

**FRONTLINE EMPLOYEE INSPIRATION IN RETAILING –
Conceptualization, Scale Development, Sources, and Customer Outcomes**

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Kathrin Neumüller

from

Germany

Approved on the application of

Prof. Dr. Thomas Rudolph

and

Prof. Dr. Heiner Evanschitzky

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The President:

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Abstract

Brick-and-mortar retailers face an increasingly competitive market environment. Against this background, *frontline employee (FLE) inspiration* is a promising strategy to motivate frontline employees (i.e., employees with regular customer contact, FLEs) to go beyond role requirements and drive them to provide superior service quality. While a few retailers (e.g., IKEA, Nespresso, Apple) have recently come to harness the power of inspiration to drive FLE performance, most other companies have yet to recognize this approach. Despite its potential to leverage FLE performance, FLE inspiration has not yet been empirically examined. Service research lacks a clear conceptualization of FLE inspiration, a reliable and valid scale to measure it, the knowledge of its relationship with established FLE constructs, the sources that evoke it, and its effects on customer outcomes.

Addressing these gaps in the service research, I conceptualize FLE inspiration as a temporary, intrinsic motivational state during which FLEs gain epistemic insights from within or outside the workplace and feel compelled to actualize, transmit, or express these epistemic insights at work (Study 1). To measure FLE inspiration, I develop and validate a 6-item scale with excellent psychometric properties (Studies 2 to 5) and show that FLE inspiration is embedded in a meaningful network of related antecedents (e.g., work-related curiosity) and outcomes (e.g., FLE proactivity) (Study 5). Various sources in the FLE's work-related environment (e.g., coworkers, customers, corporate values) and private environment (e.g., family, personal values) (Studies 6 and 7) may evoke FLE inspiration. Finally, I provide evidence for the employee–customer inspiration linkage, showing that inspired FLEs, more so than satisfied FLEs, may inspire customers and enhance various customer outcomes (e.g., loyalty, purchase intentions) (Study 8). This dissertation extends the study of inspiration to the FLE context, addressing the call for further research on the understudied topic of FLEs and the psychological mechanisms that drive their behaviors and attitudes. My investigation of the employee–customer inspiration linkage contributes to a better understanding of the psychological mechanisms that govern interactions between customers and employees, particularly during face-to-face encounters. From practitioners' perspective, FLE inspiration constitutes a new, important metric to enhance FLEs' level of intrinsic motivation, proactivity, satisfaction, and creativity and influence customer responses during service interactions. I provide a step-by-step guide to make the empirical insights actionable.

Abstract in German

Stationäre Einzelhändler sehen sich mit einem zunehmend wettbewerbsintensiven Marktumfeld konfrontiert. *Inspiration* eröffnet neue Möglichkeiten, um Flächenmitarbeiter (Frontline Employees), welche tagtäglich mit Kunden interagieren und Serviceleistungen erbringen, zu Höchstleistungen zu motivieren. Gleichzeitig steigert *Inspiration* ihre Bereitschaft, sich für bevorstehende Veränderungsprozesse einzusetzen. Während einzelne Vorreiter (z.B. IKEA, Nespresso, Apple) bereits das hohe Potential der *FLE Inspiration* (Frontline Employee Inspiration) nutzen, ist dieser Ansatz den meisten anderen Unternehmen noch unbekannt. Vor diesem Hintergrund setzt es sich die vorliegende Arbeit zum Ziel, das bisher unerforschte Thema der *FLE Inspiration* empirisch zu untersuchen. Die zentralen Ziele bestehen darin, *FLE Inspiration* zu konzeptualisieren, eine Skala zu entwickeln, die Zusammenhänge zu etablierten Mitarbeiterkonstrukten und die Quellen der *FLE Inspiration* zu untersuchen. Auch sollen die Auswirkungen inspirierter Mitarbeiter auf das Kundenverhalten und die Kundenwahrnehmung in der Mitarbeiter-Kunden-Interaktion aufgezeigt werden.

FLE Inspiration ist ein intrinsisch motivationaler Zustand, bei dem der Flächenmitarbeiter neue Erkenntnisse und Ideen gewinnt und diese bei der Arbeit umsetzt (Studie 1). Um Mitarbeiterinspiration zu messen, wurde eine Multi-Item-Skala mit hervorragenden psychometrischen Eigenschaften entwickelt und validiert (Studien 2 bis 5). Das neue Konstrukt wurde in seinem nomologischen Netzwerk, bestehend aus Einflussfaktoren (z.B. Mitarbeiterneugierde) und Auswirkungen (z.B. Mitarbeiterproaktivität) verankert (Studien 4 und 5). *Inspiration* kann von verschiedenen Quellen in der arbeitsbezogenen (z.B. Kollegen, Kunden, Unternehmenswerte) und in der privaten Umgebung (z.B. Familie, persönliche Werte) hervorgerufen werden (Studien 6 und 7). Inspirierte Mitarbeiter haben einen weit positiveren Effekt auf Kunden und deren *Inspiration*, Loyalität und Kaufabsichten als zufriedene Mitarbeiter (Studie 8). Diese Arbeit trägt zur bestehenden Serviceliteratur bei, indem sie einen neuen psychologischen Mechanismus etabliert, der das Verhalten und die Einstellungen von Flächenmitarbeitern erklärt und beeinflusst. Zudem stellt Mitarbeiterinspiration eine neue, wichtige Zielgröße dar, welche Praktiker dazu nutzen können, um die intrinsische Motivation, Proaktivität und Serviceleistung ihrer Mitarbeiter zu steigern. Die empirischen Erkenntnisse werden in einem 5-Stufen-Modell für Praktiker aufbereitet.

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List of Abbreviations

ANCOVA	analysis of covariance
ANOVA	analysis of variance
AVE	average variance extracted
CFA	confirmatory factor analysis
CFI	comparative fit index
CR	composite reliability
df	degrees of freedom
e.g.,	exempli gratia (for example)
EFA	exploratory factor analysis
et al.	et alii
FLE	frontline employee
i.e.	id est (that is)
ML	maximum likelihood
OCB	organizational citizenship behavior
OLS regression	ordinary least squares regression
PCA	principal component analysis
POS	point of sale
RMSEA	root mean square error of approximation
SD	standard deviation
SEM	structural equation model
SRMR	standardized root mean residual
TLI	Tucker–Lewis index

1 Introduction

1.1 Problem Orientation: Frontline Employee Inspiration

Physical retailers face unprecedented change and increasingly intensive competition driven by technological advances, such as the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, or service robots (Davenport et al., 2020; Grewal et al., 2018), new market entrants (e.g., Lidl opening its first store in Switzerland in 2009), and changing and hybrid consumer preferences (Mathur et al., 2008). For example, customers increasingly use brick-and-mortar retailers as showrooms to gather information about products and try them before purchasing them online at a lower price (Fassnacht et al., 2019). According to a survey, 68% of consumers first browse products in-store but purchase online (PwC, 2015). In the U.K., 20% of consumers shopped entirely or mostly online in 2020. Online sales grew almost ten times faster than offline sales between 2013 and 2020, and average retail margins eroded by almost two percentage points, from 5.1% to 3.4%, during this period.¹ Swiss brick-and-mortar retailers face similar financial pressures. In Switzerland, online sales rose by 9% per year (between 2013 and 2019) (Statista, 2020), while the sales volume of physical retailers dropped by 0.5% on average in the same period (Hunziker et al., 2020).²

To make matters worse, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to dramatic shifts in consumer behavior and spending (Atmar et al., 2020). In the first three months of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, more than 60% of Swiss consumers engaged in new shopping behaviors, such as grocery delivery and curbside pickup (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Additionally, COVID-19 has further accelerated the popularity of online shopping, boosting e-commerce players, such as Zalando, Alibaba, and Amazon. Amazon's stock value, for example, increased by more than 100% between February 2020 and February 2021 (www.finanzen.ch). In sum, the retail sector is currently witnessing seismic changes. Faced with unprecedented challenges, physical retailers need to devise strategies to reinvent themselves and maintain competitive advantage. In this context, inspiring employees may be a promising strategy for retailers because inspired employees are sensitized to changes in their environment and willing to find innovative solutions to today's most pressing problems (Rudolph et al., 2021).

¹ Refers to total retail, including e-commerce and brick-and-mortar retailing.

² Compound annual growth rate (CAGR).

Towards this end, I introduce the concept of *frontline employee (FLE) inspiration* as a means for retailers to leverage FLE performance and service delivery. I focus on FLEs who directly and regularly interact with customers at the point of sale in retail stores (Coelho et al., 2011; Di Mascio, 2010) because they assume a crucial role in shaping customer service perceptions and thus are critical determinants of organizational success (Homburg et al., 2009; Korschun et al., 2014).³ The subsequent section elaborates on FLEs' relevance for retailers and highlights why retailers should seek to inspire them (Section 1.1.1). I then analyze the opportunities of FLE inspiration for retailers. While a few retailers (e.g., NIKE, Apple, and Nespresso) have recently started harnessing the immense potential of FLE inspiration, most other retailers have yet to recognize the power of this approach (Section 1.1.2).

1.1.1 Relevance of Frontline Employees to Retailers

“Frontlines of service organizations are the frontier of innovation, growth, and competitive advantage” (Singh et al., 2017, p. 4). In the United States, more than 13 million retail salespeople operate on these “frontlines” and directly interact with customers daily. These so-called frontline employees (FLEs) account for 9% of the total U.S. labor force (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020a). Interacting with customers at the point of sale, these employees collect first-hand market information (Rapp et al., 2015), come up with new ideas on service improvements (Lages & Piercy, 2012), implement new service innovations at the point of sale (Cadwallader et al., 2010), share information internally about evolving customer needs and possible improvements in service delivery (Bettencourt et al., 2005), and foster organizational change (Ahearne et al., 2010; Coelho et al., 2011). Importantly, FLEs can provide exceptional customer service and shape customer experiences and relationships (Brady & Cronin, 2001; S. Brown & Lam, 2008; Mägi, 2003; Sok et al., 2018; Volmer et al., 2012). Thus, FLEs assume a crucial role in ensuring a retailer's competitive advantage and are important drivers of organizational success (Chebat et al., 2002; Chung & Schneider, 2002; Evanschitzky, Sharma et al., 2012; Hartline et al., 2000; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Mende & Noble, 2019).

In light of the increasing popularity of online shopping, FLEs are more important than ever. As brick-and-mortar retailers increasingly compete with online channels, the

³ Marketing and service researchers have frequently used the term “frontline employee” interchangeably with “customer-contact employee” (Chebat et al., 2002; Morhart et al., 2009), “boundary-spanning employee” (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997), and “service employee” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006).

retail FLEs have become an important differentiator in creating value for customers and therefore represent a critical opportunity to influence the future of physical retailing. FLEs' role in retailers' success is not diminishing (Hughes et al., 2019). Even in 2020, with the soaring popularity of e-commerce accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, over 90% of retail sales, by dollar volume, were made offline (U.S. Census, 2021). Moreover, one practitioner study indicated that 71% of consumers believed that the FLEs with whom they interact crucially affect their overall customer experience (PwC, 2018). Therefore, to build and maintain competitive advantage, retailers should invest in their FLEs. Given that service industries account for about 70% of GDP in Switzerland (Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, 2020) and employ approximately 75% of workers in developed countries (International Labour Organization, 2019), strategies aimed at leveraging FLEs' performance and potentials may affect not only the retail sector but also the economy at large.

Despite their vital role in firm success (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996), FLEs “are typically underpaid, undertrained, overworked, and highly stressed” (Singh, 2000; Weatherly & Tansik, 1993). In Switzerland, retail FLEs earn about 35% less than the national average wage across all occupations (Statista, 2018; www.lohnanalyse.ch). In the U.S., their mean wage is about 50% lower than the national average wage across all occupations (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020a). FLEs' work is highly challenging and complex. They have highly unstructured jobs, frequently face customers with diverse needs, and have to satisfy customer expectations regarding service quality while fulfilling management's expectations for productivity (Coelho et al., 2011). During the COVID-19 pandemic, work conditions for retail FLEs have even worsened. Retail FLEs constantly run the risk of exposure to the virus, have to stick to mask requirements, and deal with hostile customers (Grewal et al., 2021). Two-thirds of the U.S. retail FLEs have experienced mental distress since the beginning of the pandemic (Rens et al., 2021). Given this background, it is hardly surprising that many managers still struggle to capitalize on FLEs' full potential and leverage their contribution to organizational success. Gallup reported that in the U.S., as many as 72% of FLEs, more than in any other occupation, are highly disconnected from their job and do not reach their full potential at work (Gallup, 2013, 2017). As a result, they may resist their company's strategic change initiatives (e.g., introducing new technology and service innovations at the point of sale; restructuring existing work routines) (Furst & Cable, 2008). Indeed, managerial evidence indicates that about 70% of companies' change initiatives fail due to low support from employees (Beer & Nohria, 2000). Highly disconnected FLEs are also more likely to provide inferior customer service (Gallup, 2017). A practitioner study

reported that U.S. businesses lose \$62 billion each year due to poor service (Hyken, 2018). Overall, Gallup (2017) estimated that employees who do not use their full potential cost the U.S. up to \$605 billion each year in lost productivity (Gallup, 2017). This highlights the need for effectively managing FLE performance in retail stores.

Given these circumstances, retailers need to think beyond traditional approaches to leverage their FLEs' full potential. To drive FLE performance, retailers have traditionally sought to *satisfy* them with workplace amenities (e.g., a fair salary, a safe work environment, or adequate training) or to *engage* them, e.g., through increased autonomy. However, these strategies fall short when seeking to bind FLEs to the company in the long term and trying to awake a sense of commitment that drives them to go the extra mile. Satisfied employees fulfill their duties according to the company's standards and are comfortable with the status quo, meaning that they feel no need to drive change (Straume & Vittersø, 2012; Zhou & George, 2001). Likewise, engaged employees also like to act within the scope of their role requirements (Schaufeli et al., 2002). A focus on satisfying and engaging employees may be enough to drive employee performance in a stable environment. However, in today's turbulent and dynamic market environment, these approaches fall short because they cannot motivate FLEs to go beyond their predefined role requirements (Garton, 2017; Garton & Mankins, 2015; Horwitch & Whipple, 2016). As traditional approaches to leveraging FLE performance lose their effectiveness, FLE *inspiration* is becoming a topic of paramount importance.

1.1.2 Opportunities Afforded by Frontline Employee Inspiration in Retailing

Inspiration includes realizing a new idea or insight and motivating individuals to act upon this new idea or insight (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004). It is considered "the quintessential mediator of positive change" (Thrash, 2020, p. 31) and has the power to transform individuals' behavior and thinking (Wartiovaara et al., 2019). I argue that these positive effects also hold for FLEs. In particular, I posit that a stronger focus on *inspiring FLEs* may help retailers overcome the challenges in the market environment in two major ways. First, FLE inspiration, more so than FLE satisfaction or engagement, offers the opportunity to enhance FLE performance, commit FLEs to the company, and energize them to support organizational change proactively. Second, FLE inspiration may play an important role in enhancing service quality, which is an important source of competitive advantage. Below, I elaborate on each of these propositions.

1.1.2.1 Frontline Employee Inspiration as Driver of Change

FLE inspiration offers a new approach to driving employee performance in times of unprecedented change and high competitiveness. As mentioned, the existing strategies aimed at satisfying and engaging FLEs fall short when seeking to awake their commitment to change because they cannot elicit a vision or a sense of purpose in employees (Straume & Vittersø, 2012; Zhou & George, 2001). Successfully implementing change initiatives often requires significant behavioral changes from FLEs (Cadwallader et al., 2010). Inspiration is uniquely suited to fostering such behavioral change in individuals because it drives individuals to implement newly gained ideas and adapt to a rapidly changing environment (Thrash, Moldovan, Oleynick et al., 2014). In this vein, Straume and Vittersø (2012, p. 395) argued that it is not enough to satisfy employees, stating that “[f]eeling happy [...] does not motivate people to invest energy and face challenges.” To stimulate change in their employees, and to increase productivity, managers need to “facilitate inspiration rather than happiness” (Straume and Vittersø, 2012, p. 395). Since inspiration involves “challenging our expectations about what is and what can be” (Shiota et al., 2014, p. 363), inspired employees may constructively challenge work methods and bring up change-oriented, creative suggestions for improvement of products, processes, and work procedures (LePine & van Dyne, 1998). In line with this view, managerial evidence indicates that inspired employees are willing to go beyond their predefined performance expectations. Specifically, they are 2.25 times as productive as satisfied employees and 1.44 times as productive as engaged employees (Garton & Mankins, 2015).⁴ Additionally, inspired employees are twice as loyal and committed to their employer company compared to their less inspired peers (Darnell & Markey, 2018). This initial practical evidence indicates that inspired employees may act as a long-term value-creator and the “make or break” factor when implementing organizational change initiatives.

1.1.2.2 Frontline Employee Inspiration as Driver of Service Quality

Inspired FLEs may also play an important role in service delivery (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). In a market where most products are homogenous, providing exceptional service to customers is one strategy that helps retailers build and maintain competitive advantage (Mende & Noble, 2019; Rayport et al., 2005; Singh et al., 2017). Therefore, retailers’ ability to provide service experiences that not only *satisfy* customers but *inspire* them has become crucial to organizational success (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). FLEs

⁴ Measurement: Employees were asked to rate how much their job inspires them on a zero-to-10 scale.

interact with customers at the point of sale and decisively influence customer perceptions of service quality (Mägi, 2003). Capitalizing on FLE inspiration to enhance service quality may be especially useful for so-called channel retailers (Rudolph, 2000).⁵ Channel retailers, such as Nordstrom in the U.S. or Coop in Switzerland, seek to differentiate themselves from competitors by offering customers service-driven and convenient shopping experiences. FLEs who proactively identify and flexibly cater to customer needs play an essential role in providing excellent service quality (Rudolph, 2000). FLE *inspiration* may be uniquely suited to strengthening channel retailers' competitive advantage. Empirical evidence from social psychology indicates that feeling inspired makes individuals more creative, efficient, and positively minded (Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010; Thrash, Moldovan, Fuller et al., 2014), all of which are key competencies that FLEs need to interact with customers successfully (Y. Dong et al., 2015; G. Wang & Netemeyer, 2004). Therefore, inspired FLEs have the power to turn a merely satisfying service experience into a truly inspiring one. To provide customers with an inspiring service experience, retailers need FLEs who truly feel inspired at work and pass this inspiration on to customers. Thus, managing FLE inspiration in service interactions may help FLEs commit to offering the best customer service.

1.1.2.3 Status Quo of Frontline Employee Inspiration in Retailing

Given the potential effect of inspiration on FLE performance and service excellence, a few leading retailers have made FLE inspiration a priority. For example, IKEA has built its entire company culture around inspiration, offering an “inspiring vision,” an “inspiring workplace,” and “inspiring roles” to FLEs to pass their inspiration and enthusiasm on to customers (www.ikea.com). Likewise, Nespresso recognized that inspiration is not only important in its top tiers but needs to trickle down to FLEs who interact with customers daily. A Nespresso job ad seeks to attract new FLEs with “inspiring [...] a meaningful place to work” (www.monster.com/jobs/). Similarly, Nike anchored FLE inspiration in its organizational culture, stating, “When our teams feel [...]

