs generate new problem-solving ideas and transform these into uses during the service encounter, is essential at the customer interface for four main reasons. First, FLEs face varying customers with unique needs and wants, so they must be flexible and innovative to satisfy the needs of these heterogeneous customer bases (Dubinsky, Howell, Ingram, and Bellenger, 1986). Second, customer requirements continuously change, so FLEs constantly must “seek innovative solutions to dynamic customer needs” (Coelho, Augusto, Coelho, and Sa, 2010, p. 1348). Third, FLEs represent the service at the customer interface (Di Mascio, 2010; Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler, 2009), so their innovative work behaviors can contribute to the firm's positive, innovative image (De Jong and Vermeulen, 2003; Selden and MacMillan, 2006). Fourth, from a long-term perspective, FLEs represent an important source of information about changes in customer needs. Firms require this valuable information to keep adapting their offers to customers' needs (De Jong and Vermeulen, 2003; Lievens and Moenaert, 2000). In this sense, firms' efforts to satisfy customers succeed only insofar as their FLEs exhibit innovative behaviors (Cadwallader, Jarvis, Bitner, and Ostrom, 2010; Lievens and Moenaert, 2000). Despite the importance of FLEs' innovative work behavior though, this topic remains largely overlooked in extant research (Umashankar, Srinivasan, and Hindman, 2011).

Address correspondence to: Ruth Maria Stock, Department of Marketing and Human Resource Management, Technische Universität Darmstadt, Hochschulstr. 1, 64287 Darmstadt, Germany. E-mail: rsh@stockhomburg.de. Tel: +49-6151-16-7322.

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Yet simultaneously, many firms have been investing in tactics to improve FLEs' behaviors during service encounters, such as display rules (e.g., Grandey, 2000, 2003), electronic performance monitoring (e.g., Holman, 2002), and scripted interactions (Batt and Moynihan, 2002; Wilk and Moynihan, 2005), that aim mainly to increase profitability at the service encounter. Such organizational controls seek to ensure that FLEs provide a high level of service to customers (Lawler, Mohrman, and Ledford, 1995). However, they can become extreme, such as when firms require FLEs to read a script like robots, not letting them deviate, or do what is necessary to serve customer needs (Graban, 2010). In this sense, FLEs may lack chances for growth or creativity during service encounters (Walker, 2009).

For FLEs, such standardization makes the customer interaction far less exciting (Purohit, 2010). This lack of excitement might help explain findings in recent managerial studies that indicate approximately 20% of FLEs are demotivated (Skaer, 2006; Uduji, 2009). Because a lack of on-the-job challenges supports habituation and impedes creativity (Van Dyne, Jehn, and Cummings, 2002), FLEs' low work-related arousal might be a threat to innovative work behaviors—that is, the extent to which they generate new problem-solving ideas and transform these ideas into uses (see Janssen, 2000)—during service encounters.

Rather than addressing the problematic lack of challenges in service encounters, most extant research highlights supportive work conditions, such as leadership (e.g., Krause, 2004; Michaelis, Stegmaier, and Sonntag, 2009, 2010; Scott and Bruce, 1994), job design (e.g., Dorenbosch, van Engen, and Verhagen, 2005), and job autonomy (Ramamoorthy, Flood, Slattery, and Sardesai, 2005). In addition, a few studies reveal that job challenges and demands affect innovative work behaviors (e.g., De Jong and Kemp, 2003; Janssen, 2000). This

study takes a different approach by examining the behavioral innovation outcomes of FLEs' boreout, defined as a negative psychological state of low arousal that is manifested in three forms: a crisis of meaning at work, job boredom, and crisis of growth. With a focus on the innovativeness of interpersonal services, which require “close, personal contact between customers and employees” (Meuter, Bitner, Ostrom, and Brown, 2005, p. 61), this study addresses two key research questions.

1. *How do different dimensions of FLE boreout—crisis of meaning at work, job boredom, and crisis of growth—affect FLEs' innovative behavior?* Conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001, 2011) indicates that these three dimensions of boreout may represent a loss of resources, deriving from a lack of challenges at work which, thus, hinder FLEs to generate new ideas during the customer interaction or engage in innovative work behavior. Thus, all three dimensions of FLEs' boreout likely harm innovative work behavior.
2. *How does informational support by customers affect the relationship between FLEs' boreout and innovative work behavior?* A few existing studies examine employee gender or task type as moderators of the relationship between antecedents and innovative work behavior (Imran, Zaheer, and Noreen, 2011; Reuvers, van Engen, Vinkenburg, and Wilson-Evered, 2008; Scott and Bruce, 1994). This study strives to shed light on customers' influence as an external resource. Customers provide valuable information at the service encounter (Auh, Bell, McLeod, and Shih, 2007; Chen, Tsou, and Ching, 2011; Hoyer, Chandy, Dorotic, Krafft, and Singh, 2010), and according to COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001, 2011), support provided by customers may buffer the detrimental effects of boreout on FLEs' innovative work behavior.

With data from 142 FLEs, this study tests several hypotheses regarding the innovation behavior outcomes of FLEs' boreout. To determine the validity of self-assessed innovative work behavior by FLEs, this research also includes its correlation with customers' perceptions, using 43 employee–customer dyads (two to three customers per dyad).

Literature Review

Extant literature offers valuable insights into innovation behavior, focused mainly on its antecedents, including the development, promotion, and realization of ideas

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Dr. Ruth Maria Stock is a professor of marketing and human resource management at Technische Universität Darmstadt, Germany. She holds a Ph.D. in marketing from the University of Mannheim, Germany, and a habilitation degree from the University of the Federal Armed Forces Hamburg, Germany. Her primary research areas are innovation management, customer relationship management, and leadership. She is currently a visiting scholar at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and has published in various forums, including *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, and *Psychology and Marketing*.

(Axtell et al., 2000; Imran et al., 2011; Janssen, 2000).¹ Prior studies often examine employees' innovative work behavior in blue-collar work contexts, such as among machine operators (Axtell, Holman, and Wall, 2006; Axtell et al., 2000) or production employees (Ramamoorthy et al., 2005). Other studies have surveyed employees who never engage in direct customer contact (Choi and Price, 2005; Dorenbosch et al., 2005; Janssen, 2000) or managers (Michaelis et al., 2009, 2010). An extensive review revealed only one study that considered the innovative behavior of FLEs (De Jong and Kemp, 2003), which provides valuable insights about how job challenges and external contacts affect coworkers' innovative work behaviors—but without examining lack of challenges. Rather, most studies of innovative behavior investigate supportive antecedents, such as leadership (Krause, 2004; Michaelis et al., 2009, 2010; Scott and Bruce, 1994), job autonomy (Ramamoorthy et al., 2005), and job design (Dorenbosch et al., 2005). A few studies also note firm requirements, such as job challenges (Janssen, 2000) and perceived obligations to innovate (Ramamoorthy et al., 2005), as antecedents of innovative work behaviors. Table 1 summarizes this line of research.

Most studies implicitly assume that a certain level of challenge is required in a job to inspire employees to exhibit innovative work behavior. Although they are increasingly common in FLEs' work settings, lack of challenges and their effects have not been studied. Nor has prior research sufficiently investigated potential contingency factors that might moderate the strength of the relationship between antecedents and FLEs' innovative behavior. Some existing studies suggest moderation by employees' characteristics, such as gender (Imran et al., 2011; Reuvers et al., 2008), behaviors, such as work engagement (Aryee, Walumbwa, Zhou, and Hartnell, 2012), and task type (Scott and Bruce, 1994). Customer-related variables have not been examined as contingency factors, a gap that seems surprising, considering the conventional wisdom that customers are essential to the innovation generation process (e.g., Fang, 2008; Stock and Zacharias, 2011).

¹ A closely related construct is *individual innovative behavior*, or “the process of bringing new problem solving ideas into use” (Xerri and Brunetto, 2011, p. 968). It consists of various practices, such as opportunity exploration, idea generation, championing, and application. Because individual innovative behavior and innovative work behavior are closely related concepts, the literature review includes related studies from both traditions.

Framework and Hypotheses Development

Study Framework

This study strives to gain deeper insights into how FLEs' boreout affects innovative work behavior. The dependent variable is FLEs' innovative work behavior. When FLEs express such behaviors, they generate new ideas for the customer encounter, during their interaction with customers, rather than relying on standard procedures. Furthermore, the framework contains three dimensions of FLE boreout as independent variables, including three components: (1) crisis of meaning at work, (2) job boredom, and (3) crisis of growth (see Figure 1).

In turn, the conceptualization of each of the three dimensions of FLEs' boreout also reflects personal identity theory (Dutton, Roberts, and Bednar, 2010), which suggests that people strive for positive self-definitions, manifested in three essential conditions (Dutton et al., 2010; Gecas, 1982; Turner, 1982). First, an FLE perceives his or her work as meaningful. In contrast, FLEs who suffer from boreout “see no meaning in work activities and know well how unimportant the tasks appear to them” (Rothlin and Werder, 2008, p. 15). Thus, FLE boreout is manifested as a *crisis of meaning at work*, defined as the extent to which a person perceives his or her work as futile (Douglas, Gilson, and Harter, 2004; Renn and Vandenberg, 1995). During the service encounter, FLEs likely suffer from a crisis of meaning at work if the spirit of delivering superior service gets lost, due to an imposed standardization or fragmentation of the service delivery process (Purohit, 2010; Walker, 2009).

Second, the FLE believes that his or her contribution is needed by others, which depends on the extent to which that person is challenged at work. In this case of low challenges related to low and unsatisfactory stimuli, the manifestation of boreout likely involves *job boredom* during the service encounter (Kass, Wallace, and Vodanovich, 2003; Loukidou, Loan-Clarke, and Daniels, 2009). It consists of an employee's irritation about low work-related stimuli (see Kass, Vadanovich, and Callender, 2001).

Third, the FLE grows continuously in terms of her or his personality. If FLEs perceive no opportunities for personal growth at work (see Dutton et al., 2010), they likely perceive that they lack interesting experiences or chances to develop their task-related and personal skills, such that their poor self-definition at work reemerges. This phenomenon has been referred to as *crisis of growth*, defined as the extent to which a person perceives that his or her work does not provide opportunities for

Table 1. Research on Antecedents of Employees' Innovative Behavior

Authors (year)	Empirical Study	Antecedents of Employees' Innovative Behavior
Axtell et al. (2000)	<i>n</i> = 148 machine operators/ beverage manufacturer in the United Kingdom/C/ moderated RA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Idea suggestion is more strongly related to personal/job characteristics than to group/ organizational characteristics. Implementation of ideas is more strongly predicted by group and organizational characteristics. There are interactions between the number of suggestions made and group and organizational characteristics.
Axtell et al. (2006)	<i>n</i> = 85 production employees/U.K. beverages manufacturing plant/L/RA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in idea implementation relate to changes in management support. Changes in suggestion making relate to job control changes. Changes in idea implementation are linked to changes in team support for innovation.
Basu and Green (1997)	<i>n</i> = 225 employees, 58 supervisors/ manufacturing plant in the United States/C/RA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LMX quality and some of its outcomes are positively related to supervisors' perceptions of innovative behaviors of followers. There is a negative relationship between TFL and innovative behavior.
Carmeli, Meitar, and Weisberg (2006)	<i>n</i> = 175 employees and supervisors/6 firms in Israel/C/PA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-leadership skills foster innovative behavior at work. Behavior-focused strategies (component of self-leadership) are directed toward enhancing the self-consciousness and the management of essential, sometimes unpleasant, behaviors. Income has a positive relationship with innovative behavior.
Chen and Aryee (2007)	<i>n</i> = 171 employees and supervisors/China/C/RA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delegation (empowerment) positively relates to innovative behavior. Organization-based self-esteem and perceived insider status (self-concept constructs), both relate positively to innovative behavior and mediate the delegation–innovative behavior relationship. Traditionality positively moderates the relationship between delegation and innovative behavior.
Choi and Price (2005)	<i>n</i> = 178 white-collar worker/Korean electronics company/C/ polynomial RA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Congruence between innovation values and personal values relates more strongly to employees' commitment to implementation than to implementation behavior. Congruence between required and current abilities relates more strongly to implementation behavior than commitment to implementation. Commitment to implementation relates more strongly to environmental characteristics (innovation values), whereas implementation behavior relates more strongly to personal characteristics (personal values, current abilities).
De Jong and Kemp (2003)	<i>n</i> = 360 persons working in knowledge-intensive service firms/C/RA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perceptions of job challenge, autonomy, strategic attention, and external contacts positively affect coworkers' IIB. Operating in a market where firms compete on differentiation positively affects IIB. An innovation-supportive firm climate and high variation in demand do not <i>directly</i> affect IIB.
Dorenbosch et al. (2005)	<i>n</i> = 450 employees/Dutch government organization/C/RA	Multifunctional job design and the perceived HRM system promote employee involvement in innovative activities through increased feelings of ownership for work-related issues and problems.
Holman et al. (2012)	<i>n</i> = 327 employees/vehicle manufacturer in the United Kingdom/C/SEM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning strategies mediate the relationship between job design and idea generation. The effects of job control on idea generation are mediated by work-based learning strategies. The effects of problem demand on idea generation are partially mediated by work-based learning strategies. Problem demand relates to idea generation and idea promotion.
Imran et al. (2011)	<i>n</i> = 320 top, middle managers/ telecommunication in Pakistan/C/RA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TFL positively affects IWB. Gender moderates the relationship between TFL and IWB.
Jafri (2010)	<i>n</i> = 80 executives/retailing/ C/RA	Innovative behavior is positively affected by affective commitment and negatively affected by continuance commitment.
Janssen (2000)	<i>n</i> = 170 employees, 110 supervisors/Dutch food producers/C/RA	Job demands only affect IWB when employees perceive effort–reward fairness rather than effort–reward unfairness.
Janssen (2003)	<i>n</i> = 76 teachers/Dutch secondary school/C/RA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovative behavior is more positively related to conflict with co-workers and negatively related to satisfaction with co-worker relations for highly involved workers. Conflict and reduced satisfaction with co-worker relations emerge for innovative workers who consider their job performance to be a central aspect of their self-concept.