⁵ Rudolph (2000) differentiated between three generic types of retailer business models: *Content retailers* (e.g., Zara) seek to differentiate themselves from competitors through product innovations (product leadership); *global discounters* (e.g., Aldi) seek to differentiate themselves through offering good value for the money to customers; and *channel retailers* (e.g., Nordstrom) strive to differentiate themselves via superior customer service. While all three types of retailers may benefit from FLE inspiration, I contend that the effect is especially pronounced for channel retailers. See the step-by-step guide in Chapter 6, Section 6.3, for a more detailed discussion of the advantages of FLE inspiration for each type of retailer.

inspired, they turn that creativity into innovation to serve our athletes globally and deliver against our goals.” Apple also has a specific program to increase its FLEs’ level of inspiration. As a result, inspired FLEs bring more enthusiasm about the brand to their service interactions and fulfill customer needs beyond expectations, which positively affects customer loyalty and spending (Darnell & Markey, 2018).

While these retailers have started harnessing the immense potential of inspiring their employees, most retailers have not yet recognized the power of this approach. A practitioner study found that about 70% of employees are not or barely inspired at work (Darnell & Markey, 2018).⁶ Applying this statistic to the Swiss retail sector with more than 320,000 employees reveals a large potential for increased FLE inspiration (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2018). Approximately 243,000 Swiss retail employees may not be inspired, leading to lower employee performance during service interactions, decreased productivity, and a loss in firm profitability. This highlights the importance of effectively managing FLE inspiration in retail.

Despite the immense potential of FLE inspiration, it has not yet been empirically examined. To leverage the positive effects of inspired FLEs performance and service quality, empirical research needs to investigate the nature, underlying mechanisms, sources, and outcomes of FLE inspiration to help retailers develop effective measures to inspire their FLEs.

1.2 Status Quo of Inspiration Research

This section reviews inspiration research in social psychology to provide a frame of reference for FLE inspiration (Section 1.2.1), followed by a detailed review of the current state of knowledge in the field of employee inspiration (Section 1.2.2). Note that currently, there is no academic research on *frontline* employee inspiration. Therefore, this section reviews the literature on employee inspiration in the work context. Chapter 1.3 provides an overview of the FLE literature, in which I seek to position the topic of FLE inspiration.

1.2.1 Inspiration Research in Social Psychology

Inspiration has mostly been studied in social psychology as a construct comprising cognitive and affective-motivational constituents. Thrash and Elliot (2003) suggested that inspiration is an individual’s epistemic-motivational state “that is triggered

⁶ $N = 2,482$ employees, study conducted in November 2015.

by a compelling idea or illumination [...] and that is targeted toward the actualization or realization of the idea” (p. 827). In social psychology, inspiration has been viewed as the individual’s spontaneous experience, which cannot be imposed on a person by will-power but arises spontaneously and outside of volitional control (Thrash et al., 2017). Based on this conceptualization, Thrash and Elliot (2003) developed a domain-generic standardized two-dimensional scale that measures how frequently and intensely individuals become inspired.⁷

The psychological literature proposes that an outside force or external cue, also referred to as the source of inspiration (e.g., a work of art or a role model), triggers inspiration. In trying to understand the antecedents of inspiration, psychological research has investigated various sources. In an experiment, Thrash, Elliot et al. (2010) showed that participants felt inspired by watching a video of Michael Jordan’s extraordinary competence. Further studies revealed that reading poetry (Thrash et al., 2017) or a creative idea (Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010) may inspire individuals. While inspiration results from exposure to an inspiring source, researchers in social psychology have also investigated individual differences in personality traits that influence the emergence of inspiration. At this juncture, Thrash and Elliot (2003) suggested that individuals high in openness to experience are more likely to experience inspiration. Other individual differences that influence inspiration include positive affect, optimism, and self-esteem, which may increase one’s receptiveness to inspiring influences (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Furthermore, social psychologists showed that extraverted (i.e., outgoing, talkative, and energetic) individuals are more likely to act on inspiring ideas (Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010).

Psychological research has also examined the outcomes of inspiration in daily life. A large body of empirical research has shown that inspiration is positively associated with various desirable outcomes, such as productivity, efficiency (Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010), hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010), goal-striving (Milyavskaya et al., 2012), self-determination, work mastery, perceived competence, and positive affect (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). The psychological literature has primarily examined the relationship between creativity and inspiration. Inspiration has been found to predict diverse indicators of creativity, such as the receipt of U.S. patents

⁷ The inspiration scale is composed of four statements (e.g., I experience inspiration), each followed by an intensity item (“How strongly or deeply”) and one frequency item (“How deeply or strongly”), measured with a seven-point Likert-type scale (Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

(Thrash & Elliot, 2003), self-reported creativity (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), and poetic creativity (Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010).

1.2.2 Research on Employee Inspiration

To approach the topic of FLE inspiration, I provide an integrated and synthesized overview of the current state of knowledge of employee inspiration. A large body of research has used “employee inspiration” in a rather informal or anecdotal way (Section 1.2.2.1). I draw the reader’s attention to leadership research which has dealt with employee inspiration extensively (Section 1.2.2.2). Finally, I discuss the organizational and entrepreneurial literature on employee inspiration (Section 1.2.2.3).

1.2.2.1 Anecdotal Usage of Employee Inspiration

Much of the literature in organizational behavior and marketing has only tangentially explored the nature of employee inspiration. The construct has been rarely, if ever, defined, measured, or investigated directly. In these disciplines, employee inspiration has mostly been used anecdotally, often as a synonym for “employee motivation” (Lockwood & Kunda, 1999; Maxham & Netemeyer, 2003) or “gaining a new insight” (Langley et al., 1995). Inspiring experiences of employees have also been mentioned in service research. This literature principally describes singular manifestations of employee inspiration, such as emulating a supervisor who serves as a role model (Kohli et al., 1998), drawing inspiration from a company’s advertising (Wentzel et al., 2010), or gaining a new idea from interacting with a customer (Lages & Piercy, 2012).

Furthermore, inspiration has frequently been understood as a facet of other employee-centric constructs in organizational behavior, such as work-related affect (van Katwyk et al., 2000; Watson et al., 1988), organizational productive energy (Cole et al., 2012), and employee engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Researchers examining employee engagement have viewed inspiration as similar to dedication, enthusiasm, and pride (Schaufeli et al., 2002). In the same vein, “being inspired” is one constituent of affective work-related well-being (Ghasemy et al., 2020; van Katwyk et al., 2000), which is based on the conceptualization of general positive affect in daily life (Watson et al., 1988). According to this perspective, inspiration is one of the various positive mood states (similar to enthusiasm, joy, happiness). Additionally, it is one of the factors contributing to the emotional dimension of productive organizational energy, i.e., “the extent to which an organization, division, or team has mobilized its emotional, cognitive, and behavioral potential to pursue its goals” (Bruch & Vogel, 2011, p. 51). In the literature on organizational energy, inspiration is a work unit’s collective experience and has

a strong emotional component (Cole et al., 2012). In sum, organizational research and service research has tended to use inspiration informally without defining it as a proper construct. Rather, in this literature, inspiration is depicted as part of other employee-centric constructs.

1.2.2.2 Employee Inspiration from the Leadership Perspective

The leadership literature has widely addressed inspiration (Avolio & Bass, 1999; Bass, 1985; Bono & Judge, 2004; Conger & Kanungo, 1994; Morhart et al., 2009; Neumanich & Keller, 2007; Yukl & van Fleet, 1982). In the leadership literature, “inspirational motivation” describes leaders’ inspirational ability and effort to energize their followers, transmit passion to them, and motivate them to exceed performance expectations. The approach generally builds on the assumption that inspirational leaders can “influence salespeople to perform above and beyond the call of duty” (MacKenzie et al., 2001, p. 129) by articulating a vision beyond one’s self-interest, expressing confidence, being optimistic, and reinforcing organizational ideals (Bass, 1985). Researchers at the intersection between service research and leadership research have frequently shown that leaders’ inspirational skills enhance FLE motivation (Wieseke et al., 2011) and desirable FLE behaviors, including brand-building behavior (Morhart et al., 2009), sales-oriented behavior (Boichuk et al., 2014), and service-sales ambidexterity (Ruyter et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2012). In these studies, leaders’ inspirational skills have been measured by asking employees to indicate the level at which they perceive a leader to be inspiring. The most widely used scales are the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass, 1985), with a sample item being, “Rate the extent to which your leader articulates a compelling vision,” and the Charismatic Leadership Scale (Conger & Kanungo, 1998), with a sample item being, “Rate the extent to which this leader provides inspiring strategic and organizational goals.” Consistent with this view, leadership researchers have investigated the inspirational content of vision statements that leaders can articulate to their followers (Sosik & Dinger, 2007). Seeking to understand why some visions are more appealing to followers than others, researchers asked corporate executives to describe and rate their visions against a long list of adjectives. “Inspirational” was included as one of several adjectives to describe the appeal of vision statements, along with “purposeful,” “innovative,” and “focused” (Larwood et al., 1995; Ruvio et al., 2010). The general assumption was that if leaders succeeded in crafting a vision statement that brings together these appealing attributes, they would be more likely to influence their followers positively.

In sum, inspirational leadership studies have above all conceptualized inspiration as a leader's ability to inspire her/his followers and an attribute of a vision that inspirational leaders communicate to their followers. In leadership research, inspiration is a purposefully designed speech act that leaders communicate to their followers. Its effectiveness depends on the leader's skills, effort, and willpower (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). The focus is on the leader-follower relationship and on the process through which leaders' behaviors can cause followers to perform better.

1.2.2.3 Employee Inspiration as Perceived by Employees

A more recent literature stream in organizational behavior has investigated employee inspiration as the employee's subjective work experience and focal construct. Relevant studies in this area are summarized below.

James and Lahti (2011) investigated the effect of employee vision inspiration, defined as employee's "motivation to help achieve their organizations' visions" (p. 108), on organizational performance. They showed that inspirational leadership (i.e., the extent to which a leader communicates the company's vision convincingly) and organizational factors (e.g., organizational hierarchy, a collective reward system) positively affect employee vision inspiration, which, in turn, enhances organizational performance. To measure employees' vision inspiration, the authors used an ad-hoc scale asking employees to rate two items, "To what extent does the organization's vision inspire you?" and "How strong are your feelings of loyalty to your organization's mission?"

The organizational psychologists *Straume and Vittersø (2012)* investigated the effect of complex work environments on employees' experiences of inspiration at work. They described inspiration as a "feeling state" (p. 338) but did not explicitly define the construct. Their main finding was that employees experience happiness (i.e., pleasure or satisfaction) and inspiration in different situations at work. The lack of challenge leads to feelings of happiness and satisfaction at work, while inspiration emerges from the novel, complex and challenging environments and eventually leads to self-development and growth. To measure the effect of difficult work situations on employee inspiration, the survey participants ($N = 465$ healthcare workers) were asked to rate their previous workday in terms of inspiration using the day reconstruction method (Kahneman et al., 2004; 1 = *not inspired* to 7 = *inspired*).

Avramenko (2013) explored employees' experiences of inspiration in the organizational context by conducting 18 qualitative interviews with employees from three

Latvian and Dutch telecommunication companies. He conceptualized employee inspiration as a “heightened emotional and cognitive condition associated with individuals being energetic, having clarity of mind and sense of concentration on tasks” (p. 126). Avramenko found that inspiration is not confined to personal life but often occurs in organizational settings. His findings indicated that employees often associate inspiration at work with energy, freedom, and happiness and that employees’ perceptions of inspiration may vary depending on their position in the organization. Employees indicated that inspiration is useful because it allows them to deal with stress and monotonous routines more easily. In contrast, managers perceived inspiration as a human resource management technique aimed at motivating employees.

In his doctoral thesis, *I. Smith (2014)* conceptualized employee inspiration in line with psychological research (Thrash & Elliot, 2003) and importantly contributed to our understanding of the process during which individuals become inspired. Using an online experiment, *I. Smith (2014)* showed that inspiring stimulus objects share three characteristics. First, they are disruptive to one’s previous thinking. Second, they are relevant to the fulfillment of human needs (e.g., feeling part of a community), and third, they appear attainable and thus motivate action. Furthermore, *I. Smith (2014)* showed that inspiration enhances prosocial behavior. More precisely, the results from his field study indicated that when exposed to their manager’s inspiring speech about donating blood, employees are more inspired to engage in pro-social behavior. To operationalize inspiration, the author adapted the domain-general inspiration scale (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), with a sample item being, “I was inspired to participate in the blood drive.”

An and Youn (2018) investigated the relationship between appreciation of art, inspiration, and creativity in the work-related context. Their experimental study (with business school students as a sample) found that participants exposed to artwork (e.g., photographs of artworks painted by Vincent van Gogh) experienced higher levels of inspiration. Inspiration, in turn, positively affected participants’ creativity problem solutions (e.g., generated more creative solutions for recycling packaging materials). The authors followed Thrash and Elliot’s (2003) social psychological conceptualization and measured inspiration utilizing an 8-item scale by Thrash, Elliot et al. (2010) (sample item: “I had important insights or revelations that I strove to express”). Their research contributes to our understanding of employee inspiration by highlighting that aesthetic experiences with art may trigger inspiration at work and, consequently, creative behavior. This implies that inspiration plays an important role in increasing employees’ creative problem-solving abilities, especially in new product development.

Watkins (2020) examined co-workers' success stories (e.g., signing a new service contract with a client) as an important source of inspiration at work. The effect of this source depended primarily on the recipient's attitude towards the discloser (i.e., the coworker narrating her/his success). Perceiving the discloser as a competitor elicits envy in the employee. In contrast, if competition is low and the new information could co-benefit the employee, she/he will become inspired. This finding indicates that the effect of an inspiring source might vary across employees. To explain why some employees react with envy while others react with inspiration, *Watkins (2020)* argued that employees compare themselves to their coworkers, which is in line with the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954; Lockwood & Kunda, 1999). Furthermore, *Watkins (2020)* contributes to our understanding of the outcomes of employee inspiration by showing that inspired employees may engage in interpersonal organizational citizenship behavior defined as "discretionarily helping a coworker in a way that bolsters organizational functioning" (*Watkins, 2020, p. 11*). Employee inspiration was measured employing the 5-item admiration scale (*Sweetman et al., 2013*) (sample items: "I am inspired by my coworkers"; "I admire my coworkers"), focusing on coworkers as the main source of inspiration.

Wartiovaara et al. (2019) proposed a conceptual framework for understanding the role of inspiration in entrepreneurship, building on the conceptualization of inspiration in social psychology (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). In the entrepreneurial context, the authors argued that entrepreneurs' openness influences inspiration to experience and the need for achievement, making entrepreneurs more responsive to ideas in their environment. Feeling inspired may alter entrepreneurs' thinking, emotions, and behavior by influencing their identification of new opportunities, decision-making, and productivity and reducing their fear of failure. Furthermore, inspiration may energize entrepreneurs to transform new ideas into creative output. Their conceptual work contributes to our understanding of employee inspiration by highlighting that inspiration may play a predominant role in the business context and may affect individuals' behavior, decision making, effort, and energy at work.

Bhansing et al. (2018) examined the relationship between entrepreneurs' passion and their experience of inspiration. In line with the psychological conceptualization of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), *Bhansing et al. (2018)* considered inspiration as a "motivational response to a creative idea, preceding this process of transformation" (p. 16). They found that other passionate individuals in the entrepreneurs' work environ-

ment inspire them to actualize creative ideas (e.g., concerning new product development). Administering a survey to 358 entrepreneurs across the Netherlands, they showed that one's passion for work, i.e., the degree to which individuals are passionately engaged with their work, is an antecedent of inspiration in the entrepreneurial context. To measure the frequency and intensity with which entrepreneurs experience inspiration, they used the domain-generic inspiration scale (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Their findings contribute to our understanding of employee inspiration by identifying two antecedents of inspiration (i.e., presence of other passionate individuals and one's passion for work) at the workplace. Table 1-1 provides an overview of the empirical studies that have conceptualized and investigated employee inspiration as a focal construct.

Table 1-1:
Extant Studies on Employee Inspiration

Context	Study	Journal	Key Findings	Theoretical Approach	Sample	Measurement
Organizational Behavior	James and Lahti (2011)	Creativity and Innovation Management	A leader's articulation of the company's vision and the presence of a collective reward system positively influence employee vision inspiration, enhancing organizational performance.	Inspirational leadership; psychological conceptualization of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003)	Employees from software firms/financial service providers	"To what extent does the organization's vision inspire you?" "How loyal do you feel to your organization's mission?"
Organizational Psychology	Straume and Vittersø (2012)	Journal of Positive Psychology	Inspiration in the organizational context is triggered by complex work situations and leads to eudaimonic well-being.	Functional model of well-being	Healthcare worker (e.g., nurses)	Single item (7-point Likert Scale; 1 = <i>not inspired</i> ; 7 = <i>inspired</i>)
Organizational Behavior	Avramenko (2013)	Baltic Journal of Management	Employee inspiration often occurs in organizational settings. The perception of inspiration may vary across employees from the different levels of the organizational hierarchy.	Psychological conceptualization (Thrash & Elliot, 2003)	18 employees from telecommunication firms	Qualitative interviews
Organizational Behavior	Smith (2014)	Doctoral dissertation	Source characteristics of stimulus object (disruptiveness, relevance to motives, attainability) lead to employee inspiration, which, in turn, enhances prosocial behavior.	Psychological conceptualization of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003).	MTurk (Studies 1 and 2); employees (Study 3)	4-item inspiration scale (IS)
Organizational Behavior	An and Youn (2018)	Journal of Business Research	Exposure to artwork inspires individuals in the organizational context and enhances creative idea generation (e.g., brand-name generation).	Psychological conceptualization of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003)	Students	8-item scale based on Thrash et al. (2010)
Organizational Behavior	Watkins (2020)	Journal of Management	Inspiration may be triggered by listening to a coworker's success story and may lead to interpersonal, organizational citizenship behavior.	Social comparison theory (1954)	Employees	5-item scale (Sweetman et al., 2013); e.g., "I admire my coworker."
Entrepreneurship	Wartiovaara et al. (2019)	Journal of Business Research	Inspiration plays a key role in entrepreneurs' creative processes and may significantly transform thinking and behavior.	Psychological conceptualization of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003)	NA (conceptual paper)	N/A
Entrepreneurship	Bhansing et al. (2018)	Journal of Entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurs' passion for work (i.e.,) predicts their level of inspiration.	Psychological conceptualization of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003)	998 entrepreneurs	4-item inspiration scale (IS) ⁸

Source: Author's illustration.

⁸ The inspiration scale (IS) consists of four stem statements: "I experienced inspiration.", "Something I encountered or experienced inspired me.", "I was inspired to do something." "I felt inspired", each followed by two questions, concerning frequency (How often does this happen?, anchored at 1 = *never* to *very often*) and intensity (How deeply or strongly (in general?) anchored at 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very deeply or strongly*).

1.3 Status Quo of Frontline Employee Research

In recent years, FLEs, their behaviors, emotions, and job-related attitudes have increasingly attracted attention from researchers across disciplines. Management researchers, for example, have been concerned with how FLEs affect organizational outcomes (Subramony & Pugh, 2015), while organizational psychologists study how FLEs in frontline positions experience stress (Dreison et al., 2018). Service and marketing research, in turn, focuses primarily on FLEs from the customer perspective, exploring how FLEs, their behaviors, and their attitudes influence customers during service interactions (Subramony et al., 2021). In this dissertation, I seek to contribute to the FLE-related literature by investigating inspiration in the context of FLEs. I approach the topic of FLE inspiration from a marketing and service perspective. Therefore, I now review the extant literature on FLEs in service and marketing research.