Table 1. Continued

Authors (year)	Empirical Study	Antecedents of Employees' Innovative Behavior
Janssen (2005)	<i>n</i> = 170 employees and supervisors/Dutch energy firm/C/RA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor supportiveness moderates the relationship between employees' perceived influence in the workplace and their levels of innovative behavior. • When supervisors are perceived as being supportive of employee innovation, employees feel encouraged to use their influence to carry out innovative activities at work.
Krause (2004)	<i>n</i> = 399 middle managers/Germany/C/RA	Leadership (granting freedom and autonomy, using expert knowledge and information) positively affects IWB and negatively affects innovation blocking behaviors.
Lee (2008)	<i>n</i> = 201 R&D professionals/2 firms in Singapore/C/RA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TFL affects innovativeness positively. • TFL affects LMX, as well as followers' innovativeness. • Loyalty is positively associated with innovativeness.
Messmann and Mulder (2011)	<i>n</i> = 9 teachers/6 vocational colleges in Germany/C/qual. interviews	Encouraging teachers to act on opportunities for change and by establishing a collaborative structure at schools facilitates innovation development.
Michaelis et al. (2009)	<i>n</i> = 194 employees working in R&D teams/German automotive firm/C/SEM	Charismatic leadership and trust in top management both relate positively to innovation implementation behavior, controlling for followers' individual differences, management level, and department affiliation; both relationships were mediated by followers' affective commitment to change.
Michaelis et al. (2010)	<i>n</i> = 198 R&D managers/German automotive firm/C/RA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TFL increases followers' innovation behavior; this relationship is moderated by followers' levels of climate for initiative. • Commitment to change mediates the relationship between TFL and followers' innovation implementation behavior.
Pieterse, van Knippenberg, Schippers, and Stam (2010)	<i>n</i> = 231 employees/Dutch government agency/C/RA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TFL is only positively related to innovative behavior when psychological empowerment is high. • TAL negatively relates to innovative behavior only in these conditions.
Ramamoorthy et al. (2005)	<i>n</i> = 204 employees/Irish manufacturing firms/C/PA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived obligation to innovate, job autonomy, and pay directly affect IWB; pay and job autonomy indirectly affect IWB through perceived obligation to innovate. • Organizational process of meritocracy, equity perceptions, and procedural justice perceptions indirectly affect IWB.
Rank, Nelson, Allen, and Xu (2009)	<i>n</i> = 161 employees and supervisors/24 German firms/C/RA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TFL (TAL) is positively (negatively) related to innovation. • Self-esteem moderates the relationships between leadership and innovation. • Self-presentation moderates relationships between leadership and task performance. • Lack of self-confidence combined with lack of inspiring leadership is more detrimental to novelty introduction.
Reuvers et al. (2008)	<i>n</i> = 335 managers of 4 Australian hospitals/C/RA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a positive relationship between TFL and IWB. • Gender of the managers moderates the relationship.
Sanders, Moorkamp, Torka, Groeneveld, and Groeneveld (2010)	<i>n</i> = 272 employees/Dutch and German firms/C/RA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both LMX and satisfaction with HR practices are positively related to innovative behavior. • Satisfaction with HR practices mediates the relationship between LMX and innovative behavior.
Scott and Bruce (1994)	<i>n</i> = 172 engineers, scientists, technicians/U.S. industrial corp./C/SEM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership, individual problem-solving style, and work group relations affect IWB directly and indirectly through their influence on perceptions of the climate for innovation. • Task type moderates the relationship between leader role expectations and IWB.
Xerri and Brunetto (2011)	<i>n</i> = 85 engineers/Australian SMEs in services sector/C/RA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tie strength, sociability, and organizational culture affect the usefulness of workplace social networks for problem solving. • Perceived usefulness of workplace social networks affects the innovative behavior of engineering SME employees.
Yuan and Woodman (2010)	<i>n</i> = 238 employees, leaders/U.S. companies, IT, chem. industry, manufacturing/C/SEM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IIB is affected by expected image/risk gains and expected positive performance outcomes. • Expected image/risk gains and positive performance outcomes are affected by perceived organizational support for innovation, supervisor-related quality, innovation job requirements and reputation, and dissatisfaction with status quo.

PA, path analysis; RA, regression analysis; SEM, structural equation modeling; C, cross-sectional study; L, longitudinal study; TFL, transformational leadership; TAL, transactional leadership; LMX, leader-member-exchange; IWB, innovative work behavior; IIB, individual innovation behavior.

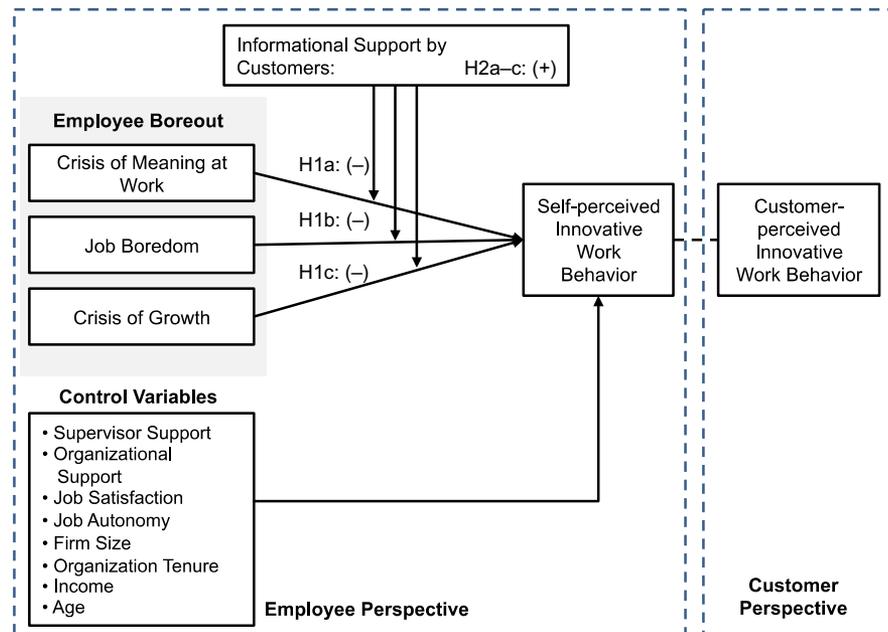


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

learning or development (Bakker, van Veldhoven, and Xanthopoulou, 2010).

Another important element of this study relates to the potential moderating effect of *informational support by customers*, or the “extent to which FLEs perceive their customers’ professional feedback and information as valuable” (Stock and Bednarek, 2014, p. 404).² According to COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001, 2011), customers represent a valuable resource in the service encounter because they provide valuable and insightful information and professional feedback (Hoyer et al., 2010; Vargo and Lusch, 2004), which makes the work more meaningful for the FLE and enables him or her to grow and develop personally at work.

Control variables. The proposed model controls for several aspects that might affect FLEs’ innovative work behavior too. According to COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001, 2011), FLEs’ resources might affect FLEs’ innovative work behavior, so the proposed model controls for FLE resources, deriving from both the work context and FLE personal characteristics. The *work context* reflects the “situational settings in which workplace phenomena occur” (Joshi and Roh, 2009, p. 601), so the relevant control variables are supervisor and organizational support. Supervisor support, or the degree to which

² In the study by Stock and Bednarek (2014), this construct has been labeled as cognitive customer support to contrast it from emotional customer support.

employees perceive that their supervisor values their well-being (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, and Hammer, 2011), is one of the most studied antecedents of innovative work behavior (e.g., Imran et al., 2011; Krause, 2004; Michaelis et al., 2009, 2010; Reuvers et al., 2008); organizational support is the degree to which the FLE believes the organization acts as if it is responsible for his or her needs (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa, 1986). According to organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Wayne, Shore, Bommer, and Tetrick, 2002), FLEs who receive supervisor and/or organizational support feel obligated to reciprocate and engage in appropriate behaviors to meet organizational goals, such as innovation.