1.3.1 Relevance of Frontline Employees to Service and Marketing Research

Due to FLEs' power to positively influence customers and firm outcomes (see Section 1.1.1), service research has recently devoted considerable attention to FLEs to understand the underlying factors that drive their behaviors and attitudes (Auh et al., 2019; Delcourt et al., 2016; Evanschitzky et al., 2011; Friend et al., 2020; Grandey et al., 2011; Rapp et al., 2016; Schepers & van der Borgh, 2020). Examples of factors that influence FLEs' attitudes and behaviors include job characteristics, such as autonomy or feedback (Wilder et al., 2014), individual personality (Hurley, 1998), personal values (Sousa & Coelho, 2011), the social environment (Sergeant & Frenkel, 2000), the employee-supervisor relationship (Tierney et al., 2006; Tierney & Farmer, 2004), companies' advertisements (Wentzel et al., 2010), service climate (Jerger & Wirtz, 2017), and customer satisfaction (Frey et al., 2013). Research on inspiration and its potential to influence FLE behaviors and attitudes has, however, received only limited attention from service researchers so far (Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

Since I want to position FLE inspiration as a new construct within the FLE literature and identify its relation to existing constructs, it is important to review the existing employee-centric constructs. The following section focuses on the status quo of relevant research on the various FLE constructs and their outcomes for employees (Section 1.3.2) and customers (Section 1.3.3), while Chapter 3 (Section 3.2) defines each employee construct and distinguishes it from FLE inspiration.

1.3.2 Established Frontline Employee Constructs

Marketing and service researchers have examined several employee constructs, including job-related attitudes (e.g., employee satisfaction), motivational states (psychological empowerment, engagement, intrinsic motivation), behaviors (employee creativity and discretionary work behavior), and traits (e.g., work-related curiosity). Although these constructs have often been studied in the FLE context, they are not limited to this context. For example, many researchers have studied employee satisfaction from an organizational perspective, showing that employee satisfaction positively affects employees' well-being and productivity (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). However, a lot of research has specifically studied job satisfaction in the FLE context (e.g., Homburg & Stock, 2004). The following subsections review the status quo of research on each of these employee constructs. They introduce each construct from a broader perspective and subsequently from the marketing and service perspective, summarizing the findings that apply to FLEs.

1.3.2.1 Employee Satisfaction

Employee satisfaction is one of the most widely studied constructs in marketing and service research (S. Brown & Peterson, 1993; Homburg & Stock, 2004; Lages & Piercy, 2012; Zhou & George, 2001). Employee satisfaction has been defined as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from an appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (Locke, 1976, p. 1300). A large body of marketing and service research has shown that employee satisfaction enhances employee and customer outcomes. In the FLE context, employee satisfaction has been found to drive the generation of ideas to improve service delivery (Lages & Piercy, 2012), sales performance (S. Brown & Peterson, 1993), job performance, and retention (Zablah et al., 2012). Employee satisfaction has also been shown to positively affect customer satisfaction (S. Brown & Peterson, 1993; Homburg & Stock, 2004) and loyalty (Homburg et al., 2009), which, in turn, drives a firm’s financial results (S. Brown & Lam, 2008). This link between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction is a central element of a conceptual framework referred to as the service–profit chain (Heskett et al., 1997), which is detailed in Chapter 5.

1.3.2.2 Employee Motivation

Motivation is a foundational topic in organizational psychology, marketing, and service research. Motivation describes the degree to which a person wants and chooses to engage in goal-directed behavior (Latham & Pinder, 2005; Mitchell, 1982). Since

motivation describes the forces that drive action, an understanding of motivation is central to explaining employee behavior (Grant, 2008). Motivation researchers have generally differentiated between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Pinder, 2014). Extrinsic motivation is the desire to expend effort to obtain outcomes external to the work itself, such as rewards or recognition (Deci & Ryan, 1985). When individuals are extrinsically motivated, they are driven by goals, rewards, and external evaluations of the task itself. In contrast, intrinsic motivation refers to the desire to accomplish a task for enjoyment (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Most employee motivation research has focused on intrinsic motivation (Gilson & Shalley, 2004). The underlying rationale is that employees' traits and situational factors affect intrinsic motivation, leading to certain work behaviors, attitudes, and performance (Parker et al., 2010). Service and marketing researchers, in particular, have shown that intrinsic motivation drives many important FLE behaviors, including willingness to participate in service innovation implementation (Cadwallader et al., 2010), creativity (Coelho et al., 2011; Zhang & Bartol, 2010), service performance (Hur et al., 2020), customized service behaviors (Gwinner et al., 2005), brand-building behavior (Morhart et al., 2009), innovation selling (Hohenberg & Homburg, 2016), adoption of IT-enabled services (Wunderlich et al., 2013), retail manager behaviors (T. Arnold et al., 2009), and sales behavior (Fang et al., 2004).

1.3.2.3 Employee Empowerment

Empowerment is an important construct in marketing and service research because of its link to important employee behaviors and business outcomes (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991; Chebat et al., 2002; Wilder et al., 2014). This research considered two conceptualizations of empowerment: the structural conceptualization, which defines empowerment as a “practice or set of practices involving the delegation of the responsibility down the hierarchy to give employees increased decision-making authority in respect to the execution of their primary work tasks” (Leach et al., 2003, p. 28), and the psychological conceptualization, which defines empowerment as a state originating from employees' perceptions of their job and reflecting their feelings of empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995). Spreitzer (1995) was the first to develop a multidimensional instrument to assess psychological empowerment. Based on Thomas and Velthouse (1990), Spreitzer (1995) defined psychological empowerment as intrinsic task motivation reflecting a sense of control concerning one's work and an active orientation to one's work role that manifests in four cognitions: meaning, self-determination, competence, and impact.

Service and marketing scholars have continuously been interested in psychological empowerment because of its effect on FLE behaviors and attitudes (Chebat & Kollias, 2000). Previous research has shown that psychological empowerment positively influences FLE task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, innovation behavior (Seibert et al., 2011), job satisfaction, role clarity, organizational commitment (Chebat et al., 2002; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996), service performance (Kumar & Pansari, 2016), and FLEs' ability to adapt a service to customer needs (Wilder et al., 2014). Chapter 3 (see Section 3.2.3.4) focuses on the relationship between FLE inspiration and psychological empowerment rather than structural empowerment for two reasons. First, psychological empowerment, like FLE inspiration, is understood as a psychological state residing within employees (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Second, structural empowerment does not reflect the nature of empowerment as experienced by employees and is limited to the organization-centric perspective on empowerment.

1.3.2.4 Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a relatively new construct in the marketing and service literature. Researchers have emphasized mainly two conceptualizations of employee engagement. First, most researchers follow the conceptualization of employee engagement as an "affective-motivational state," as Schaufeli et al. (2002) suggested. These authors defined employee engagement as a "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 72). Following this conceptualization, research has shown that work engagement is negatively related to employee absenteeism and turnover and positively related to job satisfaction (Rich et al., 2010), organizational commitment, and performance (Salanova et al., 2003; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Service and marketing researchers, in particular, have shown that FLE engagement positively affects service climate (Salanova et al., 2005), salesperson performance (Miao & Evans, 2013), and FLE organizational commitment (Suh et al., 2011). From the customer perspective, employee engagement positively influences customer loyalty (Salanova et al., 2005), customer satisfaction, profitability (Harter et al., 2002), and customer service perceptions (Menguc et al., 2013).

Second, Kumar and Pansari (2014) suggested another conceptualization of employee engagement, defining it as a "multidimensional construct which comprises of all the different facets of the attitudes and behaviors of employees towards the organization" (p. 55). The dimensions of employee engagement proposed by Kumar and Pansari comprise employee satisfaction, identification, commitment, loyalty, and job performance. Building on this conceptualization, Kumar and Pansari (2016) explored the relationship between employee engagement and customer engagement. The authors

showed that employee engagement positively affects customer engagement and firm performance and that this effect is stronger for service firms in which FLEs directly and regularly interact with customers rather than for manufacturing firms. Researchers following the conceptualization presented by Schaufeli et al. (2002) have tended to view employee engagement as a motivational construct, while Kumar and Pansari (2016) perceived employee engagement primarily as a behavioral construct.

1.3.2.5 Employee Creativity

Firms often attach great importance to employee creativity as a key driver of success (Sok et al., 2018). Creative employees develop new ideas and suggest novel products and procedures which, in turn, can be implemented and used to promote the organization's survival and effectiveness (Zhou & George, 2003). Based on this argumentation, a large body of research has argued that employee creativity (i.e., the generation of novel and useful ideas) is critical for ensuring a company's competitive advantage (Amabile, 1988; Woodman et al., 1993). Therefore, employee creativity attracts growing attention from academics seeking to understand how it can be promoted and sustained (Coelho & Augusto, 2010). Employee creativity has garnered recent attention from service and marketing researchers (Agnihotri et al., 2014; Coelho & Augusto, 2010; Shalley et al., 2004; Sok et al., 2018), largely because it helps FLEs identify the latent needs of customers and suggest innovative solutions to customer problems (Sousa & Coelho, 2011). For example, Coelho and Augusto (2011) showed that FLEs' work factors (e.g., job complexity, relationships with customers or coworkers) and intrinsic motivation might foster FLE creativity. FLE creativity has been shown to lead to various positive outcomes for employees and customers. In this context, FLE creativity positively affects FLEs' ability to adapt a service to customer needs (Wilder et al., 2014) and enhances customer satisfaction (Y. Dong et al., 2015). Creative FLEs are more likely to uncover customers' latent needs, develop a good rapport with customers, and solve their service problems creatively and effectively, ultimately creating a superior experience (Coelho et al., 2011; Grewal et al., 2009).

1.3.2.6 Discretionary Work Behaviors

The changing work and company environments have challenged traditional views of individual work behaviors and performance. In response to the demanding company environment, researchers have studied a range of new work behaviors that describe "extra things people do above and beyond the call of duty to enhance the effectiveness of their agencies" (MacKenzie et al., 1999, p. 407). Examples of employee discretionary work behaviors include employee proactivity (Griffin et al., 2007) and

change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior (Choi, 2007). Service and marketing researchers, in particular, have focused on discretionary work behavior of FLEs, including customer-directed extra-role behavior (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2003), brand extra-role behavior (Hughes et al., 2019), feedback-seeking behaviors (Auh et al., 2019), discretionary customer-directed behavior (Chan & Wan, 2012), organizational citizenship behavior (MacKenzie et al., 1999), extra-role customer service behavior (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997), customized service behaviors (Gwinner et al., 2005), and service-oriented citizenship behavior (Auh et al., 2014). While these constructs differ in their scope and precise definition, they describe work behaviors that exceed what is formally required from FLEs, are highly beneficial to companies and customers (Bell & Menguc, 2002), and focus on “changing rather than maintaining the status quo” (Morrison & Phelps, 1999, p. 404). For example, FLE adaptiveness refers to the “deliberate modification of the service offering and/or the employee’s interpersonal behavior in a situationally appropriate manner in response to meeting perceived consumer needs” (Gwinner et al., 2005, p. 135), while employee proactivity implies larger-scale changes, including making suggestions to improve the overall efficiency of the organization (Griffin et al., 2007). Given their positive effect on firm success and customer-level outcomes (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2003), marketing and service research has extensively studied the drivers of discretionary work behavior, including empowering leadership (Auh et al., 2014), motivation to adapt to customer needs (Gwinner et al., 2005), and organizational justice (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2003).

1.3.2.7 Work-Related Curiosity

As companies face an increasingly dynamic market environment and the nature of work is changing, organizational researchers have stressed the importance of curious employees for organizational success (Hardy et al., 2017; Mussel, 2013). While service and marketing researchers have not yet studied curiosity in the FLE context, organizational researchers have provided initial evidence that curiosity, defined as the “intrinsically motivated desire for specific information” (Loewenstein, 1994, p. 87), significantly affects job performance (Mussel, 2013). Empirical research has indicated that curious employees adapt more easily to new work environments (S. Harrison et al., 2011), engage in extra-role behavior (S. Harrison & Dossinger, 2017), and are more creative at work (Hardy et al., 2017). In particular, S. Harrison and Dossinger (2017) showed that curious employees seek out ideas on their own, invite more feedback from others, and readily accept others’ ideas. Additionally, curiosity plays an important role during newcomer adaptation because it motivates exploratory behavior, bolsters creative problem setting,

and ultimately drives employee performance (S. Harrison et al., 2011). Table 1-2 summarizes the prior literature and the most important findings.

Table 1-2:
Summary: Employee Metrics in Prior Marketing and Service Literature

Employee Construct	Most Common Definition	Most Important Findings and Representative Studies in Marketing and Service Research
Employee Satisfaction	“Pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from an appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (Locke, 1976; p. 1300)	Employee satisfaction enhances FLE sales performance (S. Brown & Peterson, 1993), FLE generation of ideas for service improvement (Lages & Piercy, 2012), and positively affects customer-level outcomes, including customer satisfaction (Homburg & Stock, 2004)
Employee Motivation	• Intrinsic motivation: One’s desire to expend effort based on enjoyment and interest. • Extrinsic motivation: One’s desire to expend effort to obtain external outcomes, such as rewards or recognition (Grant, 2008)	• Most service and marketing research deals with intrinsic motivation. • Intrinsic motivation drive various FLE behaviors, including - Creativity (Coelho et al., 2012) - Brand-building behavior (Morhart et al., 2009) - Customized service behavior (Gwinner et al., 2005)
Employee Empowerment	• Structural empowerment: “Sharing power between superiors and subordinates to cascade relevant decision-making power to lower levels of the organizational hierarchy” (Spreitzer, 2008; p. 55) • Psychological empowerment: Intrinsic motivational state consisting of meaning, self-determination, competence, impact (Spreitzer, 2008)	• Most service and marketing research deals with psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment has been shown to enhance FLE outcomes: - FLE task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, innovation behavior (Seibert et al., 2011) - Role clarity, organizational commitment, employee satisfaction (Chebat et al., 2002)
Employee Engagement	Affective-motivational state is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002)	• Employee engagement has been shown to enhance outcomes on the FLE level and customer level: - FLE organizational commitment (Suh et al., 2011) - Service climate (Salanova et al., 2005) - Customer engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2016) - Customer loyalty (Salanova et al., 2005) - Customer satisfaction (Harter et al., 2002)
Employee Creativity	Generation of novel and useful ideas that benefit the company (Amabile, 1988)	• FLE creativity is influenced by the FLEs’ level of intrinsic motivation and job complexity (Coelho & Augusto, 2011). • FLE creativity enhances employee and customer outcomes: - FLE service adaptiveness (Wilder et al. 2018) - FLE service performance (Sok et al., 2018) - The customer experience (Coelho et al., 2011)
Discretionary Work Behaviors	An umbrella term that refers to work behaviors that go beyond predefined work requirements (MacKenzie et al., 1999)	• Discretionary work behaviors studied in the FLE context include, for example: - FLE adaptiveness (Gwinner et al., 2005) - Extra-role customer service behaviors (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997) - Brand extra-role behavior (Hughes et al., 2019)
Work-Related Curiosity	Employees’ desire for information that motivates exploration (Litman, 2005)	Work-related curiosity increases employees’ willingness to seek feedback from others at work (Harrison & Dossinger, 2017); it positively influences newcomer adaption and employee performance (Harrison & Sluss, 2011)

Source: Author’s illustration.

1.3.3 Effect of Frontline Employees on Customers

Section 1.3.2 focused on the various existing employee-centric constructs that describe FLE motivation, behavior, and attitudes. Since FLEs directly interact with customers at the point of sale and importantly influence their spending behavior (Mägi, 2003), it is crucial to understand the linkage between extant FLE constructs and customer outcomes.

Western economies are increasingly dominated by the service industry, which has spurred the so-called “employee–customer linkage research” in recent decades (Payne & Webber, 2006; S. D. Pugh et al., 2002). Service researchers, in particular, have sought to understand factors that contribute to high-quality service and successful service interactions (Rafaeli et al., 2008; Snipes et al., 2005). Service interactions are face-to-face encounters between customers and FLEs (Solomon et al., 1985), including, for example, buying a hamburger in a fast-food restaurant or purchasing a new phone at an electronics retail store. Given that employee attitudes and behaviors during customer interactions may leave a long-lasting impression that influences the customer’s spending behavior and loyalty, and ultimately the firm’s financial performance (Mägi, 2003), service researchers have sought to understand the link of FLE attitudes and behaviors with customer responses (Bitner et al., 1994; Evanschitzky, Sharma et al., 2012; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Kumar & Pansari, 2016).

To investigate the effect of FLEs on customers’ responses, researchers have particularly focused on the effects of employee satisfaction on customer outcomes, such as customer loyalty and customer satisfaction (S. Brown & Lam, 2008; Loveman, 1998); the effect of employees’ positive affect on customer affect and satisfaction (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006; S. D. Pugh, 2001); and the effect of employee engagement on customer outcomes, such as engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Table 1-3 offers an overview of the most relevant studies linking employee measures to customer outcomes. The three linkages are outlined below.

Service and marketing researchers have found a positive effect of employee engagement on customer service performance (Menguc et al., 2017), customers’ evaluation of the FLE’s service performance (Menguc et al., 2013), and on customer engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). The underlying argumentation of these studies is that “engaged employees [...] work out of happiness, excitement, and the sheer joy of providing excellent service to customers” (Menguc et al., 2013, p. 2165). Engaged FLEs’ motivated and positive state of mind affects how they treat and service customers, for example, by being friendly and helpful. Consequently, customers will evaluate the

service interaction with engaged FLEs as superior to service interaction with non-engaged peers (Salanova et al., 2005). Kumar and Pansari (2016), in particular, showed that, while both customer engagement and employee engagement positively influence firm performance, the effect of customer engagement on firm performance is stronger. Kumar and Pansari (2016) also observed that the influence of employee engagement on customer engagement is enhanced by employee empowerment.

Table 1-3:
Relevant Research on the Employee–Customer Linkage

Focal Employee Construct	Focal Customer Constructs	Representative Studies
Employee Satisfaction	→ Customer satisfaction	Homburg and Stock (2004, 2005); Jones et al., 2003; Wangenheim et al. (2007); Jones et al. (2003); Silvestro and Cross (2000); Hartline and Ferrell (1996); Koyuncu (2001); Payne and Webber (2006); Schlesinger and Zornitsky (1991), Schlesinger and Zornitsky (1991);
Employee engagement	→ Customer engagement → Customer satisfaction	Kumar and Pansari (2016); Menguc et al. (2013); Menguc et al. (2017)
Employee affect	→ Customer affect → Customer service perceptions → Customer service satisfaction	Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006); S. Pugh (2001); Tsai (2001); Wangenheim et al. (2007); Grandey et al. (2011)

Source: Author's illustration.

The link between employee affect and customer affect has also received considerable attention from service and marketing researchers. The underlying rationale for the transfer of affect between employees and customers is that FLEs' display of positive emotions (i.e., subjective feelings such as joy or happiness) during service interactions may be contagious such that they change the emotional state of customers and influence customers' perceptions and evaluations of the service encounter (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006; Mattila & Enz, 2002; Wangenheim et al., 2007; Zablah et al., 2017). Research on the employee–customer affect linkage has generally drawn on the emotional contagion framework (Hatfield et al., 1993; see Chapter 5; Section 5.2.2), suggesting that customers “catch” certain emotional states from FLEs (Homburg & Stock, 2004). In particular, marketing and service research has shown that FLEs' positive affect leads to various positive customer outcomes during service interactions, including customer perceptions of service quality (Barger & Grandey, 2006; Mattila & Enz, 2002) and future loyalty intentions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006). The contagion of positive affect from employees to customers is closely related to the employee–customer satisfaction linkage because positive affect correlates with satisfaction (Homburg & Stock, 2004). In other words, FLEs tend to display their satisfaction by smiling and showing positive emotions.

Customers, in turn, may consider FLEs' positive moods and smiling to be part of the service itself and may be more satisfied with the service (Grandey et al., 2011).

Most research on employee–customer linkage has thus far focused on the effect of employee satisfaction on customer satisfaction (S. Brown & Lam, 2008). Employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction are two of the most widely studied constructs in marketing research (Homburg & Stock, 2004). To link employee satisfaction to customer satisfaction, service and marketing researchers have commonly drawn on the logic of the service–profit chain framework (Heskett et al., 1997). This framework holds that satisfied employees are more productive and provide better service quality and value compared to less satisfied employees, leading to higher customer satisfaction (S. Brown & Lam, 2008; see Chapter 5; Section 5.2.1).

Empirical evidence on the link between employee satisfaction and customer responses remains ambiguous. While some research has found a positive relationship (Homburg & Stock, 2004), other researchers have reported a negative relationship (Silvestro & Cross, 2000) or no relationship (K. Brown & Mitchell, 1993). These inconclusive findings cast doubt on the notion that there is a strong relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction. In particular, several meta-analytic studies have challenged the presumed causal chain linking employee satisfaction to customer outcomes (i.e., customer satisfaction, customer loyalty) and firm profitability. These studies have reported either small or non-significant relationships between employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, and profitability (S. Brown & Lam, 2008; Harter et al., 2002; Riketta, 2008). For example, S. Brown and Lam (2008) showed that although the relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction was positive and statistically significant, the effect sizes were relatively modest. In their study, employee satisfaction accounted for only 4-6% of the total variance in customer satisfaction and 6-10% of the variance in customers' perceived service quality. In the same vein, Hogreve et al. (2017) found that employee satisfaction mediated only 29% of the influence of internal resources (i.e., support services and policies that enable employees to deliver results to customers) on employee productivity. Some researchers have also called into question the theoretical rationale for linking employee satisfaction to customer satisfaction. Bowen and Schneider (2014) criticized the focus on employee satisfaction in explaining service performance, noting that “[m]easures of job satisfaction are evaluative in nature, focusing on affect toward what was received or experienced regarding such issues as pay, promotion opportunities [...]; such measures are neither focused on service nor on customer experience” (p. 7). Together, the empirical evidence and theoretical criticism suggest the need to investigate additional employee constructs

that predict customer-level outcomes more reliably (e.g., customers' perceived service quality and customer loyalty).

The link between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction has been challenged not only due to its focus on employee satisfaction, as recently, researchers have also criticized the utility of companies' attempts to enhance customer satisfaction. Customers are key drivers of a firm's profit growth (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Therefore, managers and researchers have focused on various customer metrics to improve customer service quality perceptions and increase sales. In this regard, an extensive body of research in the marketing literature has investigated the effect of customer satisfaction on relevant variables, such as customer loyalty or spending behavior (DeWitt et al., 2008; Fornell et al., 2016; Mägi, 2003). However, researchers have challenged the adequacy of conceptualizing customer satisfaction as a precursor to brand loyalty and repurchase intentions (Bell & Menguc, 2002). Satisfying customers simply by selling them the right product or service is not enough, since most products or services are homogeneous and competition is intense (Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Oliver et al., 1997) and since satisfied customers are often indifferent to a firm's offering (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001); therefore, they switch between brands. In this context, Homburg et al. (2009) asserted that "a permanent increase in customer satisfaction is difficult to achieve, and therefore firms are searching for alternative ways to raise customers' loyalty" (p. 38).

Responding to the call for new customer-centric marketing metrics, marketing researchers have recently suggested that firms need to *inspire* customers (Böttger et al., 2017; Chang, 2020; Winterich et al., 2019). Customer inspiration is defined as "a customer's temporary motivational state that facilitates the transition from the reception of a marketing-induced idea to the intrinsic pursuit of a consumption-related goal" (Böttger et al., 2017). Empirical research has shown that customer inspiration predicts purchase intentions and customer loyalty more reliably than customer satisfaction (Böttger et al., 2017). As retaining customers is generally more profitable than acquiring new ones (Reinartz et al., 2005), customer inspiration has an important effect on firm profitability. Thus, it is evident that a company's primary goal should be to inspire customers, and researchers have called for a more in-depth investigation of the antecedents of customer inspiration, suggesting that interacting with FLEs at the point of sale could play an important role in eliciting customer inspiration (Böttger et al., 2017; Rudolph et al., 2014). This leads to the assumption that inspiration is a crucial new construct to be studied in "employee–customer linkage research."

Nemanich & Keller, 2007). Though valid, this approach overlooks the idea that FLEs, or any employee, can experience inspiration at work subjectively. Employees exposed to the same sources (e.g., a leader or a mission statement) may be inspired differently, depending on their level of self-determination (Wegge et al., 2019), their relationship with the supervisor or leader (Molenberghs et al., 2017), and their interaction with customers or patients (Grant & Hofmann, 2011). Thus, employee inspiration needs to be understood as a subjective work experience. Second, extant research, especially in organizational studies, has used the term “inspiration” to refer to similar constructs, including admiration or optimism (Watkins, 2020), energy (Avramenko, 2013; Cole et al., 2012), a positive feeling state (Straume & Vittersø, 2012; van Katwyk et al., 2000), employee motivation (James & Lahti, 2011; Maxham & Netemeyer, 2003), or pride and dedication to one’s job (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The problem with this imprecise usage is that it does not consider inspiration a separate empirical construct, which hinders the advancement of inspiration research in the service domain. Third, extant service and management research remains theoretically fragmented and fails to provide a precise conceptualization of employee inspiration across sources, situations, and outcomes. Although the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) may explain why FLEs may emulate a role model (Wentzel et al., 2010) or engage in interpersonal, organizational citizenship behavior (Watkins, 2020), it does not explain why and how FLEs become inspired by customers during service interactions (Lages & Piercy, 2012). Such theoretical fragmentation hinders consistency of definition and crosstalk between disciplines. Fourth, extant research overlooks *frontline* employees as an important unit of analysis. Previous organizational research has studied work-related inspiration, drawing on samples of “regular” employees without customer contact (e.g., Straume & Vittersø, 2012; Watkins, 2020), entrepreneurs (Wartiovaara et al., 2019), and students (An & Youn, 2018). Since FLEs substantially differ from “regular employees” due to their interaction with customers (Schepers et al., 2016), findings from previous studies may not hold for FLEs. Thus, the question of how FLEs experience inspiration remains essentially unexplored. This question is interesting since FLEs’ psychological work experiences affect their workplace attitudes, emotions, and behavior (Hackman, 1980), and ultimately firm performance (Harter et al., 2010).

In sum, one of the major roadblocks to theoretical precision has been the lack of a consistent and reliable definition of FLE inspiration. To advance the development of inspiration research in the service domain, research needs a concise and theoretically sound conceptualization of FLE inspiration. Therefore, in this dissertation, I seek to answer the question: How can FLE inspiration be conceptualized?

Research Gap 2: Development and Validation of the FLE Inspiration Scale

Due to the lack of adequate conceptualization, research lacks a valid, reliable, and standardized measurement scale. Most studies (An & Youn, 2018; Bhansing et al., 2018; I. Smith, 2014) that have investigated inspiration in the organizational context have used the domain-general inspiration scale (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). However, domain-general (i.e., non-contextualized) items have lower validity as predictors of outcomes compared to contextualized items that impose a specific frame of reference (Lievens et al., 2008). This makes it necessary to measure employee inspiration using a domain-specific (i.e., contextualized) scale. In the absence of a standardized employee inspiration scale, researchers have drawn on ad-hoc scales (James & Lahti, 2011; Watkins, 2020). James and Lahti (2011), for example, measured employees' vision inspiration by asking employees to rate the extent to which the organization's vision inspires them. This practice, however, is less preferable to using a reliable and valid standardized scale that enables comparisons across studies (Goldsmith & Hofacker, 1991). In sum, research needs to empirically examine FLE inspiration and validate its construct to foster the advancement of inspiration research in the service context. Using a reliable and valid measurement scale allows for empirically differentiating the FLE construct from other constructs, replicating findings, and comparing results across studies (Goldsmith & Hofacker, 1991; MacKenzie, 2003). Therefore, another key question that I seek to answer is: How can FLE inspiration be measured?

Research Gap 3: Relationship Between Frontline Employee Inspiration and Established Employee-Centric Constructs

While an extensive body of marketing and service research has dealt with employee engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2016), employee creativity (Coelho et al., 2011), employee satisfaction (Heskett et al., 1997), psychological empowerment (Chebat et al., 2002), work-related curiosity (S. Harrison & Dossinger, 2017), and intrinsic motivation (Cadwallader et al., 2010), FLE inspiration has only received limited academic attention so far. Consequently, little is known about its relationship with other work-related constructs (e.g., employee creativity). Addressing this gap is significant because FLE inspiration could affect FLE work motivation, behavior, and attitudes. Prior research in social psychology has emphasized that inspiration in daily life enhances one's feelings of self-determination, work mastery, productivity, and efficiency (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004), and organizational literature hints at the positive effect of inspiration on work-related creativity (An & Youn, 2018), pro-social behavior (I. Smith, 2014), and interpersonal organizational citizenship behavior (Watkins, 2020). While these studies can provide initial insights into the effects of inspiration in work and daily life, an important question

remains unanswered: How does FLE inspiration relate to established work-related constructs in the FLE context, such as work-related curiosity, psychological empowerment, job satisfaction, discretionary work behavior, employee engagement, and intrinsic motivation?

Research Gap 4: Identifying the Sources of Frontline Employee Inspiration

Thus far, research has not provided conclusive evidence regarding what sources can trigger FLE inspiration. While leadership research has studied the inspirational effect of leaders' behavior (Bass, 1988; Shamir et al., 1998), the company's vision (Larwood et al., 1995), and ideological messages (Grant & Hofmann, 2011) on employees, it has overlooked the possibility that the sources of inspiration may vary across different employees and situations (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Research in social psychology has investigated various sources of inspiration in daily life, including examples of work mastery and competence (Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010), poetry (Thrash et al., 2017), and personal goals (Milyavskaya et al., 2012). Organizational researchers have shown that coworkers' success stories (Watkins, 2020), artworks (An & Youn, 2018), or a complex work environment (Straume & Vittersø, 2012) may trigger inspiration at work. These studies provide valuable insights into the sources of inspiration in daily life or professional life but are subject to two major limitations. First, they do not examine the sources of *frontline* employee inspiration. This gap is significant because, working at the retailers' boundaries, FLEs, unlike "regular" non-frontline employees (e.g., administrative staff), are exposed to different influences. For example, FLEs are constantly exposed to new product arrivals, new service innovations and technologies (Jörling et al., 2019), and diverse customer needs (Coelho & Augusto, 2010; van Dolen et al., 2002), all of which could inspire them. Second, these studies did not share a common conceptualization, underlying theory, and measurement (see Research Gap 1), making it difficult to compare the influence of the sources of inspiration. For example, we do not know whether FLEs become more inspired by their leaders, customers, or the brand they are promoting. It is important to address this gap by systematically investigating the various sources of FLE inspiration to provide practical guidance. In this way, retailers may be able to devise strategies to leverage FLE inspiration. Thus, another crucial question that this dissertation addresses is: What are the sources of FLE inspiration?

Research Gap 5: Exploring How Frontline Employee Inspiration Affects Customer-Level Outcomes

Although the service and marketing literature has extensively studied the link between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction (Homburg & Stock, 2004;

Wangenheim et al., 2007), employee engagement and customer engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2016), and employee affect and customer affect (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006), empirical research has yet to investigate the link between FLE inspiration, customer inspiration, and further customer-level outcomes (e.g., loyalty). Addressing this gap is significant for three reasons. First, marketing and service researchers have repeatedly challenged the narrow focus on employee satisfaction because its predictive power in explaining variance in relevant customer outcomes (e.g., customer loyalty) is limited (Bowen & Schneider, 2014; S. Brown & Lam, 2008; Homburg et al., 2009). As a result, researchers have called for further employee constructs that predict customer outcomes more reliably (Homburg et al., 2009). Investigating FLE inspiration could address this gap because inspiration positively influences creativity, productivity, and efficiency (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), all of which are key competencies that allow FLEs to provide excellent service quality and enhance customer outcomes. Second, unlike employee engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2014), employee satisfaction (Locke, 1976), and employee affect (S. D. Pugh, 2001), inspiration involves a sense of transcendence (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), which may explain how FLEs come up with innovative service ideas and service solutions that have the power to inspire customers (Böttger et al., 2017). FLEs' ability to address customer service problems in innovative or surprising ways that transcend the existing procedures is the key to enhancing customer service perceptions and maintaining competitive advantage, more so than simply engaging or satisfying customers (Agnihotri et al., 2014; Coelho & Augusto, 2010; Y. Dong et al., 2015; G. Wang & Netemeyer, 2004). Third, customer inspiration predicts purchase intentions and loyalty intentions, two key determinants of firm profitability and revenues (Evanschitzky, Ramaseshan et al., 2012; Heskett et al., 1994; Reinartz et al., 2005), more reliably compared to customer satisfaction (Böttger et al., 2017). This implies that researchers should seek to investigate the antecedents of customer inspiration. While previous research has argued that customers could become inspired by interacting with FLEs (Rudolph et al., 2012) and provided empirical evidence that inspiration may be passed between individuals by contagion (Thrash et al., 2017), service researchers have yet to investigate the linkage between FLE inspiration and customer inspiration. Thus, the question of *whether* and *how* FLEs can pass on their inspiration to customers during service interactions and thereby influence relevant customer attitudes (e.g., loyalty) and behavior (e.g., spending) remains unanswered. Therefore, the fifth key question in this dissertation is: How does FLE inspiration affect customer responses during service interactions?

1.5 Research Strategy

1.5.1 Research Questions and Contribution

Based on the research gaps, I aim to address the following research questions. Research Questions 1 to 4 tightly focus on FLEs' experience of inspiration, while Research Question 5 expands the focus to the customer perspective.

Research Question 1:

How can frontline employee inspiration be conceptualized?

(Chapter 2)

I approach FLE inspiration by focusing on FLEs as the main unit of analysis and drawing on the psychological construct of inspiration established by Thrash and Elliot (2003, 2004). Framing FLE inspiration as a personal and spontaneous work experience perceived by the individual FLE, I conducted a qualitative, explorative study in the absence of a well-defined theory regarding FLE inspiration (Study 1). To address Research Question 1, I provide a conceptual framework of FLE inspiration that integrates qualitative findings from Study 1 with extant inspiration theory from social psychology (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004). This conceptual framework offers insights into the nature of FLE inspiration. To advance our understanding of the concept of FLE inspiration and the process through which FLE inspiration evolves, the qualitative study was designed to provide insights into the sources, influencing factors (i.e., workplace characteristics, individual employee differences), and outcomes for employees and customers. The conceptualization serves to define FLE inspiration and identify key concepts conceptually related to FLE inspiration. It builds the foundation for subsequent quantitative studies in several ways. First, it forms the basis for developing a measurement scale (see Research Question 2). Second, it informs hypothesis development (see Research Question 3) to test the relationship between FLE inspiration and related employee-centric constructs (see Research Question 3) in quantitative settings. Third, it provides preliminary qualitative insights into the possible sources of FLE inspiration (see Research Question 4). Fourth, it provides initial insights into the possible link between FLE inspiration, customer inspiration, and downstream customer outcomes (see Research Question 5).

Theoretical Contribution. This dissertation links two literature streams, psychological inspiration and service research, by introducing a conceptualization of FLE inspiration in service research that is compatible with the broader conceptualization of psychological inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). This dissertation extends the study of

inspiration to the FLE context and thereby addresses the call for further research on the understudied topic of FLEs, their attitudes and behaviors (Singh et al., 2017). In the service literature, this dissertation presents an important psychological mechanism driving FLEs' attitudes and behaviors that contribute to successful service interactions and organizational success (Singh, 2000; Tierney & Farmer, 2004).

Managerial Contribution. The conceptual framework essentially contributes to retail and service managers' understanding of FLE inspiration by clarifying how, why, and when FLE inspiration is triggered, how it evolves, and how it can be enhanced to lead to desirable effects. While previous research has viewed inspiration through the leadership lens, arguing it is the leaders' responsibility to inspire their followers (Bass, 1985), this dissertation will deepen managers' understanding of FLEs' *subjective* experiences of inspiration and the processes through which FLEs identify new stimuli in the market environment and change their behavior and attitudes. Thereby, it enhances managers' understanding of psychological mechanisms that drive FLE performance. Although often overlooked as a crucial work unit, FLEs are key figures in providing service excellence (Coelho et al., 2011) and implementing new service strategies at the point of sale (Cadwallader et al., 2010), making it necessary for managers to understand the psychological mechanisms that drive their behavior.

Research Question 2:

How can frontline employee inspiration be measured?

(Chapter 3)

I conducted four scale development and validation studies (Chapter 3; Studies 2 to 5) to generate scale items and establish the reliability and convergent and discriminant validity of the FLE inspiration scale. To do so, I followed an in-depth development procedure consistent with previous approaches (e.g., Brocato et al., 2012; Nenkov et al., 2008) and established research guidelines (J. Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Churchill, 1979).

Theoretical Contribution. By developing and validating the FLE inspiration scale, I address the call for developing high-quality instruments in the marketing and service field (Bearden & Netemeyer, 1999). The new scale will allow service and marketing researchers to investigate FLE inspiration quantitatively. The construct and the measure of FLE inspiration are of great interest to all researchers who want to test the underlying psychological mechanisms that guide employee behaviors empirically.

Managerial Contribution. The research presented here offers a parsimonious scale for practitioners that is easy to include in the company's internal employee surveys. As a valid and reliable tool, the scale can create a basis for measuring and comparing FLE inspiration at different times or in different stores. Alternatively, the scale may be used as a diagnostic instrument during personnel selection processes. Following the maxim "What gets measured, gets done," assessing FLE inspiration would allow retailers to take a first step towards inspiring their workforce.

Research Question 3:

How does frontline employee inspiration relate to established employee-centric constructs (employee traits, behaviors, and attitudes)?

(Chapter 3: Nomological Validation)

To answer this question, I seek to place FLE inspiration in its nomological network of hypothesized antecedents and outcomes, building on the qualitative insights from Study 1 (Chapter 2). In Chapter 3, I classify each construct as either antecedent or outcome of FLE inspiration and test the hypotheses through a structural equation model (Study 5). Additionally, Study 5 provides evidence of predictive validity, showing that FLE inspiration uniquely predicts relevant employee outcomes that contribute to organizational success above and beyond traditional metrics (e.g., FLE satisfaction).