Another relevant resource is job autonomy, or “the employee’s ability or freedom to make decisions about his or her work activities” (Baillien, De Cuyper, and De Witte, 2011, p. 192). Autonomy prompts positive behaviors (e.g., Argote and McGrath, 1993; Dwyer, Schwartz, and Fox, 1992; Hackman and Lawler, 1971; Loher, Noe, Moeller, and Fitzgerald, 1985) and innovative work behaviors (e.g., De Jong and Kemp, 2003; Krause, 2004; Ramamoorthy et al., 2005). Furthermore, job satisfaction, defined as an individual’s positive attitude toward his or her job (Ziegler, Hagen, and Diehl, 2012) appears in the framework because prior research has shown that innovative work behavior relates strongly to employees’ perceptions of the work (Dorenbosch et al., 2005; Yuan and Woodman, 2010). Finally, firm size might describe

the conditions that enable or prevent an FLE from displaying innovative work behaviors; it has appeared frequently as a control variable in innovation research (e.g., Fang, Palmatier, and Grewal, 2011; Stock and Zacharias, 2011).

Lastly, because *personal characteristics* as resources drive a person's behavior (Ekinici and Dawes, 2009), this study controls for the FLE's organization tenure, income, and age, all of which affect employees' innovative work behaviors (Carmeli et al., 2006; Scott and Bruce, 1994; Yuan and Woodman, 2010).

Effects of Boreout on Innovative Work Behavior

The reasoning underlying the prediction of a boreout–innovative behavior relationship reflects COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001, 2011), which has been well established in industrial psychology (Fritz and Sonnentag, 2005; Halbesleben, Wheeler, and Paustian-Underdahl, 2013; Innstrand, Langballe, Espnes, Falkum, and Aasland, 2008). The basic tenet of COR theory is that the loss or anticipated loss of valued resources (including energy) causes mental strain. Hobfoll (1989, p. 516) defines resources as those “conditions, objects, energies, and personal characteristics that are valued by the individuals or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects' personal characteristics, energies, and conditions.” The resources might be internal (e.g., personal characteristics, energy, skills) or external (e.g., favorable work conditions, support from coworkers; Hobfoll, 2001; Innstrand et al., 2008).

Boreout, which entails the loss of meaning, learning possibilities, and excitement as indicated by boredom, constitutes a clear loss of valued resources. The resulting lack of resources harms FLEs' job outcomes, “in that it leaves the employee with fewer resources (e.g., motivation and energy) to invest in their work” (Halbesleben et al., 2013, p. 493). In other words, employees who suffer from a loss of resources through boreout might become so depleted that they are unable to engage in further innovative work behavior (Innstrand et al., 2008).

Similar logic should apply across all three dimensions of boreout. For example, a crisis of meaning at work may decrease an FLE's resources because the employee loses the sense that his or her work is really valuable for the organization or for himself (Wrzesniewski, Dutton, and Debebe, 2003). Without this sense, the employee likely has less energy to pursue organizational goals (Kass et al., 2003; Loukidou et al., 2009), especially innovating new ideas (Beyer and Hannah, 2002; Cheng, Sanchez-Burks, and Lee, 2008). Job boredom similarly

reduces FLEs' resources (Kass et al., 2001; Lee, 1986) because they lack excitement, which harms the generation of new ideas during the service encounter. Behaviors of bored FLEs are driven by habituation (Lee, 1986), which likely impedes innovative work behavior. Finally, a crisis of growth at work decreases FLEs' resources, in that they lose the possibility of growing and developing (see Chay, Aryee, and Chew, 1995; Lemire, Saba, and Gagnon, 1999; Tremblay, Roger, and Toulouse, 1995). This lack draws FLEs' attention away from innovative work behaviors. Thus:

H1: The three dimensions of FLEs' boreout—(a) crisis of meaning at work, (b) job boredom, and (c) crisis of growth—negatively affect innovative work behavior.

Informational Support by Customers as a Moderator

Research on social support as a moderator of unfavorable working conditions has a long history (Cohen and Wills, 1985). Relying on this research and COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001), it can be assumed that informational support by customers buffers the detrimental effects of FLE boreout on innovative work behavior and helps an FLE get a job done (House, 1981). Specifically, COR theory predicts that an employee's resources buffer the detrimental effects of a lack of resources (Hobfoll, 2001, 2011). Employees can overcome their negative resource losses due to boreout by engaging in recovery experiences (Sonnentag, 2001). In this context, recovery “describes the process by which depleted resources are replenished and restored” (Halbesleben et al., 2013, p. 493). Sonnentag and Fritz (2007) propose differentiating recovery experiences into four distinct classes: control, mastery experiences, relaxation, and psychological detachment. Each type of experience works through different mechanisms, yet they share the common effect of reducing employee strain by offering an opportunity to recover lost resources (Etzion, Eden, and Lapidot, 1998; Fritz and Sonnentag, 2005; Sonnentag and Bayer, 2005; Sonnentag and Natter, 2004).

Because customers are fundamental to FLEs' jobs (Dormann and Zapf, 2004; Dudenhöffer and Dormann, 2013; Schneider and Bowen, 1985; Yagil, Luria, and Gal, 2008; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000), it is argued that resource depletion caused by boreout can be mitigated by informational support from customers. When FLEs suffer boreout, they likely seek to draw energy from customer-related recovery experiences for several reasons: First, customers help FLEs to achieve work goals by revealing their needs and wants (Hoyer et al., 2010). This valuable

information and professional feedback grants FLEs more *control* over the achievement of their work goals (Wu, 2011). Second, informational support provided by customers constitutes a source of professional growth and development by increasing FLEs' skills and abilities to interact with customers (Auh et al., 2007). Knowledge about customers' needs and suggestions for improvement facilitates FLEs' service delivery (Payne et al., 2008), such that informational support by customers should increase FLEs' *mastery* at the service encounter. Third and finally, FLEs who interact with supportive customers may recover their lost energy through the *relaxation* they achieve during their social interaction. As Zimmermann, Dormann, and Dollard (2011, p. 311) state, "dealing with people in service interactions is a source of positive experiences for many service providers."

These resource gains, through the customer interface, in turn might compensate for the burden of a lack of job challenges, reducing the decrement of innovative work behavior. In positing that informational support by customers weakens the detrimental effects of a lack of resources, this study applies this logic to all three dimensions of boreout. First, FLEs with a crisis of meaning at work perceive their work as futile (Douglas et al., 2004; Renn and Vandenberg, 1995). During the service encounter, they likely suffer from a crisis of meaning at work because they have lost the spirit of delivering superior service (Purohit, 2010; Walker, 2009). Informational support by customers instead grants FLEs mastery experiences, based on the information about customer needs, which helps them understand the meaning of their work. Therefore, with stimulating informational support from customers, a crisis of meaning at work is less likely to deplete resources or innovative work behavior.

Second, when they experience job boredom, FLEs stop feeling excited about their work because their work-related stimuli decrease (see Kass et al., 2001). Informational support by customers increases both mastery and control over performance goals, in that it offers professional feedback and new knowledge about how to interact successfully with customers to reach work goals. Thus, the detrimental effect of job boredom on innovative work behavior also should be weakened.

Third, FLEs who suffer from a crisis of growth also suffer from knowledge decline or missing personal or professional development opportunities (Bakker et al., 2010). Professional feedback by customers provides a route for FLEs to learn about customer needs, such that it should mitigate the detrimental effect of a crisis of growth. When FLEs suffer from a crisis of growth, they may benefit from informational customer support,

leaving them more energetic and ready to engage in innovative work behaviors. In summary, informational support from customers should buffer the detrimental effects of FLEs' resource losses due to boreout during the customer interface. Because such support should mitigate the detrimental effect of boreout on FLEs' innovative work behavior, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Informational support by customers weakens the detrimental effects of the three dimensions of FLEs' boreout—(a) crisis of meaning at work, (b) job boredom, and (c) crisis of growth—on innovative work behavior.