Theoretical Contribution. By showing how FLE inspiration relates to a set of established antecedents (e.g., work-related curiosity) and outcome variables (e.g., employee creativity, proactivity, and satisfaction), this dissertation builds on and constructively expands prior frontline research. Extant service literature has commonly focused on intrinsic motivation as an antecedent of FLE attitudes and behavior (Cadwallader et al., 2010; Coelho et al., 2011). By introducing FLE inspiration and distinguishing it from related constructs, this dissertation provides an additional, important motivational construct that will advance researchers' understanding of the underlying psychological mechanisms driving FLE attitudes and behavior.

Managerial Contribution. From a managerial perspective, a key question is whether it makes sense to introduce FLE inspiration as a new metric, complementing or even replacing traditional metrics, such as employee satisfaction. By clarifying how inspiring FLEs may affect important FLEs' attitudes and behaviors, this dissertation provides a strong theoretical rationale and empirical evidence for the positive effect of high FLE inspiration scores on firm performance. Thereby, it makes a strong case for introducing FLE inspiration as a key metric in retail firms.

Research Question 4:

What are the sources of frontline employee inspiration?

(Chapter 4)

Research has yet to address the sources of FLE inspiration. The crucial question in that regard is what sources (e.g., objects, people, and ideas) in the FLEs' environment trigger inspiration. To approach this question, I draw on the findings of the exploratory study, Study 1 (Chapter 2), which provides initial insights about the importance of different sources of FLE inspiration. To generalize and validate the findings gained from Study 1, I conducted two survey studies (Studies 6 and 7) using two large samples of U.S.-based FLE. While Study 6 investigated the frequency and intensity of each source of inspiration among FLEs across service industries, Study 7 focused on retail FLEs' discrete moments of inspiration at work and the effects of inspiration evoked by the various sources on FLEs' motivation to implement the newly learned idea at work.

Theoretical Contribution. This dissertation constitutes the first attempt to address the sources of FLE inspiration. As shown in the literature review, prior research on inspiration in the work context has singled out specific sources, such as leader behavior, ideological messages, vision statements, artwork, and role models (e.g., An & Youn, 2018; Bass, 1985; Watkins, 2020). I seek to integrate the evidence and explore the various sources of FLE inspiration to contribute to extant service research, which has thus far studied the influence of employees' work environment, such as rewards, job complexity, and relationships with supervisors on employee motivation, behaviors, and attitudes (Coelho & Augusto, 2010). Specifically, I examine how specific sources (e.g., the FLEs' store environment) inspire FLEs to actualize newly acquired ideas at work.

Managerial Contribution. A precise knowledge of the source of FLE inspiration may inform retail managers' decision-making processes. Specifically, this dissertation explores the frequency and intensity with which various sources off- and on-the-job inspire FLEs (Study 6) and their motivation to implement new ideas at work (Study 7), allowing managers to identify potential areas of improvement and leverage their FLEs' level of inspiration. These insights are especially helpful when designing and evaluating internal human resource practices that aim to improve FLEs' performance and service quality. Equipped with such understanding, retail managers would be better able to use inspirational tools to maximize FLE performance and service interactions.

Research Question 5:

How does frontline employee inspiration affect customer responses during service interactions?

(Chapter 5)

A large body of service literature has advanced the idea that FLEs critically influence customers during service interactions and their spending behavior (Homburg & Stock, 2004; H. B. Pugh et al., 2018; Wangenheim et al., 2007; Wieseke, Geigenmüller et al., 2012). However, whether and how FLE inspiration can positively affect customer responses during service interactions has not been determined. To address this question, an online scenario-based experiment was conducted with 342 participants (i.e., customers) to provide evidence that FLE inspiration predicts customer inspiration and customer outcomes (e.g., loyalty intentions; service satisfaction) beyond the predictive power of FLE satisfaction (Study 8).

Theoretical Contribution. Recent studies on employee–customer linkage have yielded mixed findings regarding the effect of employee satisfaction on customer satisfaction (Grandey et al., 2011; Silvestro & Cross, 2000), indicating a need for more research on the topic. This dissertation addresses this gap by testing the association between FLE inspiration and customer inspiration. Utilizing an online experiment, I test a complementary service–profit chain model (Heskett et al., 1997) built on the inspiration contagion model (Thrash et al., 2017). This study constitutes the first attempt to study inspiration contagion, i.e., the spill-over of inspiration, from FLEs to customers in the service context. Overall, this dissertation contributes to a better understanding of the psychological mechanisms that govern interactions between customers and employees, particularly in face-to-face encounters.

Managerial Contribution. Having a precise understanding of inspiration contagion between frontline employees and customers will help retailers improve the quality of their service interactions. Therefore, the insights of this dissertation may be especially valuable to channel retailers seeking to differentiate themselves from competitors through superior service quality (Rudolph, 2000). In particular, retailers may benefit in two ways. First, this dissertation emphasizes the need to revise the service–profit chain rationale that retailers should maximize employee satisfaction to optimize customer outcomes. By showing that FLE inspiration predicts desirable customer attitudes and behaviors during service interactions more reliably compared to FLE satisfaction, this dissertation provides managers with a viable alternative to a strategy that focuses strictly

on employee satisfaction. Second, a few leading retailers (e.g., IKEA, Nike) have recently integrated *customer* inspiration into their external marketing efforts. This dissertation encourages retailers to not only focus their efforts on inspiring customers directly but also invest in FLE inspiration to affect customer inspiration and other customer-related outcomes indirectly. Given that customers' interpersonal relationships with FLEs often have stronger and more enduring effects on customers compared to the firm's marketing efforts (e.g., loyalty programs, personalized mailings, social media campaigns) (Palmatier et al., 2007), retailers are well-advised to use FLE inspiration as a valuable tool to enhance customer inspiration and build strong relationships with customers.

Overarching Question from the Practical Perspective:

How can retail practitioners successfully leverage frontline employee inspiration?

(Chapter 6)

From a practical perspective, one key question is how managers can implement the empirical findings of this dissertation to inspire FLEs. In this regard, Chapter 6 summarizes the empirical findings of this dissertation. By providing a practical step-by-step guide for retail managers to successfully assess FLE inspiration and customer inspiration at the service level, this dissertation addresses the current shortcomings in the management and leadership literature on FLE inspiration. To date, practitioners can apply the insights on employee inspiration only to a limited extent. While most extant approaches to inspiration build on inspirational leadership theory and accordingly offer recommendations on developing leaders' ability to inspire their employees (Bass, 1985), concrete guidance on leveraging FLE inspiration to enhance service delivery is missing. The guide presented in this dissertation integrates insights from the extant customer inspiration research and the empirical findings from my research. Specifically, it enables retail managers to identify focal areas of FLE inspiration that require their immediate attention to inspire customers.

1.5.2 Dissertation Outline and Empirical Approach

This dissertation is divided into six chapters (see Table 1-4 for an overview). *Chapter 1* introduced the dissertation topic and demonstrated the theoretical and practical relevance of the research. It formulated five research questions that I seek to answer with my research. *Chapter 2* focuses on Research Question 1. It presents a comprehensive review of the literature on inspiration. Based on the extant inspiration research in

social psychology and a qualitative, exploratory study, this chapter aims to conceptualize FLE inspiration and to conceptually distinguish it from related employee constructs. A conceptual framework is developed based on the insights derived from the literature and the qualitative study. In *Chapter 3*, I present a scale measuring FLE inspiration and establish its construct validity. Thereby, Chapter 3 addresses Research Question 2. As part of the scale validation process, in Chapter 3, I also seek to position FLE inspiration in its nomological network of related antecedents and outcomes, which helps address Research Question 3. To do so, a set of hypotheses is developed and tested utilizing a structural equation model. *Chapter 4* presents a quantitative investigation of the sources of FLE inspiration (Studies 6 and 7), addressing Research Question 4. *Chapter 5* discusses the core link between FLE inspiration, customer inspiration, and customer outcomes, addressing Research Question 5. *Chapter 6* offers implications for retail and service practitioners. Apart from offering a detailed step-by-step guide for practitioners, this chapter summarizes the findings and addresses their implications and limitations for researchers. Furthermore, promising possibilities for future research are identified.

Six empirical studies were conducted as a part of this dissertation. *Study 1* adopted an exploratory qualitative approach involving 24 in-depth interviews with FLEs and frontline managers in direct customer contact to conceptualize FLE inspiration (Research Question 1). *Studies 2-5* were used to develop a scale to measure FLE inspiration and distinguish it from related constructs (Research Questions 2 & 3). *Study 2* developed and validated the FLE inspiration scale by administering a survey to 290 U.S. FLEs via the crowdsourcing platform MTurk. Like Study 2, *Study 3* collected data from 201 frontline U.S. employees via MTurk to further refine and validate the scale. *Study 4* surveyed 253 U.S. retail FLEs working utilizing the platform Prolific Academic. The objective of this study was to refine and validate the FLE inspiration scale. Like Study 4, *Study 5* involved a survey administered to 288 U.S.-based FLEs working in retail via the platform Prolific Academic. Study 5 provided a final validation of the scale. To quantitatively investigate the sources of FLE inspiration (Research Question 4), *Study 6* used the same dataset as Study 2 but extracted and analyzed a different set of questions from the questionnaire. Likewise, *Study 7* built on the same data set as Study 4 and used specific questions from the questionnaire to investigate the sources of FLE inspiration. *Study 8* investigated the customer-level outcomes (e.g., customer loyalty) of FLE inspiration (Research Question 5) through an online experiment with 342 participants on Academic Prolific.

Table 1-4:
Overview of Chapters

CHAPTER	OBJECTIVES	RESEARCH QUESTION ADDRESSED	STUDY
CHAPTER 1: Introduction	➤ Demonstrating the practical and theoretical relevance of FLE inspiration	/	/
CHAPTER 2: Conceptualizing Frontline Employee Inspiration	➤ Conceptualizing FLE inspiration using relevant theory and a qualitative study ➤ Conceptually distinguishing FLE inspiration from related constructs ➤ Developing a framework of FLE inspiration	Research Question 1: How can FLE inspiration be conceptualized?	Study 1: explorative, qualitative Study ($N = 24$)
CHAPTER 3: Measuring Frontline Employee Inspiration	➤ Developing a measurement scale of FLE inspiration	Research Question 2: How can FLE inspiration be measured?	Study 2 ($N = 290$) Study 3 ($N = 201$)
	➤ Establishing convergent and discriminant validity ➤ Establishing nomological and predictive validity	Research Question 3: How does FLE inspiration relate to established employee-centric constructs (employee traits, behaviors, and attitudes)?	Study 4 ($N = 253$) Study 5 ($N = 288$)
CHAPTER 4: The Sources of Frontline Employee Inspiration	➤ Quantitatively exploring the sources of FLE inspiration ➤ Examining the frequency and intensity with which various sources of inspiration inspire FLEs ➤ Examining the effect of inspiring sources on FLEs' motivation to act upon a new idea at work	Research Question 4: What are the sources of FLE inspiration?	Study 6 ($N = 290$; Dataset from Study 2) Study 7 ($N = 253$; Dataset from Study 4)
CHAPTER 5: The Effect of Frontline Employee Inspiration on Customer Outcomes	➤ Investigating the core link between FLE inspiration, customer inspiration, and downstream customer outcomes	Research Question 5: How does FLE inspiration affect customer outcomes?	Study 8 ($N = 342$)
CHAPTER 6: Synthesis and Conclusion	➤ Deriving implications for retailers: 5-step inspiration guide ➤ Summarizing key findings for researchers and practitioners ➤ Limitations and directions for future research	All research questions	/

Source: Author's illustration.

2 Conceptualizing Frontline Employee Inspiration

This dissertation approaches the topic of frontline employee (FLE) inspiration by drawing on the psychological construct of inspiration as established by Thrash and Elliot (2003, 2004). This theoretical approach to understanding FLE inspiration is detailed below.¹⁰

2.1 Inspiration Theory in Social Psychology

Thrash and Elliot (2003, 2004) pioneered the conceptualization of inspiration. Recognizing the need for a unified, integrated definition of the inspiration construct, these authors developed a domain-general conceptualization that draws on the core commonalities across diverse literature streams (e.g., leadership studies, literature, religion, sports). They conceptualized inspiration as an epistemic-motivational state triggered by a compelling idea and targeted towards the actualization of this idea (Oleynick et al., 2014). Based on this conceptualization, Thrash and Elliot (2003) developed a domain-generic standardized scale to measure inspiration—the Inspiration Scale (IS)—and provided empirical evidence for its construct validity. Social psychology has thereby advanced inspiration as an important empirical construct in its own right. This foundational work has established a fruitful basis for advancing inspiration research across various disciplines such as marketing (Böttger et al., 2017) and organizational behavior (An & Youn, 2018), and provides an ideal starting point for initiating the study of FLE inspiration.

2.1.1 Models of Inspiration

Inspiration has been conceptualized in terms of three complementary models (Thrash and Elliot, 2003, 2004): the *tripartite model*, the *process model*, and the *transmission model*. The following sections discuss each of these models.

Tripartite Model of Inspiration. According to this model, inspiration has three core characteristics: evocation, transcendence, and approach motivation. The moment of inspiration is spontaneously *evoked* by a stimulus object, rather than willfully initiated (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). One does not feel directly responsible for becoming inspired,

¹⁰ A shortened version of this chapter is part of the manuscript submitted to the *Journal of Service Research* (JSR). The pronoun “we” refers to myself and the other co-authors of the manuscript. An earlier version of this work was presented at the European Marketing Academy 47th Annual Conference: Authors: Neumüller, K., Kleinlercher, K., Evanschitzky, H. & Rudolph, T. (2020).

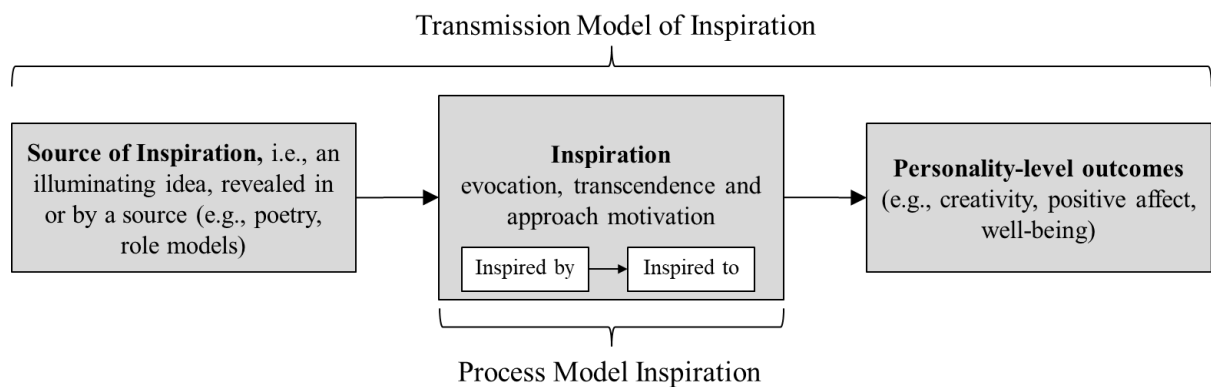
and therefore ascribes the responsibility for one's inspiration to something beyond one's own will. *Transcendence* implies the experience of a moment of clarity that enhances previous knowledge with new or better previously unconsidered possibilities (Abraham et al., 2012). Since transcendence provides these new possibilities, it is associated with self-growth in that it implies going beyond one's limits (Ashforth & Pratt, 2003). Finally, *approach motivation* (i.e., activation, energy) helps "to transmit, actualize or express the newly gained idea" (Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010, p. 470). These three characteristics are necessary and collectively sufficient to distinguish inspiration from other constructs (Thrash, Moldovan, Fuller et al., 2014).

Process Model of Inspiration. According to the process model of inspiration, inspiration consists of two processes: an epistemic process (inspired-by), which gives rise to a motivational process (inspired-to) (Thrash & Elliot, 2004). "Being inspired by" describes the receptive or "passive" process through which the individual is awakened to new possibilities and comes to appreciate the intrinsic value of a stimulus object (i.e., evocation and transcendence). In this moment "it clicks," and a novel idea enters awareness. "Being inspired to," in turn refers to an agentic, motivational process during which one feels compelled to realize newly acquired ideas or possibilities (i.e., approach motivation). The process of inspired-by corresponds to the core characteristics of transcendence and evocation. In contrast, the process of inspired-to reflects the core characteristic of approach motivation (Thrash & Elliot, 2004). The process model makes it possible to describe moments in which one process is present while the other is absent. For instance, one may be inspired by a painter's work (inspired-by) but may not feel inspired to paint oneself (inspired-to) (Thrash, 2020).

Transmission Model of Inspiration. Thrash and Elliot's (2004) third model of inspiration, the transmission model, conceptualizes inspiration as a mediator (transmitter) that links antecedents to outcomes and transmits the perceived, intrinsic values found in a source or stimulus object (antecedent) to the target object (outcome) (Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010). For instance, employees who are particularly helpful to customers (antecedent) may inspire their co-workers (mediator), who may in turn strive to be more helpful themselves (future outcome). The transmission model of inspiration is the theoretical basis for exploring the sources and outcomes of FLE inspiration, as it explains how sources (i.e., stimulus objects) lead to certain emotions, attitudes, and behaviors (Belzak et al., 2017). Thrash and Elliot (2003) used the term "trigger" to refer to the source that evokes inspiration (e.g., a person or idea) and "target" to refer to the object toward which the resulting motivation is directed (e.g., a possible self, personal goal,

creative product, or future self). This implies that the resulting behavior or attitude of inspiration depends on the content of the original idea that triggered the inspiration. For example, a coworker's exemplary behavior when dealing with an upset customer (trigger) may inspire an FLE to emulate this behavior in the future (target). Inspiration thus bridges the gap between the trigger object and the target object by projecting the qualities found in the former onto the latter. Thus, the transmission function of inspiration describes the transition from the process during which one is inspired by an idea or insight (source) to the process during which these inspiring qualities are extended to the target object. Figure 2-1 shows an integrated view of the transmission and process models of inspiration.

Figure 2-1:
Integrated View of Transmission Model and Process Model



Source: Author's illustration based on Thrash & Elliot (2003, 2004).

Thrash, Moldovan, Fuller et al. (2014) suggested three distinct forms of transmission: replication, actualization, and expression. *Replication*, also referred to as emulation or extension, occurs when one reproduces the intrinsically valuable features of a source in a new object. For instance, an FLE may become inspired by a coworker's sales technique and extend this technique to future service interactions. *Actualization* occurs when one brings newly imagined possibilities to fruition. For example, an FLE may suddenly have a new idea for a service improvement and pass this idea on to her/his sales manager. *Expression* occurs when ideas flow out swiftly and arrive in a well-developed, actionable form, and therefore may be expressed immediately and spontaneously. For example, upon being inspired, an FLE may express inspiration in the form of a creative product presentation at the point of sale. Whereas extension and actualization sometimes require planning or sub-goal pursuit to channel the inspired-to impulse in a

particular direction, expression requires no such planning. Table 2-1 presents an overview of the transmission forms of general inspiration and its application to FLE inspiration.

Table 2-1:
Transmission Forms of FLE Inspiration

Forms of Transmission	Stimulus Object	General Inspiration	FLE Inspiration
Extension	Exemplar in the environment	Modeling oneself after one's father	An FLE models her/his behavior after a coworker.
Actualization	Compelling idea or insight	Bringing an idea for a career path into fruition	An FLE has a new idea for a service improvement and passes this idea on to his/her sales manager.
Expression	Well-formed idea	Recording insights as diary entries	An FLE is decorating a shop window, and suddenly has an idea about how to decorate the window. The FLE experiences flow and ease.