Method

Data Collection and Sample

The study features a sample that spans several service industries that offer various personal services in a business-to-consumer context: retailing, consulting/training, public services, financial services/insurances, information technology (IT)/telecommunication, repair services, and health services. Preliminary interviews with marketing experts indicated that the provision of personal services by FLEs was particularly relevant in these industries.

From a professional address provider, a list of the e-mail addresses of 1000 FLEs was obtained; these potential participants received requests to participate in the study. This e-mail request also incorporated a link to the electronic questionnaire. To encourage participation, respondents would be entered into a raffle (with prizes including an iPod and Amazon voucher worth \$20). Erroneous e-mail addresses led to the return of 71 messages, so the valid sample included 929 contacts. Three weeks later, 127 respondents had returned questionnaires. After a follow-up e-mail, another 49 respondents completed questionnaires. Of the 176 questionnaires (response rate = 17.6%), 34 were incomplete, so this study relies on 142 completed questionnaires with self-assessments by FLEs.

The comparison of early and late respondents revealed no significant differences in any constructs, so nonresponse bias was not a major concern. Among the surveyed FLEs, 60.5% were men. They represented multiple industries: retailing (24.8%), consulting/training (19.1%), public services (15.5%), financial services/insurance (10.6%), IT/telecommunication (9.9%), repair services (11.4%), and health services (9.7%). Most surveyed FLEs were between 20 and 55 years of age, had an organization tenure of between 5 and 20 years, and earned between \$31,000 and \$63,000 per year.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities, and Intercorrelations among Refined Measures

Variables	M	S	α	CR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
1. Supervisor support ^a	5.90	1.18	.94	.94	(.89)														
2. Organizational support ^a	4.86	1.09	.89	.89	.66*	(.75)													
3. Job autonomy ^a	4.97	1.30	.87	.87	.05	.17*	(.74)												
4. Job satisfaction ^a	5.61	1.30	.89	—	.54*	.52*	.31*	(—)											
5. Firm size (number of employees) ^a	2.99	2.33	—	—	.02*	-.25*	-.13	-.10	(—)										
6. Organization tenure (years) ^a	8.05	8.53	—	—	-.05	.03	-.05	.14	.03	(—)									
7. Age (years) ^a	36.42	12.00	—	—	.07	.07	-.09	.21*	-.06	.62*	(—)								
8. Income ^a	6.20	1.86	—	—	.15	.20*	.17*	.30*	.11	.25*	.29*	(—)							
9. Crisis of meaning at work ^a	2.36	1.28	.77	.79	-.27*	-.16	-.33*	-.36*	-.03	-.09	-.11	-.09	(.69)						
10. Job boredom ^a	2.44	1.20	.78	.80	-.51*	-.36*	.01	-.50*	.04	-.16	-.22*	-.10	.41*	(.70)					
11. Crisis of growth ^a	2.90	1.44	.88	.89	-.24*	-.44*	-.53*	-.67*	-.22*	-.04	-.07	-.23*	.27*	.18*	(.81)				
12. Informational support by customers ^a	4.69	.90	.76	.78	-.35*	.26*	.22*	.37*	.10	-.10	-.01	.04	-.26*	-.25*	-.25*	(.75)			
13. Innovative work behavior (employees) ^a	3.96	1.56	.95	.95	.18*	.19*	.27*	.39*	-.03	.15	.07	.16	-.26*	.03	-.42*	.12	(.89)		
14. Innovative work behavior (customers) ^b	5.17	1.20	.93	.94	-.27	.33*	.26	.35*	-.36*	.22	-.11	.06	-.20	-.05	-.59*	.27*	.47*	(.87)	

* $p \leq .05$.^a FLE data with $n = 142$.^b Customer data with $n = 43$.

Notes: M = mean, S = standard deviation, α = Cronbach's alpha, CR = composite reliability, diagonal elements in parentheses are square roots of average variance extracted for multi-item constructs measured reflectively. Anchors for firm size (number of employees): 1 = "< 50," 2 = "50–100," 3 = "100–250," 4 = "250–1000," 5 = "1000–5000," 6 = "5000–10,000," 7 = "10,000–50,000," 8 = "50,000–100,000," 9 = "> 200,000." Anchors for income: 1 "less than \$1300"; 2 = "\$1300–2500"; 3 = "\$2500–3800"; 4 = "\$3800–6300"; 5 = "\$6300–13,000"; 6 = "\$13,000–31,000"; 7 = "\$31,000–63,000"; 8 = "\$63,000–95,000"; 9 = "\$95,000–130,000"; 10 = "\$130,000–250,000"; 11 = "more than \$250,000."

The operationalization of innovative work behavior used a reduced version of the reflective multi-item scale developed by Janssen (2000). All the items appear in the Appendix. Because of this study's focus on FLEs' innovative work behavior at the service encounter, four items referring to employees' internal promotion of ideas did not appear in the survey (e.g., "mobilizing support for innovative ideas" or "introducing innovative ideas into the work environment in a systematic way").

To ensure the reliability and validity of the scales, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses followed. The Cronbach's alphas exceeded the recommended values (.7) for all constructs (Bagozzi, Yi, and Phillips, 1991; Nunnally, 1978), which indicated a high degree of internal consistency. Furthermore, composite reliability, or the shared variance among a set of indicators that measure an underlying construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), was consistently greater than the threshold value of .6 (Bagozzi et al., 1991). The test for discriminant validity applied Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion; the values exceeded the recommended values. The

descriptive statistics and correlations among the constructs appear in Table 2.

The operationalization of boreout used a second-order construct, in which the three dimensions were captured by reflective multi-item measures because the observed variables represent interchangeable manifestations of the underlying construct. The exploratory factor analysis confirmed these three independent factors. Figure 2 depicts the factor structure; the items and their sources appear in the Appendix.

The test of the factor structure of the three-dimensional conceptualization of the boreout construct revealed that the three-factor model indicated a very good fit ($\chi^2 = 88.361$, $df = 62$, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .08, square root mean residual [SRMR] = .09). This fit was superior to that of a one-factor model ($\chi^2 = 347.387$, $df = 65$, RMSEA = .25, SRMR = .21) or a four-factor model ($\chi^2 = 198.551$, $df = 59$, RMSEA = .12, SRMR = .12).

The measure of *crisis of meaning at work* used a reduced scale from Schnell (2010). The original scale

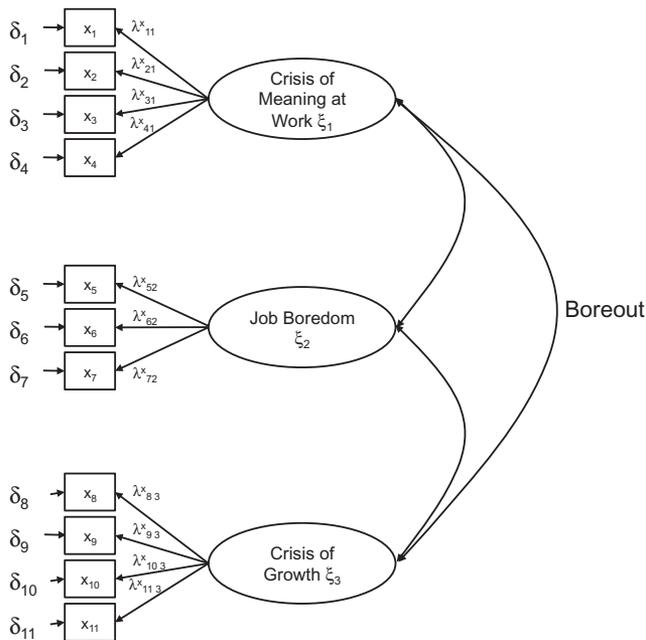


Figure 2. Three-Factor Model of Boreout with Intercorrelated Factors

captured crises in life in general; with slight adaptations, it effectively reflected the work context. For example, the original item “I do not see any sense in my life” became “I do not see any sense in my work,” and the item “My life seems meaningless” became “My work seems meaningless.” Scale purification also suggested removing one item, “My work seems empty.” The scale for *job boredom* was originally developed by Fisher (1998); during the item purification process, the reversed items were purged for this study (e.g., “In my work, I am fascinated by/enjoy/am interested in the task”). *Crisis of growth* was measured with a reversed version of the scale developed by Bakker et al. (2010).