Source: Author's illustration. Examples for general inspiration from Thrash, Moldovan, Fuller et al. (2014).

Since inspiration is a response to certain stimulus objects (e.g., a person or an idea) and necessarily leads to outcomes (e.g., the actualization of a new idea) (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), it is important to investigate inspiration holistically, including its sources and outcomes in the service context. Therefore, I address the sources and outcomes of inspiration in the next section.

2.1.2 Antecedents and Outcomes of Inspiration in Social Psychology

The psychological literature suggests that the emergence of inspiration depends on the presence of an inspiring source, and the characteristics of the recipients of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004), both of which are explained below.

2.1.2.1 Sources of Inspiration and Source Characteristics

According to Thrash and Elliot (2004), "inspiration is triggered by an epistemic event in which new or better possibilities are revealed by, or revealed in, an evocative stimulus object" (p. 959). The term "source of inspiration" refers to the specific external cue or stimulus object that triggers inspiration (e.g., a work of art or role model). Previous research in social psychology suggests that the emergence of inspiration depends both on the presence of an inspiring source and the characteristics of the recipient (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Some sources such as role models or a piece of art are encountered in the individual's external environment, whereas other sources may emerge from within (e.g., having a spontaneous idea in the shower) or enter the individual's mind through intrapsychic processes (e.g., memory) (Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

Drawing on the psychological conceptualization of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), researchers have investigated various sources of inspiration in daily life and consumer life. To explore the antecedents of inspiration in daily life, social psychologists have investigated models of extraordinary competence such as Michael Jordan (Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010), poetry (Thrash et al., 2017), creative ideas (Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010), and goals (Milyavskaya et al., 2012) as sources of inspiration. In consumer behavior, research has shown that a company's marketing efforts such as advertisements (Böttger et al., 2017; Winterich et al., 2019) and branded videos (Chang, 2020) may trigger customer inspiration. In some of these studies, the sources of inspiration were operationalized in terms of specific stimulus objects such as extraordinary competence in role models (Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010). In other studies, the sources of inspiration were operationalized in terms of more general insights or "illuminating" experiences such as a creative idea (Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010).

While the list of potential sources is vast, researchers have suggested that inspiring sources share so-called source characteristics. In marketing, Böttger et al. (2017) suggested that inspiring sources provide inspirational content (i.e., including a new idea) to the customer, appeal to the customer's imagination, and elicit an approach rather than avoidance motivation, such that the customer feels compelled to buy a product rather than put off from buying it. To understand why FLEs become inspired by certain sources and what similarities these sources share, I draw on two theories: schema-congruity theory (Mandler, 1982) and cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991).

Schema-congruity theory has been extensively used in service research and consumer research to explain how individuals process new stimuli (Andreassen, 2001; Pounders et al., 2014). According to this theory, individuals organize knowledge in mental structures (schemata) that cannot be easily changed once established (Mandler, 1982). When confronted with a new stimulus, individuals try to access the corresponding schemata to process it quickly and easily. The degree to which the external stimuli fit the existing schemata determines the extent of congruence. Incongruity implies that the new stimulus does not fit the established schema and therefore forces individuals to see things in a different light. This experience of incongruity is closely related to transcendence, a key feature of inspiration, which implies that individuals become vividly aware of new and better possibilities (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Therefore, a new idea may inspire individuals if it is perceived as incongruent with their current mental schemata and thus forces them to adopt a new perspective.

Cognitive appraisal theory offers further insight into why some sources may be more inspiring than others. Cognitive appraisal theory has frequently been used in marketing and service research to study how customers react to service failure (DeWitt et al., 2008; Nyer, 1997). It suggests that individuals evaluate events in terms of their goal relevance, or the extent to which a new event is personally relevant to the individual (Lazarus, 1991). Cognitive appraisal has been described as “a process through which the person evaluates whether a particular encounter with the environment is relevant to his or her well-being, and if so, in what ways” (Folkman et al., 1986, p. 992). As such, the same event may be deemed relevant to one person and irrelevant to another, depending on situational and personal factors. When encountering a stimulus object, the individual evaluates whether the stimulus object is relevant to her or his deeply held goals. If a stimulus is determined to be irrelevant by the individual, it does not elicit further action. If a situation or information is considered relevant to the goal, the individual will have stronger emotional and behavioral reactions (Nyer, 1997).

2.1.2.2 Recipient Characteristics

“Personality traits” refers to employee-level variables that facilitate receptivity to a source of inspiration. Although inspiration results from being exposed to an inspiring source in one’s environment, not all inspiring sources will be equally inspiring. Thrash and Elliot (2003) found that inspiration was related to two of the Big Five personality traits: openness to experience and extraversion. Openness to experience—the extent to which individuals are proactive, have wide interests, look for novel experiences, and are imaginative, independent-minded, and autonomous (McCrae, 1987)—has been shown to facilitate inspiration in daily life (Milyavskaya et al., 2012; Thrash & Elliot, 2003; Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010), because it expands the range of objects towards which one’s attention may be directed (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Extraversion—one’s tendency to be outgoing, talkative, and energetic—predicts how strongly individuals are inspired to act upon their new ideas (Thrash & Elliot, 2004). In other words, whereas openness to experience promotes the process of being inspired-by, extraversion drives the process of being inspired-to (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004; Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010). Other antecedents of inspiration include positive affect, optimism, and self-esteem (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), which may facilitate breadth of thinking and attention (Fredrickson, 2001) and thus exposure to inspiring influences. Finally, work mastery and creativity also emerged as antecedents, suggesting that inspiration does not involve pure passivity. Rather, one’s active engagement with the world of objects or ideas may facilitate exposure to inspiring sources (Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

2.1.2.3 Outcomes of Inspiration

Inspiration involves an epistemic process (inspired-by), which gives rise to an intrinsic motivation to actualize a new idea (inspired-to) (Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010). Since inspiration is a “move beyond the mundane toward the extraordinary or transcendent” (Thrash, Moldovan, Oleynick et al., 2014, p. 495), its outcomes constitute an improvement over past experiences or a constructive departure from the status quo. Previous research in social psychology has shown that inspiration is positively associated with various desirable outcomes, including creativity (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), productivity, and efficiency (Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010). During the creative process, inspiration mediates between the reception of this not-yet-actualized creative idea and the creative product that results from the idea (Thrash, 2020). Additionally, inspiration has been found to induce emotional outcomes, most prominently positive affect, which is a pleasurable mood state (Thrash, Moldovan, Fuller et al., 2014), characterized by high energy, full concentration, and pleasurable, positive excitement (Watson et al., 1988; Watson et al., 1999). Similar positive outcomes have been found in research in other academic disciplines. For example, consumer behavior and marketing research has shown that inspiration enhances several customer outcomes, including satisfaction, loyalty (Böttger et al., 2017), recycling behavior (Winterich et al., 2019), donation behavior (Liang et al., 2016), and well-being (Chang, 2020). Table 2-2 provides an overview of the empirical research across fields which, based on the psychological conceptualization of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), has examined the antecedents and outcomes of inspiration.

Table 2-2:
Antecedents and Outcomes of Inspiration in Social Psychology, Consumer Behavior, and Organizational Behavior

Study	Context	Source of Inspiration	Individual-level Differences (Traits)	Outcome(s)
Thrash, Maruskin et al. (2010)	Social psychology	Stimulus object (creativity of the idea)	Openness to experience, positive affect, extraversion	Productivity, efficiency, creativity
Thrash, Elliot et al. (2010)	Social psychology	Exposure to extraordinary competency	N/A	Positive affect, life satisfaction, vitality, self-actualization
Thrash and Elliot (2003)	Social psychology	N/A	Work mastery, openness to experience, self-esteem; creativity; positive affect; optimism	Work mastery, absorption, creativity (self-reported creativity and the receipt of U.S. patents), perceived competence, self-esteem, optimism, self-determination; openness to experience, positive affect
Thrash & Elliot (2004)	Social psychology	Illumination (epistemic event)	Openness to experience; extraversion	N/A
Milyavskaya et al. (2012)	Social psychology	Personal goals	N/A	Goal progress, goal attainment, goal motivation
Thrash et al., (2017)	Social psychology	Writer's text (e.g., a poem)	Openness to experience, extraversion	Reader inspiration
Böttger et al., (2017)	Consumer behavior	A firm's conscious marketing effort (e.g., print ad)	Customer idea shopping motivation	Customer delight, customer positive affect, transcendent customer experience, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty intention, customer impulse buying
Winterich et al., (2019)	Consumer behavior	Recycling ad campaign	N/A	Recycling behaviors
Chang (2020)	Consumer behavior	Branded videos	N/A	Consumer attitudes towards brand; subjective well-being
An & Youn (2018)	Organizational Behavior	Exposure to artworks	N/A	Creative idea generation (e.g., brand-name generation)

Source: Author's illustration.

2.1.3 Initial Definition of Frontline Employee Inspiration

Thrash and Elliot (2003) conceptualized inspiration both as a state and as a trait. Understanding inspiration as a state concerns the within-person level of analysis—i.e., a person experiences different levels of inspiration across time (Oleynick et al., 2014). In contrast, conceptualizing inspiration as a trait concerns the between-person level—i.e., inspiration varies in intensity and frequency across individuals. The term “trait” as applied to inspiration should not be viewed as a predisposing personality trait, but rather as “between-person variance in the tendency to experience states of inspiration” (Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010, p. 492). Thus, individuals higher in trait inspiration are more likely to experience the state of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Following previous inspiration research (Böttger et al., 2017; Oleynick et al., 2014; Thrash, Moldovan, Fuller et al., 2014), this dissertation focuses on FLE inspiration as a psychological state that is temporarily elevated after being evoked by a stimulus object (e.g., an inspiring new idea). As a temporary state rather than a more permanent employee trait, FLE inspiration explains how FLEs’ work environment and workplace design may lead behavioral and attitudinal changes in FLEs. Therefore, understanding FLE inspiration as a temporary state will provide practical insight into how FLE inspiration can be successfully influenced by managerial action.

Initial Definition of FLE Inspiration:

Based on the previous conceptualizations of inspiration in social psychology, FLE inspiration can be defined as a *state during which FLEs gain new, epistemic insights / ideas and are compelled to actualize these epistemic insights / ideas at work.*

While this initial definition of FLE inspiration is in line with the transmission model of inspiration (Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010) and with previous inspiration research (e.g., Böttger et al., 2017), it differs from definitions in other disciplines in important ways: First, prior inspiration literature focuses on consumers’ (Böttger et al., 2017; Winterich et al., 2019) or students’ (Thrash & Elliot, 2003) experience of inspiration. In contrast, the definition of FLE inspiration is specific to the work domain and focuses on *FLEs* as the recipients of inspiration. Second, prior research examines sources of inspiration such as leaders (Bass, 1985), mission statements (Yukl & van Fleet, 1982), or conscious marketing efforts (Böttger et al., 2017; Winterich et al., 2019). In contrast, the definition of FLE inspiration concerns those ideas and insights encountered in the FLE environment that may be useful for carrying out their work role. Third, prior inspiration research has primarily been concerned with inspiration to reach personal goals, such as achievement, power, work mastery, or creativity (Thrash & Elliot, 2004; Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010), or consumption-related goals such as purchasing

(Böttger et al. 2017). The definition of FLE inspiration, in contrast, is concerned with achieving work-related goals. Inherent in this definition is that FLEs use their inspiration to contribute to their organization's success. In the context of FLEs, work-related goals may include the generation of new ideas for service improvement (Lages & Piercy, 2012), coming up with more appealing product displays at the point of service (POS), striving to deepen one's product and technological expertise (Selles & Hansen, 2001), or surprising customers in unconventional ways that extend beyond existing procedures (Y. Dong et al., 2015).

In the following chapters, I deliberately refer to inspired-by and inspired-to as dimensions, states, processes, or factors depending on the context. These ways of conceptualizing inspiration are not mutually exclusive but depend on the methodological/conceptual approach. From the perspective of the process model, FLE inspiration is conceptualized as a state consisting of two consecutive *processes* (Thrash & Elliot, 2004). Alternatively, researchers have also referred to inspired-by and inspired-to as *states*, which highlights the transient nature of inspired-by and inspired-to (Böttger et al. 2017). During scale development, I refer to inspired-by and inspired-to as *dimensions* of FLE inspiration. From a statistical perspective, inspired-by and inspired-to are referred as *factors*.

In sum, extant empirical findings and theoretical insights in inspiration research mainly concern individuals' personal lives and consumer behavior and can therefore offer only limited guidance for studying FLE inspiration. Inspiration theory (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004) provides an adequate point of departure for investigating FLE inspiration. However, to understand and conceptualize the nature of FLE inspiration fully, further steps need to be taken. In the absence of well-defined theory, established marketing and service literature (Harris & Ogbonna, 2002; Parasuraman et al., 1985) recommends using a qualitative research approach. Following their recommendation, in this dissertation I use a qualitative approach to refine the definition of FLE inspiration and develop an integrative framework (Creswell & Clark, 2018). My approach is in line with recent qualitative studies on psychological constructs (Salo et al., in press). The findings of the qualitative study are presented below.

2.2 Study 1: Explorative Approach to Frontline Employee Inspiration

Our exploratory approach sought to conceptualize FLE inspiration and identify its sources, influencing factors, and outcomes. An exploratory qualitative approach was

deemed appropriate due to the limited amount of service research on inspiration and the poorly understood nature of the issue (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

2.2.1 Methodology

2.2.1.1 Sample and Procedure

To examine FLE inspiration, an important prerequisite for interviewees in our sample was being a frontline worker (i.e., having direct customer contact). We conducted personal in-depth interviews with 14 retail FLEs, 8 frontline managers (FLM), and 2 HR managers. The FLM are FLEs with managerial responsibility—some of them are direct superiors of FLEs that we interviewed; the human resource managers frequently recruit and counsel FLEs. Our sample size is consistent with the sample sizes recommended for exploratory research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We ceased the sampling process when no new insights emerged from the field data, that is, when theoretical saturation was reached (A. L. Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The table shown in Appendix A provides an ID number for each interview participant and links it with their respective sample characteristics.

Following prior research (e.g., Melton & Hartline, 2010), we used semi-structured interviews consisting of open-ended questions about FLE inspiration. We followed a predefined interview schedule, with deviations allowed to facilitate a smoother information flow (Gremler & Gwinner, 2000). We asked the respondents to describe specific incidents in which they had experienced inspiration, the perceived differences between inspiration and related constructs, the triggers of inspiring experiences, and how workplace characteristics and personal characteristics facilitated or hindered experiences of inspiration (see Appendix B for the interview guide). In addition, we gave the interviewees the opportunity to address other topics in the area of inspiration that they considered important. This step provided additional insights regarding how the interviewees distinguish employee inspiration from related constructs (e.g., employee satisfaction, intrinsic motivation).

2.2.1.2 Data Analysis and Interpretation

We audiotaped all interviews and transcribed the data verbatim. The interviews lasted 32 minutes on average. The interview material was coded by means of the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. The data analysis follows Lincoln and Guba's (1985, p. 203) categorizing process, which “involves sorting units into provisional categories on the basis of ‘look-alike’ characteristics.” First, we read the transcripts several times, sentence by sentence, to familiarize ourselves with the material and to identify interesting and reoccurring features in the data (Jörling et al., 2019). This step helped to

highlight key phrases (Gremier & Gwinner, 2000) and identify descriptive quotes (e.g., “Inspiration may happen when commuting”). Second, these descriptive quotes were consolidated into abstract code categories (e.g., sources of inspiration in the private work environment). Third, we discussed, connected, and consolidated these abstract codes into aggregate-level categories (e.g., non-work-related sources of inspiration), integrating all categories coded during the research procedure into a unifying framework.

2.2.2 Findings

Appendix C provides a detailed overview of the aggregate-level categories identified in our qualitative data, their different abstract codes, and some qualitative quotes for each abstract code that we identified.

2.2.2.1 Conceptualization of Frontline Employee Inspiration

Responses from the interviews suggest that FLEs often experience inspiration with all three of its characteristics, i.e., evocation, transcendence, and approach motivation, which together make up one episode of employee inspiration. Confronted with a customer need, an FLE from a furniture retailer (ID16) emphasizes:

We recently had a client that was looking for small bowls for panna cotta. I really thought he wanted small bowls. I showed him the products we had, but he didn’t want any of them. Then my coworker walked by, saying “one could also use shot glasses.” [...] I would not have had this idea by myself. [She had this idea] just because she looked at it [the problem] from another angle. You happen to have inspiring moments over and over again. Also, because most people were not trained at the frontline but used to have other occupations. I can then pass them [these ideas] on to customers.

FLE inspiration is *evoked* by an external source rather than volitionally initiated by the FLE, *transcends* the employee’s thinking by providing a new idea or solution to a work-related problem, and *motivates* the employee to realize or actualize the newly acquired vision or idea in the workplace. The data also reveals that FLE inspiration is composed of an inspired-by process (e.g., ID 1: “I become inspired by [...] our interior decoration”) and of an inspired-to process (e.g., ID 9: “Then I try to implement the ideas”). Interviewees conceptualized inspiration as an individual’s temporary state that varied across situations (e.g., ID 21: “[Inspiration] is rather a state. Sometimes, I am inspired. Sometimes not.”). Conceptualizing FLE inspiration as a state implies that firms can create work environments, which are conducive to experiencing inspiration. Based on our findings, we conceptualize FLE inspiration in terms of the two processes inspired-by and inspired-to and offer an initial definition of it as: a temporary, intrinsic motivational state during which FLEs spontaneously gain new, epistemic (i.e., illuminating, eye-opening, compelling) insights (inspired-by) and are compelled to actualize

these insights at work (inspired-to). Thereby, FLE inspiration facilitates the transition from the activating reception of a work-related insight to the intrinsic pursuit of a work-related goal.

2.2.2.2 Sources of Frontline Employee Inspiration

Respondents explained that FLE inspiration emerges from a source in their external environment. Inspiration may be triggered *directly*, when encountering a new source of inspiration, or through intrapsychic processes, such as memory of a previously encountered source or from our subconscious. An idea may be stored in the FLE's subconscious for a long time before it enters her/his awareness through a sudden moment of insight and triggers inspiration. When asked where his novel ideas come from, the FLE of a large wholesale retailer states: "I think these [new ideas] come from within. You try out and experiment" (ID 2).

We differentiate between six categories of sources. Four categories are directly associated with the company where the FLEs work and concern their immediate work environment. Two categories summarize those sources, which are found in the FLE's extended work environment or private environment and are highly important to achieving work-related goals.

Work-Related Sources. These sources refer to all sources that FLEs directly associate with their company and which are encountered in the FLE's physical work environment. The analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in the identification of four categories of work-related sources: the company, interaction with coworkers, interaction with customers, or the FLE's physical store environment. Numerous respondents stated that they frequently become inspired by *company-related sources*, such as the company's products, the brand, the company's success, and other stores of the company where they work. For instance, an FLE from a furniture chain emphasizes that "the company values are the common ground for those who work here. It's the company vision and philosophy that inspires us" (ID 16). Furthermore, respondents stressed *interaction with the workforce* (e.g., coworkers, direct supervisors, and FLMs) as a major source of inspiration. Coworkers may be inspiring to others, because they bring in novel abilities and approaches which hint at new and better possibilities for achieving a customer-oriented service. For instance, an FLE working in a furniture store acquired a new idea from her coworker who had worked in gastronomy. "She had this great service idea just because she looked at it [the problem] from another angle [...]" (ID 16). *Customer-related sources* involve customers' ideas, visual appearance, behavior, or needs that may inspire FLEs during the service interaction. In the context of customer advice, an FLE

states: “It is the customer contact which inspires me most in the retail sector. I like to interact with customers” (ID 14). Many FLEs stressed the importance of *the physical store environment* to becoming inspired. For instance, an FLE working in the fashion department of a large warehouse chain emphasized that she “becomes inspired by the store’s visual appearance and the store atmosphere” (ID 1).

Many participants mentioned the importance of non-work-related sources, which we define as sources that are encountered outside the FLE’s physical workplace and are highly important to achieving work-related goals. We differentiate between sources from the FLE’s immediate private environment (e.g., private life, hobbies, and friends) and the sources found in the FLE’s macro-environment (e.g., role models, social media, societal change, nature, or information provided in social media or newspapers). For example, an FLE with management responsibility from a larger supermarket chain emphasized that he “tends to get his inspiration not directly at work, but outside of work, [...] when commuting to work, when driving the car” (ID 3). Another FLE highlights the role of her personal values in triggering inspiration: “Honesty inspires me. When I am a customer myself, I prefer salespeople treating me in an honest way. [...] I try to pass this honesty on to customers” (ID 16). Similarly, an FLE from an apparel store stated that she becomes inspired by “beauty blogs, style homepages, Instagram, or when going out with friends on the weekend” (ID 21) when she thinks about decorating a shop window. These findings help to further refine our conceptualization of FLE inspiration:

FLE inspiration is temporary, intrinsic motivational state during which FLEs spontaneously gain epistemic (i.e., illuminating, eye-opening, compelling) insights (directly or through intrapsychic processes) from within or outside the workplace (inspired-by) and feel compelled to actualize or express these insights at work (inspired-to).

2.2.2.3 Influencing Factors of Frontline Employee Inspiration

We find that three groups of influencing factors can affect the emergence of inspiration in the organizational context: source characteristics, FLE characteristics, and workplace characteristics.

Source Characteristics. We mainly identified two source characteristics that may influence the emergence of an inspiring stimulus. Most interviewees mentioned that a source needs to be relevant to achieving a work-related goal or solving a work-related problem. For example, an FLE working in the colonial goods department emphasized that her goal was to “make the process [of restocking products] faster, since velocity is key” and that she was inspired by the “efficient work procedures learnt at her previous

job” (ID 6). In addition, interviewees emphasized that an inspiring source needs to provide new content which activates them to take a different perspective. Inspiration occurs when employees accommodate this new idea, which contrasts with their previous knowledge and eventually requires them to adapt their behavior accordingly. One FLE working in an apparel store remarked: “I propose a new look or combination to the customer and she tells me that she ‘does not like it.’ To me, it is inspiring when different opinions come together” (ID 21).

Employee Characteristics. We identified five individual employee-level variables that impact the strength and frequency with which a source elicits FLE inspiration: Organizational identification, openness to experience, curiosity, intrinsic motivation, and employee satisfaction. First, FLEs’ *identification* with the firm, its products, and its vision facilitates the emergence of employee inspiration. For example, an FLE working in a logistics company asserted that he was interested in innovation, which was a crucial part of his job and an important aspect of the company’s vision: “Yes, of course I surf online, and I read articles [about innovations]. I am very interested in innovation. The whole topic interests me” (ID 9). FLEs who identified with the company culture, products and/or mission are more open to work-relevant inspiring influences. Second, many participants remarked that FLEs who experience inspiration at work tend to be more *open-minded* and receptive to learning new things. One FLE with management responsibility emphasized that inspired FLEs are “extremely open to everything new, walk through the world with open eyes, [and] soak up new innovations and topics like a sponge” (ID 10). To become inspired, FLEs also need to be *curious* along with the ability to reflect on themselves and on their surroundings. Inspiration was also associated with a curious, exploratory mindset. In this context, one FLE with management responsibility emphasized that “You need to be curious in order to become inspired. You need to be able to reflect. And one needs to be able to analyze in relative terms where one stands at the moment and where one wants to stand in a month” (ID 17). Third, respondents described *intrinsic motivation* as a volitional energizing force that increases FLEs’ receptivity to new ideas (inspired-by) and it intensifies the implementation of a newly acquired idea (inspired-to). Compared to inspiration, motivation largely depends on one’s willpower (ID 17):

Motivation is something that I can influence myself to a large extent. For sure, the management influences [my motivation], by creating supportive work conditions that strengthen my motivation. [...]. Inspiration is related to a role model, who can eventually motivate me.

This example highlights that inspiration, in comparison to intrinsic motivation, is a state, spontaneously evoked by a source (in this case the role model), which entails a strong epistemic component (*inspired by*).

Fourth, we propose *job satisfaction* as a further driver of FLE inspiration. Respondents emphasized that job satisfaction is a necessary but still not sufficient condition for the emergence of inspiration. In this context, an FLE from a larger supermarket chain stresses that a minimum level of job satisfaction is necessary for inspiration to occur: “Personal satisfaction is the basis to grow. Being dissatisfied implies escape and escaping is not inspiring” (ID 3). However, high satisfaction levels could also imply comfort, stifling the emergence of inspiration. For example, an FLE in a supermarket chain stated: “No, [I am not inspired] any more. Somehow my inspiration has been erased. But I am happy with it. I am satisfied” (ID 4).

Workplace Characteristics. We identified four workplace factors that shape the emergence of FLE inspiration: team climate, autonomy, task variety, and time pressure. First, we suggest that *team climate* (i.e., exchange of ideas, team cohesion, purposeful communication between team members, and an enjoyable work atmosphere) plays an important role in facilitating FLE inspiration. As one participant remarks, a supportive team climate with “regular, internal communication” (ID 17) drives the emergence of FLE inspiration, because it fosters team cohesion and identification with the team, and eventually drives FLEs’ openness to inspiring ideas (ID 17):

It is very important that every team member is on the same knowledge level concerning internal communication. It is not about knowledge, but rather about everyone receiving the same important information without feeling excluded, because then I feel more appreciated. [...] This inspires me to pass that feeling on to other co-workers.

Second, respondents stressed that *autonomy*, as manifested in the company culture and guidelines and one’s freedom to decide for oneself, affects their experience of inspiration at work. An FLE working in restocking products in the colonial goods department stresses that strict guidelines and a predefined work routine as an FLE are an obstacle to her inspiration: “Most things are predefined. You can bring yourself in only to a very small degree” (ID 6). If FLEs feel autonomous, they may be in a better position to engage with their stimulus milieu, and may feel able to implement the newly acquired ideas at work.

Third, respondents remarked that engaging with a broad *variety of tasks* and a wide range of activities and procedures facilitated inspiration at work. Variety implies changes and exposure to new stimuli objects and may therefore drive FLEs to engage in

exploratory behavior, triggering inspiration. For example, an FLE from a furniture retailer remarks: “I need variety. I am very inspired because of variety and changes” (ID 16). In line with that view, a frontline manager maintained that “those who have to do repetitive work are less inspired because there is less exposure to potentially inspiring stimuli” (ID 3).

Fourth, participants frequently remarked that high work load and *time pressure* stifled their inspiration by reducing the extent to which they can engage in exploratory thinking and behavior and making them less receptive to inspiring stimuli. An FLE from an apparel store remarks: “Right now, I am not inspired. Probably that is because right now I have so many tasks. I have to look after a lot of things. In this case, inspiration has lowest priority” (ID 21).

2.2.2.4 *Employee-Level Outcomes*

We identified several motivational, behavioral, emotional, and attitudinal outcomes of inspiration that may affect FLEs. First, inspiration leads to increased levels of intrinsic *motivation*. Inspiration involves an epistemic process whereby the FLE becomes aware of new ideas, which eventually gives rise to the intrinsic motivation to realize the newly acquired idea. In this context, one interviewee (ID 10) remarked that:

When you are inspired, you come up with something. To come up with new ideas, to see something from another angle than one’s usual daily routine, that is inspiration to me. You become inspired. And from this, motivation can develop. Intrinsic motivation also means that you implement things by which you were inspired.

Second, we posit that FLE inspiration gives rise to positive *behavior* such as the intrinsic pursuit of work-related goals, which manifests itself in a behavioral change that benefits the FLE and the company. Feeling inspired energizes FLEs to engage in new work behaviors and “grow beyond themselves” (ID 3). As the frontline manager from a large furniture retailer stated, these new work behaviors constitute an improvement to the FLE’s current work behavior: “Inspired employees look at work processes and think ‘Why do we work so complicated here? We could do this in a simpler way.’ Then they give feedback on how to optimize and simplify work processes” (ID 7). Importantly, respondents stated that inspiration energizes them to be creative at work. Inspiration is triggered by “seeing” an inspiring idea in one’s work environment, because it appeals to one’s aesthetics or goals. For example, an FLE in a cosmetics store observed that inspiration helped her design creative new make-up looks: “To be creative, you need inspiration. [...] I see something, such as interior design, which inspires me. To me, that is inspiration—the idea to implement something” (ID 11). Our data highlights that FLE

inspiration explains the transition from the reception of a creative idea to the actualization of such a creative idea in the workplace. One participant remarked: “Inspiration is something that I experience, that I see, which I like. Being creative means to use this [inspiration] and further develop it” (ID 22).

Third, the interviewees told us that, upon feeling inspiration, they experience positive emotions. One FLE from an apparel store (ID 21) remarked that she experiences feelings of joy and happiness when being inspired:

When I am inspired, then I feel good, then I am in a good mood. Then I have many ideas, I am open, then it’s a good day for me, then things go well, and everything works out well. Sometimes, I am too inspired, that means I am very inspired, then I have so many ideas that I try to implement that I forget everything around me.

The positive emotional outcomes of FLE inspiration may lead FLEs to persist longer and work towards their goals. In sum, these accounts show that inspiration is accompanied by various positive feelings such as joy, pleasure, and fun.

Fourth, we suggest that FLE inspiration leads to positive, *attitudinal changes*, for example, by enhancing the FLE’s level of job satisfaction, as one respondent stressed: “I think job satisfaction results from inspired FLEs. If you have found a source of inspiration, then you are a bit more satisfied” (ID 17). Apart from job satisfaction, interviewees declared that feeling inspired heightens FLEs’ identification and their perceived connectedness with the company. For example, a frontline manager from a cosmetics retailer (ID 12) stressed that, “Inspiration leads to higher levels of identification. When an FLE becomes inspired by an advertisement or by a personality [company leader], then she/he feels it. This leads to identification with a person, with a company, with a process.”

2.2.2.5 Customer-Level Outcomes

Attitudinal and Behavioral Outcomes. Drawing on FLEs’ interview statements, we provide initial insights regarding how FLEs’ increased level of inspiration may have emotional and inspirational outcomes for customers. Respondents emphasized that when being inspired, this inspiration may as well translate into favorable customer outcomes in that FLEs’ positive, inspiring mindset can be contagious and affects how they treat and serve customers during service interactions. For example, an FLE from a tea shop stated:

I think that inspiration has a big impact. A positive one. I think customers are very aware of employees’ inspiration, because inspired FLEs are more open and cheerful. I think you can achieve more that way. I think you radiate that (ID 17).

As FLEs become more inspired, they find their work more meaningful and fulfilling, and accordingly become more dedicated, concentrated, and engrossed in their jobs. FLEs' positive and motivated state of mind may have the power to carry over to their customers, resulting in the perception that the service interaction was successful. Conversely, if FLEs are not inspired and do not implement their ideas at the point of sale, this potentially affects customers in a negative way. An FLE from a wholesaler observes (ID 23):

All FLEs need to be inspired somehow. Otherwise, there is no progress. If they are not inspired to bring in new ideas, to change the store concept, to rearrange the store layout. Then, things stay the same. Customers might become bored. This might result in customers not returning to store, because nothing is new.

Furthermore, our data hints at the importance of FLE inspiration in driving customer spending. In this context, a human resource manager shares his experience with FLE inspiration: "inspired FLEs automatically are more motivated, has a special charisma, the customer feels that. And this automatically increases sales" (ID 12).

Inspirational Outcomes. Our data also provides initial evidence that FLE inspiration may positively affect customer inspiration. More precisely, inspired FLEs may be more creative than less inspired peers, passing their ideas on to customers, and thereby inspiring them. For example, an FLE at a wholefoods retailer stated that he had originally trained to be a cook, which inspires him to pass on new ideas (e.g., new ingredients) to his customers. To many interviewees, feeling inspiration automatically entailed passing this inspiration on to customers, as the frontline manager of a larger warehouse chain narrates: "To me, inspiration means encountering ideas, new thoughts, and in terms of my job, it is certainly related to customer contact, to inspiring customers. That's our daily business" (ID 2).

Customer Idea Shopping Motivation. The qualitative data indicates that the spillover of inspiration from FLEs to customers may depend on customers' shopping motivation and their receptivity to new ideas. Customers who are open and receptive to new ideas become more readily inspired by FLEs' ideas. FLEs' ideas may be "overwhelming" to customers who only want to shop for certain items efficiently, and, therefore, are less receptive to new shopping ideas. From the FLEs' point of view, a customer who has a specific product in mind will most likely be less receptive to a new idea from the FLE than a customer without a specific product in mind. In this context, an FLE from a cosmetics store stated (ID 11):

The customer [that just came in] wanted a sun cream that smelt like summer and sun. We did not have a sun cream with this smell. But I spontaneously became

inspired about a perfume that we sell which smells like sun and sea. But she [the customer] was not receptive to that [the idea of buying a perfume].

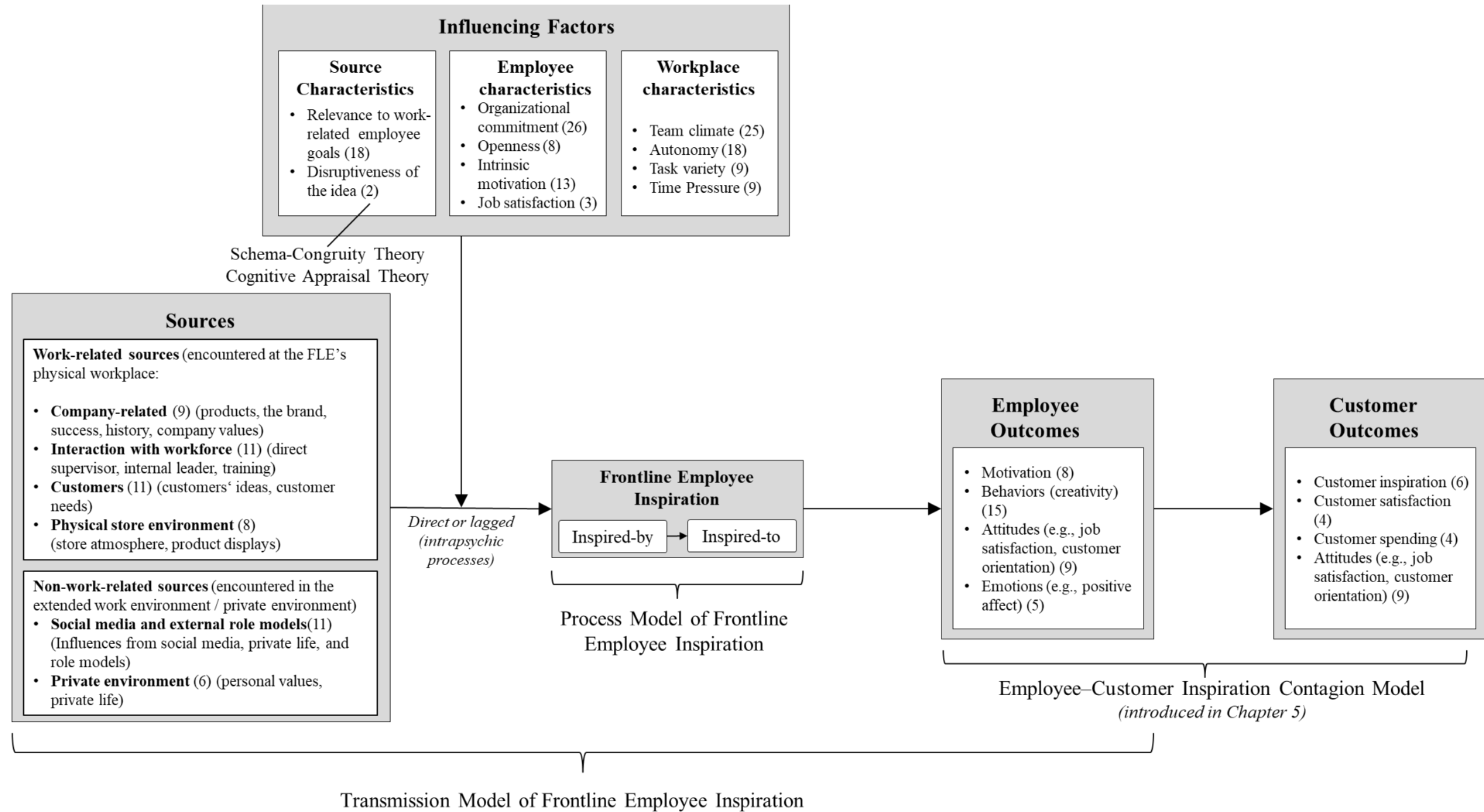
2.3 Integration of Theory and Qualitative Findings

The framework summarizes the qualitative findings and classifies the identified concepts as sources of FLE inspiration, influencing factors, or outcomes for employees and customers (Figure 2-2). The numbers in parentheses reflect how often interviewees mentioned the respective themes and provide initial data regarding the prevalence of the different themes in practice. Inspiration is experienced as a reaction to a work-related or non-work-related source that may impact FLEs directly or through intrapsychic processes. Concerning work-related sources, we identified those related to the company (e.g., company values), customers, interaction with the workforce, and the physical store environment. Non-work-related sources refer to those encountered in the FLE's extended work environment or private environment and are highly relevant to FLE goals (e.g., a work-relevant idea encountered while travelling). While these sources may influence FLEs directly, it is also possible that they exert their inspiring power through intrapsychic processes; in this case, a source (e.g., a co-worker who acts very friendly toward a customer) may enter one's awareness later, when one is no longer exposed to it, and arise from one's memory (e.g., when one is taking a shower and suddenly remembers a co-worker who was very friendly toward the customer). The likelihood that a source triggers inspiration depends on two source characteristics: relevance to the FLE's goal and novelty, and uniqueness of the idea. Employee characteristics (organizational commitment, openness to experience, curiosity, intrinsic motivation, or job satisfaction), and workplace characteristics (team climate, autonomy, task variety, workload, and time pressure) also influence the emergence of FLE inspiration. In terms of outcomes, we find that FLE inspiration has a direct impact on employees, leading to changes in their attitudes, emotions, and behavior. Furthermore, the FLE interview statements hint at the possibility of FLE inspiration enhancing customer responses during service interactions. For example, a current theme was that inspired FLEs might inspire their customers with new ideas.