Both the boreout dimensions and innovative work behavior measures used the FLEs’ self-reports. Thus, common method variance may bias the findings (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff, 2003). Harman’s single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) assessed its existence. Because a single-factor model, with all manifest variables, fit significantly worse than the proposed model in Figure 1, according to the comparison of their chi-square values ($\Delta\chi^2(190 \text{ df}) = 1663.550, p < .01$), the correlations among the observed variables cannot be explained using a single factor. In addition, a common method factor appeared in the structural model used to test H1a–c. It loaded on all the items in the FLE self-reports and thus could control for common method variance in the hypothesis tests. To achieve model convergence, the loadings of the method factor were speci-

fied to be of the same size, reflecting the assumption that common method variance affects all items equally. In addition, the method factor was specified as uncorrelated with other constructs, in line with the assumption that the degree of common method variance is independent of the true magnitude of FLEs’ innovative work behavior (Homburg, Müller, and Klarmann, 2011). Because the results remained stable, common method bias does not appear to be a concern for this current study.

Further scale development related to the control variables. Supervisor support was captured with four items, adapted from Bakker et al. (2010). The measure of organizational support used a reduced, six-item scale (three reverse-coded items were deleted during the item purification process), adapted from Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, and Lynch (1997). The three-item job autonomy scale and two-item job satisfaction measure both came from the job diagnostic survey (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). A reversed job satisfaction item, “I often think of quitting this job,” was removed during the item purification process. Organization tenure was the years the FLE had worked for the current employer; income was assessed on a yearly basis. Firm size was measured as the number of employees.

Finally, regarding the moderator variable, service marketing research highlights the particular value of customer information during the service delivery process (Auh et al., 2007; Vargo and Lusch, 2004), so the customer support construct focuses on informational support by customers. The three selected measurement items reflect the conceptualization of different facets of information, distinguishing the content from the effect of that information (Auh et al., 2007; Kellogg and Chase, 1995; Mohr and Nevin, 1990) and were originally developed by Stock and Bednarek (2014). The scale captured content by the value of the information and professional feedback, whereas its effect was related to professional enrichment (see Appendix).

Validation of FLEs’ Innovative Work Behavior with Customer Data

To test the validity of the dependent variable—FLEs’ innovative work behavior—from a customer perspective, the assessment focused on FLEs’ innovative work behavior during the customer interaction. The procedure to gather customer data was adapted from Jones, Busch, and Dacin (2003) and Stock (2011). Specifically, the FLE survey asked them to give a half-page customer questionnaire to three typical customers. A typical customer represents the behaviors of most customers for which the

FLE is responsible. After 3 weeks, 129 useable customer responses were received. This procedure produced 52 FLE–customer dyads, with an average of 2.5 customer responses per FLE. However, nine dyads had to be removed because they were incomplete.

Because perceptions of FLEs' innovative work behavior at the customer interface should relate to customers' assessments, the customer survey included items to measure their assessments of FLEs' innovative work behavior, as well as their satisfaction with the FLE and the firm. To secure honest responses, the survey assured these customers that their assessments would be used exclusively for research purposes and would never be forwarded to the FLE or firm. This method of capturing customer perceptions of FLEs' innovative work behavior at the customer interface responds to calls for dyadic approaches in prior innovation research (Szymanski, Kroff, and Troy, 2007) and mitigates the problems inherent to self-reported assessments of innovative work behavior (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Specifically, the items asked customers to assess the FLEs' innovative work behavior during their interaction. The innovation measure used versions of three items developed by Janssen (2000), adapted to fit the customer interface. These customers responded to three items, in reference to the FLE who was responsible for and served them: "The frontline employee is highly engaged in. . . (1) generating new solutions, (2) creating new ideas for difficult issues, and (3) transforming innovative ideas into useful applications." The validity measures were satisfactory, according to the Cronbach's alpha values (.94), composite reliability (.94), and average variance extracted (.77). The customer responses were averaged for each FLE (Van Bruggen, Lilien, and Kacker, 2002). Finally, correlating the FLEs' assessments of their innovative work behavior with customer assessments produced a high correlation value (.51, $p < .05$), indicating that the FLEs' innovation behavior evaluations were valid and not overly influenced by their answers to other questions, as would be the case if common method bias were a threat.

Results

The hypotheses proposed direct effects from the three dimensions of FLEs' boreout to FLEs' innovative work behavior and a moderating effect of informational support by customers. To test for both direct and moderated effects, hierarchical moderated regression analysis is appropriate (Aiken and West, 1991). For FLEs' innovative work behavior as a criterion variable, the initial regression with only control variables (model 1) avoided

confounding the main effects (Irwin and McClelland, 2001). Model 2 added the independent variables: crisis of meaning at work, job boredom, and crisis of growth (see Table 3). Finally, model 3 included the interaction terms, created by multiplying the values for each dimension of boreout with the corresponding values for informational support from customers. For ease of interpretation, mean centering applied to the constituent variables (Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken, 2003).

Main Effects Results

The findings partly supported H1. Crisis of meaning at work (H1a: $-.24$, $p < .05$) and crisis of growth (H1c: $-.57$, $p < .05$) negatively affected FLEs' innovative work behavior, but job boredom had no effect (H1b: $-.01$, *ns*). Although COR theory indicates that boredom represents a lack of resources (Hobfoll, 2001, 2011), boredom did not affect FLEs' innovative work behaviors. A possible explanation for this surprising finding might be that boredom has both negative and positive effects. On the one hand, bored FLEs might have less energy and be less able to concentrate, which would disrupt their innovative behavior. On the other hand, boredom might give a person sufficient space to change his or her satisfaction levels by developing new ideas, which would increase innovative work behaviors during the service encounter. These positive and negative effects then might mitigate each other. The results of this regression analysis appear in Table 3.

Moderating Effects of Informational Support by Customers

The basic notion underlying the second hypothesis is that informational support by customers mitigates the detrimental effects of FLEs' boreout. Consistent with H2a, support provided by customers buffered the detrimental effect of crisis of meaning at work on innovative work behavior (.26, $p < .05$). In other words, in conditions marked by high informational support from customers, crisis of meaning at work drew less energy away from innovation behavior. Furthermore, the missing link between boredom and innovative work behavior grew positive when customers provided more support (.23, $p < .05$); bored FLEs apparently get inspired by customers' feedback and ideas, which encourage their innovative work behavior. Finally, contrary to the theoretical reasoning, the interaction between crisis of growth and informational support by customers was significantly negative ($-.36$, $p < .05$), and H2c is rejected. The detrimental

Table 3. Regression Results for Boreout Dimensions and Innovative Work Behavior

	Model 1 (Control Variables)	Model 2 (Direct Effects)	Model 3 (Moderator Effects)
FLEs' firm-related resources as control variables			
Supervisor support	.26*	.20	.02
Organizational support	.30*	.24*	.18
Job autonomy	.21*	.02	.10
Job satisfaction	.02	.41*	.32*
Firm size	.09	.15	.09
Organizational tenure	.10	.13	.09
Age	.04	-.02	.05
Income	.09	.10	.04
Direct effects			
Crisis of meaning at work	—	-.24*	-.38*
Job boredom	—	-.01	.12
Crisis of growth	—	-.57*	-.59*
Moderator effects			
Informational support by customers (ISC)			.13
Crisis of meaning at work × ISC	—	—	.26*
Job boredom × ISC	—	—	.23*
Crisis of growth × ISC	—	—	-.36*
R^2 (adjusted R^2)	.25 (.19)	.33 (.27)	.57 (.51)
F -value	2.78*	5.66*	10.67*
F_1	2.78*	11.55*	16.72*
Incremental R^2	.25	.08	.14

* $p < .05$.Notes: Standardized regression coefficients. F_1 = value of incremental R^2 .

effect of a crisis of growth instead grew stronger in conditions of high informational support.

Perhaps FLEs' evaluations of customers' behaviors are based on context effects. Specifically, FLEs who receive high support from customers might grow increasingly aware of their limited opportunities to grow. Such FLEs then could suffer greater dissonance, due to their negative perception of the lack of opportunities, contrasted with the support they receive for their innovative ideas from customers. Thus, FLEs suffering from a crisis of growth may even experience a particularly low well-being at work when they interact with supportive customers.

Figure 3 displays the three interaction effects. Panel A reveals a significant interaction for crisis of meaning at work and innovative work behavior, emphasizing the potential of informational support by customers to nearly neutralize the negative effect of crisis of meaning at work on innovative work behavior. Panel B depicts the significant interaction between job boredom and innovative work behavior; the previously nonsignificant boredom–innovative behavior relationship became positive when customers offered strong informational support. Finally, panel C depicts a significant interaction between crisis of growth and innovative work behavior, such that the detrimental effect of crisis of growth on innovative behavior

became even stronger due to customers' informational support. In addition, Figure 3 includes the main effects of the three boreout dimensions at a medium level of informational support (Cohen et al., 2003).

Discussion

When service providers standardize service encounters, FLEs often suffer from crises of meaning at work, job boredom, and crises of growth. Yet resource loss associated with a lack of interesting challenges has remained largely unexplored in innovation research. The results of this initial investigation offer some valuable insights for academics and practitioners alike.

Research Implications

Highly demanding conditions are well understood as antecedents of innovative work behavior (e.g., Janssen, 2000, 2003); this study sheds new light on another omnipresent threat to the service encounter, namely FLEs' boreout. It also provides an initial theoretical conceptualization. On the basis of the notion that a lack of resources hinders FLEs to perform adequately during service encounters, this study turns to COR theory (Hobfoll, 2011, 2011) to provide a clearer view of lack of challenges and their tendency to lead to FLE boreout.

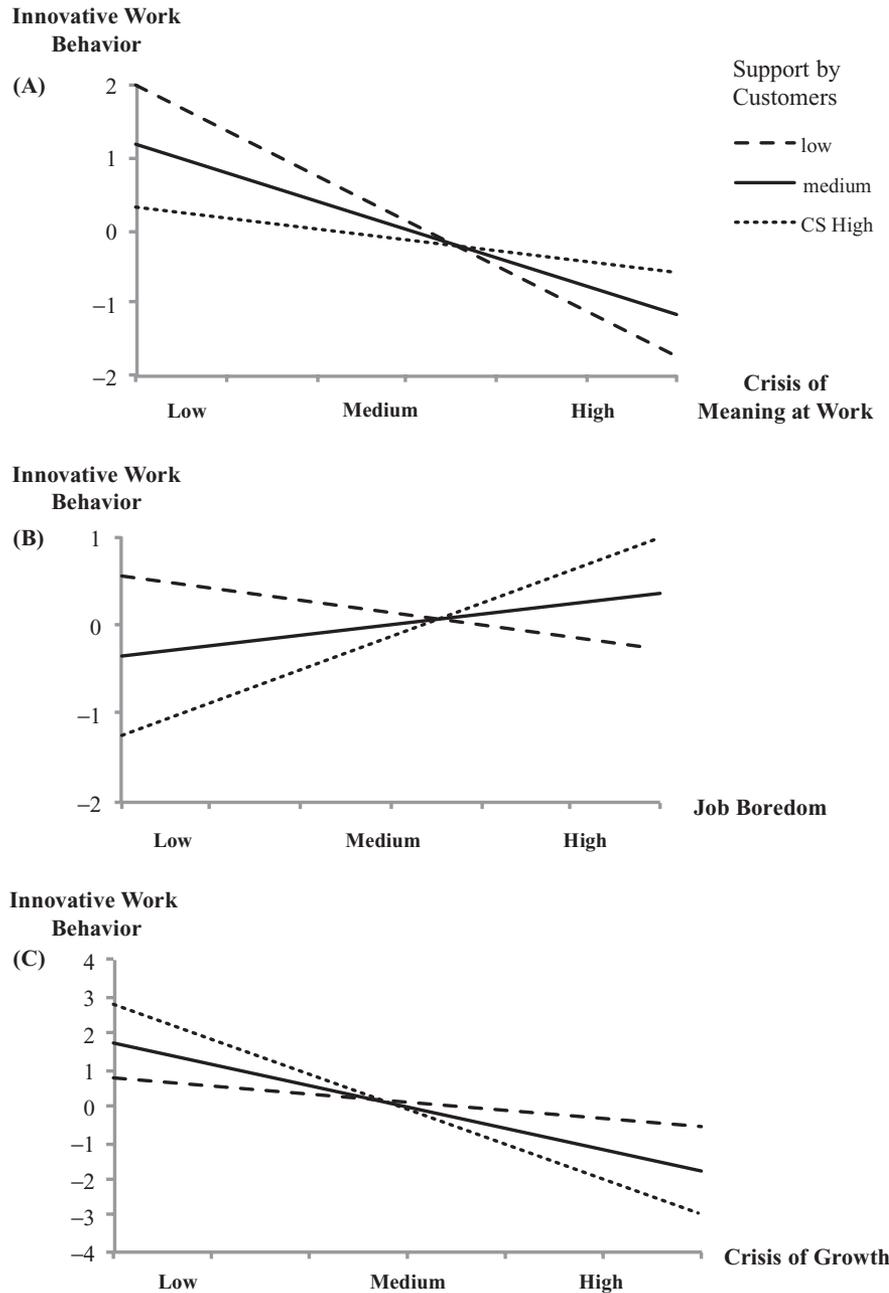


Figure 3. Moderating Effects. (A) Crisis of Meaning and Innovative Work Behavior Moderated by Support by Customers (CS). (B) Job Boredom and Innovative Work Behavior Moderated by Support by Customers (CS). (C) Crisis of Growth and Innovative Work Behavior Moderated by Support by Customers (CS)

This theoretical approach also can examine whether different facets of FLE boreout affect innovative work behaviors differently. The data presented in this study confirm the theoretical assertion that FLEs suffering from boreout experience a lack of energy and cannot be innovative, at least in relation to a crisis of meaning at work and crisis of growth. However, the innovation outcomes of job boredom are not significant. Therefore, the three dimensions of boreout, despite their similar roots as

lack of resources, differ notably when it comes to FLEs' innovative work behaviors.

Also from a theoretical perspective, this study refines predictions from the resource-based view (Barney, 1991, 2001; Crook, Ketchen, Combs, and Todd, 2008; Schuler and Jackson, 1987). Extant research implicitly assumes that FLEs offer an important source of service innovativeness (Comer, 2007; Hamel and Prahalad, 1994), but this assumption does not hold for inadequately

placed employee resources. When FLEs suffer from greater crises of meaning, boredom, and a lack of opportunities to grow, adequate employee placement might become an even more critical challenge for service firms that seek to provide superior services to customers, through their innovative FLEs.

Finally, whereas researchers previously have been concerned mainly with social support from supervisors, colleagues, spouses, or friends (Halbesleben et al., 2013), salespersons spend most of their time in contact with customers (Stock and Hoyer, 2005), so informational support by customers is likely to be of particular importance to them. This study sheds light on informational support by customers as a contingency factor that mitigates some detrimental effects of FLEs' boreout. In line with the predictions of COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001, 2011), customers are important resources in the service encounter. This finding is important for extant innovation research that examines customers' influences on FLEs. Most such research assumes customers are stressors of FLEs (Grandey, Dickter, and Sin, 2004; Reynolds and Harris, 2009), without considering their potentially positive effects. Relying on COR theory, the current study explicitly considers customers as a form of support. In particular, when FLEs suffer a crisis of meaning at work, informational support by customers can enhance their innovative work behaviors. In such high support conditions, boredom positively affects innovative work behavior. However, support by customers strengthens the negative effect of a crisis of growth on FLEs' innovative work behavior, possibly because of the increased cognitive dissonance that results from FLEs' (negative) perceptions of the firm as limiting their growth and (positive) view of customers and the support they provide. In other words, a lack of challenges may provoke even more negative evaluations if it contrasts with a salient, positive, supportive standard of customer behavior.

Managerial Implications

In business practice, firms often proactively seek to stimulate their employees' innovativeness through human resource programs, such as creativity training, gain sharing, or awards. Although these programs might be fruitful to a certain extent, boreout will impede FLEs' innovative work behavior, so managers responsible for firm innovations must ensure that FLEs do not suffer too much from boreout. In addition, standardization processes in the service encounter need to be implemented with caution.

Managers also should note customers' differentiated roles in support of employees' innovation behavior. On the one hand, customers can buffer the detrimental effect of crises of meaning, in terms of innovative work behavior. On the other hand, customers might increase the detrimental effect of the crisis of growth. Thus, regular interactions between FLEs and customers can be a source of innovative behavior at the service encounter, but only if employees are adequately placed and do not suffer from crisis of growth already.

Limitations and Further Research

This study constitutes a first step toward a better understanding of the innovative behavior outcomes of FLEs' boreout. Despite these contributions, several limitations suggest directions for more research. Previous research on the antecedents of innovative work behavior has largely ignored the problems associated with a lack of challenges at the service encounter. This study proposes boreout as an outcome of such insufficient challenges; additional research should specify its three dimensions more clearly and seek to understand potential changes in this phenomenon over time. For example, researchers might investigate how FLEs' boreout affects innovative work behaviors across various phases of the new service development process.

Although the proposed conceptualization of boreout refers to the individual level, it might transfer to new product teams as well. Is boreout less likely in new service teams, due to the dynamism within these teams? The dependent variable, FLEs' innovative work behavior, represents a behavioral outcome variable. This study cannot address the innovativeness of the service program at the firm level though, so further studies should investigate service innovation outcomes at this level, perhaps by relying on objective firm data.

Customer data validate these findings, though the focus remains on understanding the psychological processes that affect FLEs' innovative work behavior. Additional research could focus more specifically on the customer perspective. For example, does FLEs' boreout spread to customers, in the form of customers' adoption of service innovations? Can boreout be transferred to customers through emotional contagion (e.g., Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson, 1994)?

In organizational psychology, most investigators adopt House's (1981) distinction of emotional, appraisal, instrumental, and informational support. This study focuses on information support by customers, which entails the provision of information to facilitate job

completion. It can be anticipated that customers have superior knowledge and provide valuable insights for FLEs (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Further research also could consider the different forms of support to determine if they present distinct relationships in the context of boreout and FLEs' innovative work behavior. For example, emotional support consists of empathy, liking, or respect. Appraisal support might be expressed through shared perspectives and evaluations, such as when a customer praises a salesperson for doing a good job. Instrumental support includes direct help, such as a customer helping a salesperson in lifting a heavy object.

Another implicit assumption of this research was that FLEs' innovative work behavior matters in the service encounter. In this vein, this study prioritizes boreout as a driver of innovative work behavior, but customer relationship outcomes of FLEs' innovative work behavior also need to be examined, to determine whether and how FLEs' innovative work behaviors affect customer relationship variables, such as customer satisfaction.

Finally, support by customers negatively affects the three boreout dimensions. Additional research could examine the mechanisms underlying these relationships in more detail.

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Appendix. Measures and Items

Dimensions of Boreout

Crisis of meaning at work^a (Schnell, 2010)

- My work seems meaningless.
- I don't see any sense in my work.
- I suffer from the fact that I do not see any point in my work.
- When I think about the meaning of my work I find only emptiness.

Job boredom^a (Fisher, 1998). In my job . . .

- . . . I feel bored.
- . . . I am frustrated.
- . . . I am not able to concentrate.

Crisis of growth^a (Bakker et al., 2010)

- My job offers me opportunities for personal growth and development (r).
- My work gives me the feeling that I can achieve something (r).
- My work offers me the possibility of independent thought and action (r).
- I learn new things in my work (r).

Dependent Variable

Innovative work behavior^a (Janssen, 2000).

- At the service encounter, I am highly engaged in . . .
 - . . . generating new solutions for problems.
 - . . . creating new ideas for difficult issues.
 - . . . searching out new working methods, techniques, or instruments.
 - . . . transforming innovative ideas into useful applications.
 - . . . evaluating the utility of innovative ideas.

Control Variables

Supervisor support^a (Bakker et al., 2010)

- I can count on my supervisor when I come across difficulties in my work.
- If necessary, I can ask my supervisor for help.
- I do get on well with my supervisor.
- In my work, I feel appreciated by my supervisor.

Organizational support^a (Eisenberger et al., 1997)

- My organization really cares about my well-being.
- Help is available from my organization when I have a problem.
- My organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part.
- My organization is willing to help me if I need a special favor.
- My organization cares about my opinions.
- My organization strongly considers my goals and values.

Job autonomy^a (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). In my job . . .

- . . . I work independently.
- . . . I can determine how I fulfill my tasks.
- . . . I have the possibility to bring in personal initiative and autonomy.

Firm size^b (number of employees)

Organization tenure (in years)

Age (in years)

Income^c (gross income per year)

Job satisfaction^a (Hackman and Oldham, 1975; Zhou and George, 2001)

- In general, I like working for my firm.
- All in all, I am satisfied with my job.

Moderator Variable

Informational support by customers^a (Stock and Bednarek, 2014)

- My customers give me valuable professional feedback.
 - The interaction with customers is a professional enrichment for me.
 - My customers give me valuable information.
-

Notes: (r) reversed item.

^a Seven-point Likert-type scale with 7 = "strongly agree" and 1 = "strongly disagree" as anchors was employed.

^b Anchors with 1 = "< 50," 2 = "50–99," 3 = "100–249," 4 = "250–999," 5 = "1000–4999," 6 = "5000–9999," 7 = "10,000–49,999," 8 = "50,000–100,000," 9 = "> 200,000."

^c Anchors for income: 1 "less than \$1300"; 2 = "\$1300–2499"; 3 = "\$2500–3799"; 4 = "\$3800–6299"; 5 = "\$6300–12,999"; 6 = "\$13,000–30,999"; 7 = "\$31,000–62,999"; 8 = "\$63,000–94,999"; 9 = "\$95,000–129,999"; 10 = "\$130,000–250,000"; 11 = "more than \$250,000."