Furthermore, the conceptual framework connects the identified themes to extant inspiration theory. In line with the *tripartite model of inspiration* (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), FLE inspiration is evoked by an external source in the FLE's environment, transcends the FLE's thinking by providing a new solution to a work-related problem, and motivates the FLE to realize or actualize the newly acquired vision or idea in the workplace. The three core features of evocation, transcendence, and motivation account for a

full episode of FLE inspiration. In line with *the process model of inspiration* (Thrash & Elliot, 2004), FLE inspiration is composed of two consecutive processes—inspired-by and inspired-to. In line with the *transmission model of inspiration* (Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010), FLE inspiration is a response to sources in the FLE’s (work or private) environment and leads to work-related outcomes such as the actualization of a new idea during service encounters. The qualitative findings hint at the possibility of FLEs passing their inspiration on to customers during a service interaction, which is consistent with the contagion model of inspiration (Thrash et al., 2017). The contagion model of inspiration will be detailed in Chapter 5, where it serves as a theoretical basis for linking FLE inspiration and customer inspiration. Furthermore, two other theories—schema-congruity theory (Mandler, 1982) and cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991)—provide a theoretical rationale for why some sources may trigger FLE inspiration while others do not. Specifically, schema-congruity theory offers a plausible explanation for why novel or disruptive sources provide a sense of transcendence that triggers FLE inspiration. Also, cognitive appraisal theory may explain why sources that provide information relevant to achieving FLE goals trigger FLE inspiration. This conceptual model will be detailed in subsequent studies and serves as a point of departure for developing hypotheses in Chapters 3 (Section 3.2) and 5 (Section 5.4).

Figure 2-2:
Framework of Frontline Employee Inspiration



Source: Author's illustration. Note: The numbers in parentheses reflect the frequency of appearing themes across the 24 interviews.

2.4 Discussion and Implications

2.4.1 *Theoretical Implications*

The role of FLEs in service interactions has received considerable attention in recent service research (Auh et al., 2019; van der Borgh et al., 2019), but little attention has been paid to inspiration and its impact on FLE attitudes and behaviors. By means of a qualitative study, we introduced and conceptualized FLE inspiration as a temporary, intrinsic motivational state during which FLEs spontaneously gain epistemic insights (directly or through intrapsychic processes) from within or outside the workplace (inspired-by) and feel compelled to actualize, express, or transmit these epistemic insights at work (inspired-to). Thereby, this conceptual work research has sought to place the study of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003) squarely within the FLE context and the service literature. This qualitative work represents an initial attempt to develop a comprehensive and theoretically informed basis for understanding FLE inspiration and provides qualitative insights regarding its sources, influencing factors (workplace characteristics, source characteristics, employee characteristics), and outcomes for FLEs as well as customers.

By systematically categorizing and investigating the sources of FLE inspiration and including sources in the FLE's direct work environment and off-the-job context, the research presented here extends existing knowledge of the sources of employee inspiration, which so far has mainly focused on leaders' behaviors (Bass, 1988), mission statements (Falbe & Yukl, 1992), artwork (An & Youn, 2018), and coworkers (Watkins, 2020). The results of the qualitative study indicate that FLEs may be inspired by various external sources in their environment that inspire them directly or indirectly. Concerning external sources, we further differentiate between sources encountered outside the FLEs' physical workplace that are still highly important to achieving work-related goals (i.e., non-work-related sources; e.g., ideas from friends, social media, personal values) and those sources that FLEs directly associate with their company (i.e., work-related sources). We categorize work-related sources into four groups: sources related to the company (e.g., company values, history), customers, interaction with the workforce, and FLEs' physical store environment.

Previous research has focused on the possibility that FLEs' job influences their behavior outside the company (Morhart et al., 2009). Our findings provide a complementary perspective on extant research by showing that there may also be an "outside-in" effect, where the private environment influences FLEs and provides them with new ideas to act on in their work environment. Furthermore, by investigating the off-the-job

sources that contribute to FLE inspiration, this research contributes to the emergent field of transformative service research, where Ostrom et al. (2015) spotlighted “improving well-being through transformative service” as a key priority for service research. In the scope of transformative service research, employee inspiration is uniquely suited to creating “uplifting changes” in employees (L. Anderson & Ostrom, 2015). By providing evidence that customers affect FLE inspiration, we address a call in the service research for more investigation of the mechanism through which customers contribute to FLE’s experience of the service encounter and thereby enhance FLE well-being (Subramony et al., 2021).

Although inspiration research has not yet investigated situational factors, i.e., contexts that nurture or hinder the emergence of inspiration (Oleynick et al., 2014), our findings hint at the importance of understanding workplace factors in facilitating or impeding FLE inspiration. Specifically, the findings highlight that FLE’s autonomy, team climate, task variety, and time pressure may influence their experience of inspiration at work. The findings from our qualitative study therefore extend prior FLE-related research on workplace factors, including service climate (Schneider et al., 1998; Susskind et al., 2003), job complexity, and organizational policies (Shalley et al., 2000).

Concerning the factors that influence FLE inspiration, our qualitative findings indicate that sources have an inspiring effect if they provide employees with unique and novel content that is relevant to achieving employee goals. Furthermore, we find that the emergence of employee inspiration depends on the presence of certain employee characteristics. Our research extends existing inspiration research, which has mainly focused on openness to experience and extraversion as stable personality traits (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), by further including organizational identification, curiosity, intrinsic motivation, and job satisfaction as relevant employee-level variables that influence the emergence of inspiration.

When looking at the outcomes of FLE inspiration, it most often results in a heightened level of intrinsic motivation, which in turn leads to behavioral changes. New behaviors include, for instance, the implementation of new ideas during service interactions with the customer, sharing one’s ideas with coworkers, or adapting a service to customer needs. In sum, FLE inspiration gives rise to the intrinsic pursuit of work-related goals, which may manifest itself in myriad new discretionary behaviors that benefit FLEs, customers, and the company. Furthermore, FLE inspiration may also positively impact work-related attitudes (e.g., FLE satisfaction) and emotions because inspired FLEs experience elation or positive excitement.

2.4.2 Managerial Implications

Our research provides managers with a better understanding of the differences between FLE inspiration and related constructs (such as job satisfaction) and stresses the importance of FLE inspiration. Understanding the sources that contribute to FLE inspiration is a strategically important question for service providers because when FLEs are inspired, they will grow beyond their limits and engage in new workplace behaviors that are beneficial to the company.

Our research finds that employees draw inspiration from sources encountered outside the workplace (e.g., social media, family) as well as in the workplace, including customers and their immediate store environment. The results show that sources in the employee's private environment (e.g., when talking about a product or a trend with a friend) or on social media platforms hold valuable information for FLEs. Sources outside the employee's immediate work environment may inform of customer concerns and evolving trends, thereby enabling them to offer new service solutions. Companies need to consider that the physical store environment (i.e., window decoration, product assortment, and store layout) may have an inspiring effect not only on customers, but also on FLEs. While many companies successfully use social media to interact with their customers (Li et al., 2021), they still need to explore ways to engage with their FLEs via these platforms. To capitalize fully on the positive effects of FLE inspiration, retailers need to build on various sources of inspiration and provide FLEs with the opportunity to relay their newly acquired ideas through internal platforms or feedback channels. Toward this end, practitioners should create a work environment that is conducive to FLE inspiration by fostering a positive team climate that prioritizes team cohesion, purposeful communication between team members, and idea exchange. This implies that providing employees with a certain degree of autonomy—for example, to arrange product displays—may be beneficial for triggering inspiration.

2.5 Next Steps

Chapter 2 sought to provide a holistic conceptualization of FLE inspiration. Toward this end, I reviewed extant theory and the empirical literature on inspiration in social psychology. I presented three models of inspiration: the *tripartite model*, the *process model*, and the *transmission model*. Since prior empirical research on FLE inspiration is limited, an exploratory qualitative study was conducted. The resulting conceptual framework identifies important themes related to FLE inspiration, including sources of

inspiration, employee characteristics (e.g., work-related curiosity), and workplace factors (e.g., team climate) that influence the emergence of FLE inspiration. It also includes possible outcomes of FLE inspiration for FLEs and customers. The theoretical and empirical insights gained in Chapter 2 provide valuable guidance for conducting the subsequent studies in this dissertation, which seek to quantitatively test the relationships identified in Study 1. Table 2-3 shows how subsequent studies build on the arguments developed to this point.

Table 2-3:
Empirical and Theoretical Insights from Chapter 2

Qualitative Findings	Theoretical Insights	Guidance for Subsequent Studies / Chapters
• FLE inspiration is conceptualized as a state consisting of two processes. • It is influenced by employee characteristics and source characteristics. • It leads to several important outcomes at the employee level.	• The process model of inspiration causally links inspired-by and inspired-to. • The transmission model links the sources of inspiration to the outcomes of inspiration, mediated by inspiration, thereby informing statistical modelling.	Chapter 3: The qualitative study informs the scale development, hypothesis development, and exploration of FLE inspiration in its nomological network.
• Work-related sources and non-work-related sources may trigger FLE inspiration.	• The investigation of the sources of FLE inspiration is based on the transmission model, which models the sources as antecedents of the state of inspiration.	Chapter 4: The sources of inspiration will be quantitatively validated.
• FLE inspiration may have positive influences on customers during service interaction.	• The investigation of the relationship of FLE inspiration and customer-level outcomes is based on the inspiration contagion model, which will be introduced in Chapter 5.	Chapter 5: The qualitative findings inform the quantitative investigation of the relationships among FLE inspiration, customer inspiration, and customer-related outcomes (loyalty, spending).

Source: Author's illustration.

Scale Development, Validation, and Exploration of Nomological Network (Chapter 3). The qualitative findings and theoretical insights inform the scale development and validation process in the following ways. (1) The conceptualization of FLE inspiration as a two-dimensional state—consisting of two processes, inspired-by and inspired-to—is reflected in the two subscales of the new scale. This approach is in line with the process model of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2004) and prior inspiration literature (Böttger et al., 2017). (2) The qualitative statements serve as a basis for formulating the items of the new scale. (3) The conceptual framework identified several antecedents and

outcomes and informs the development of the hypotheses and exploration of FLE inspiration in its nomological network. Accordingly, two source characteristics (relevance to employee goals and surprise) and two employee characteristics (work-related curiosity and openness) are modeled as antecedents of FLE inspiration. Furthermore, the qualitative study identified intrinsic motivation, employee satisfaction, and employee creativity as important constructs related to FLE inspiration, and these constructs are thus included as employee-level outcomes in the structural equation model. Theoretically, the nomological network builds on the transmission model of inspiration (Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010), which links the antecedents of inspiration to employee-level outcomes.

Sources of FLE Inspiration (Chapter 4). The qualitative insights also provide an adequate starting point for quantitatively validating the sources of FLE inspiration. The qualitative insights hint at the importance of considering sources from the employee's work-related and non-work-related environment. I address this issue by asking participants to rate the inspiring effect of fifteen sources, e.g., coworker's superiors and brand values. Again, the transmission model of inspiration provides an adequate theoretical approach because it links the sources as antecedents to the state of inspiration.

Customer-Level Outcomes of FLE Inspiration (Chapter 5). The qualitative findings indicate that inspired FLEs may enhance customer responses during service interaction, primarily because they provide creative ideas and service solutions. This finding provides a valuable starting point for investigating the impact of FLE inspiration on customers during service interactions. Theoretically, the linkage of FLE inspiration and customer-level outcomes is grounded in the contagion model of inspiration, which is introduced in Chapter 5.

3 Measuring Frontline Employee Inspiration

3.1 Introduction and Research Focus

This chapter reviews the development and validation of a parsimonious scale of frontline employee (FLE) inspiration, which is of practical use for retailer managers wishing to measure their FLEs' level of inspiration and for researchers who seek to investigate the construct empirically. As shown in Study 1, FLE inspiration is an epistemic motivation consisting of two dimensions, inspired-by and inspired-to. This two-dimensional conceptualization needs to be reflected in the operationalization of the constructs; therefore, FLE inspiration needs to be measured as a second-order construct comprising two factors (inspired-by and inspired-to). As detailed in Section 3.4, the customer inspiration scale provides an ideal point of departure for developing the FLE inspiration scale because it is a valid and reliable scale that measures customer inspiration as a two-dimensional state (inspired-by and inspired-to) (Böttger et al., 2017).

Measuring FLE inspiration utilizing a two-dimensional scale helps address the shortcomings of the extant scales. First, the existing measures of organizational behavior assess employee inspiration as a single item of a multi-item scale instead of measuring it as a discrete construct (Mowday et al., 1979; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Watkins, 2020). For example, "I am inspired by my coworker" is one item of the 5-item admiration scale (Watkins, 2020). This approach is problematic because it does not allow us to investigate inspiration as an empirically unique construct. Second, single-item scales do not capture the full theoretical richness of employee inspiration as a two-dimensional construct consisting of inspired-by and inspired-to. For example, the inspiration item of the job engagement scale ("My job inspires me;" Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) taps onto the inspired-by dimension but overlooks the inspired-to dimension. This is problematic because both inspired-by and inspired-to make up a full episode of inspiration (Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010). Third, extant scales measuring organizational behavior often focus too narrowly on specific sources or outcomes instead of measuring the actual state of inspiration (Mowday et al., 1979; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). For example, James and Lahti (2011) measured employee vision inspiration using two items inquiring about the extent to which the organization's vision inspires employees and the strength of employees' loyalty to their organization's mission. However, if scales focus too narrowly on sources (e.g., vision statement) or outcomes (e.g., loyalty), they may introduce a systematic bias and, thus, do not truly reflect the experienced level of FLE inspiration

(Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 2001). For example, if FLEs feel deeply inspired by customers, they may artificially score lower on scales that measure the inspirational power of a company's vision. Therefore, FLE inspiration needs to be measured as a state of being inspired-by and inspired-to, independent of sources and outcomes of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

Addressing these limitations in previous literature, this chapter reviews the development of a reliable and valid scale to measure FLE inspiration. I first present an overview of the scale development and validation process (Section 3.1.1), followed by a description of the requirements that had to be met to ensure scale's validity (Section 3.1.2). Subsequently, I distinguish FLE inspiration from related employee-centric constructs (e.g., employee satisfaction) and derive a set of hypotheses (Section 3.2). The process of data preparation is described in Section 3.3. Section 3.4 summarizes the scale development process and Studies 2 and 3. Section 3.5 provides evidence of construct validity, reliability, nomological validity, and predictive validity of the scale. In doing so, I seek to answer Research Question 2 (How can FLE inspiration be measured?) and Research Question 3 (How does FLE inspiration relate to established employee-centric constructs?).

3.1.1 Scale Development and Validation Process

The empirical scale development and validation process involved an extensive item generation process and selection of several relevant empirical studies to validate the FLE inspiration scale (i.e., convergent and discriminant validity) and show that FLE inspiration has a unique position among the hypothesized antecedents and outcomes (nomological validity). Towards this end, I followed an in-depth development procedure consistent with previous approaches (e.g., Brocato et al., 2012; Nenkov et al., 2008) and established research guidelines (J. Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Churchill, 1979). Table 3-1 summarizes the stages of data collection and describes the multiple samples that I used.

Pilot Studies. Twenty items were generated with the help of the qualitative interviews from Study 1. These items were subjected to purification procedures in *Study 2* and *Study 3*, relying on an iteration of confirmatory factor analyses to improve the scale's measurement properties. As a result of these two pilot studies, the items had to be slightly reworded to capture the essence of the inspired-by and inspired-to states.

Main Studies. *Study 4* and *Study 5* built on the results of the two pilot studies. In *Study 4*, the revised items were subjected to scale purification procedures. Subsequently,

I examined the psychometric properties of the scale, the indicators of reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and nomological validity. In the scope of the nomological assessment, I computed correlations between FLE inspiration and other work-related constructs to determine possible linkages. In Study 5, I further extended the nomological network by employing structural equation modeling and provided evidence of predictive validity of the FLE inspiration scale.

Table 3-1:
Scale Development and Validation Procedure

Study	Objectives	Method Applied	Selection Criteria	Sample	N	Items
Study 2 Pilot Study	Item generation based on qualitative findings and scale purification	Confirmatory factor analysis	Factor loadings Reliability Convergent validity	MTurk (U.S. FLEs)	290	20
Study 3 Pilot Study	Purification of scale and initial scale validation	Confirmatory factor analysis	Factor structure Factor loadings Reliability Convergent validity Discriminant validity	MTurk (U.S. FLEs)	201	14
Study 4	Item re-wording, purification of scale, initial scale validation	Confirmatory factor analysis Inter-construct correlations Hotelling-Willem test	Factor loadings Reliability Factor structure Convergent validity Discriminant validity Nomological validity	Prolific Academic (U.S. retail FLEs with direct customer contact)	253	14
Study 5	Final scale validation	Confirmatory factor analysis Structural equation modeling	Factor loadings Reliability Factor structure Convergent validity Discriminant validity Nomological validity	Prolific Academic (U.S. retail FLEs with direct customer contact)	231	6

Source: Author's illustration.

Across four studies, scale purification was guided by both theoretical considerations (i.e., the breadth of theoretical content covered by an item) and statistical consideration, as detailed below. I used the statistical software IBM SPSS AMOS version 25.0.0 to conduct confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to refine the FLE inspiration scale and assess its reliability and validity (J. Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Byrne, 2010).

3.1.2 Requirements of Scale Validity

To establish construct validity of a measurement scale, the scale needs to demonstrate (1) reliability, (2) convergent validity, (3) discriminant validity, and (4) nomological validity (Peter, 1981). I now present the relevant indicators and thresholds for scale reliability and validity pertinent to the scale validation process.

Reliability. Reliability refers to the internal consistency of the items of a construct, i.e., the extent to which a set of variables consistently measures the intended construct (Hair et al., 1998). The reliability of a scale is commonly tested by calculating Cronbach's α and the Composite Reliability (CR) coefficient. Cronbach's α is an index of the scale's reliability based on the similarity of patterns of responses to the individual items of the scale (Schneider et al., 2009). A high Cronbach's α indicates that the items are likely measuring the same underlying concept. For the FLE inspiration scale, Cronbach's α and CR need to be tested separately for the two factors inspired-by and inspired-to. To provide proof of reliability, the recommended threshold for both estimates had to be .70 or larger (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Nunnally, 1975).

Convergent Validity. Convergent validity denotes the extent to which different items designed to tap the same construct correlate with each other. Convergent validity is given if all items of a construct load strongly (above .70) and significantly on their respective factors and the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeds .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Item loadings are correlation coefficients between a common latent factor and an item. The average variance extracted (AVE) is calculated as the average of squared item loadings of a factor (Kline, 2010).

Discriminant Validity. According to Churchill (1979, p. 70), "discriminant validity is the extent to which the measure is novel and not simply the reflection of some other variable." If a scale possesses discriminant validity, it differs from measures of other constructs in the same model. In the case of FLE inspiration, this means that the measurement scale for the inspired-by factor and the measurement for the inspired-to factor need to be empirically distinct from each other and the other related constructs (e.g., employee satisfaction).

Nomological Validity. The importance of establishing nomological validity has been well documented in the literature (e.g., Babin et al., 1994; Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). Thus, Studies 4 and Study 5 aimed to provide evidence of the nomological validity of the new scale. The nomological validity of the new scale is assessed by examining its relationship to hypothesized antecedents and outcomes (Iacobucci et al., 1995;

Nenkov et al., 2008). To place FLE inspiration in its nomological network, I conceptually distinguish FLE inspiration from theoretically related employee-centric metrics (e.g., employee satisfaction) and classify them as either antecedents or outcomes of FLE inspiration, as described in the following section.

3.2 Conceptually Related Constructs and Hypotheses

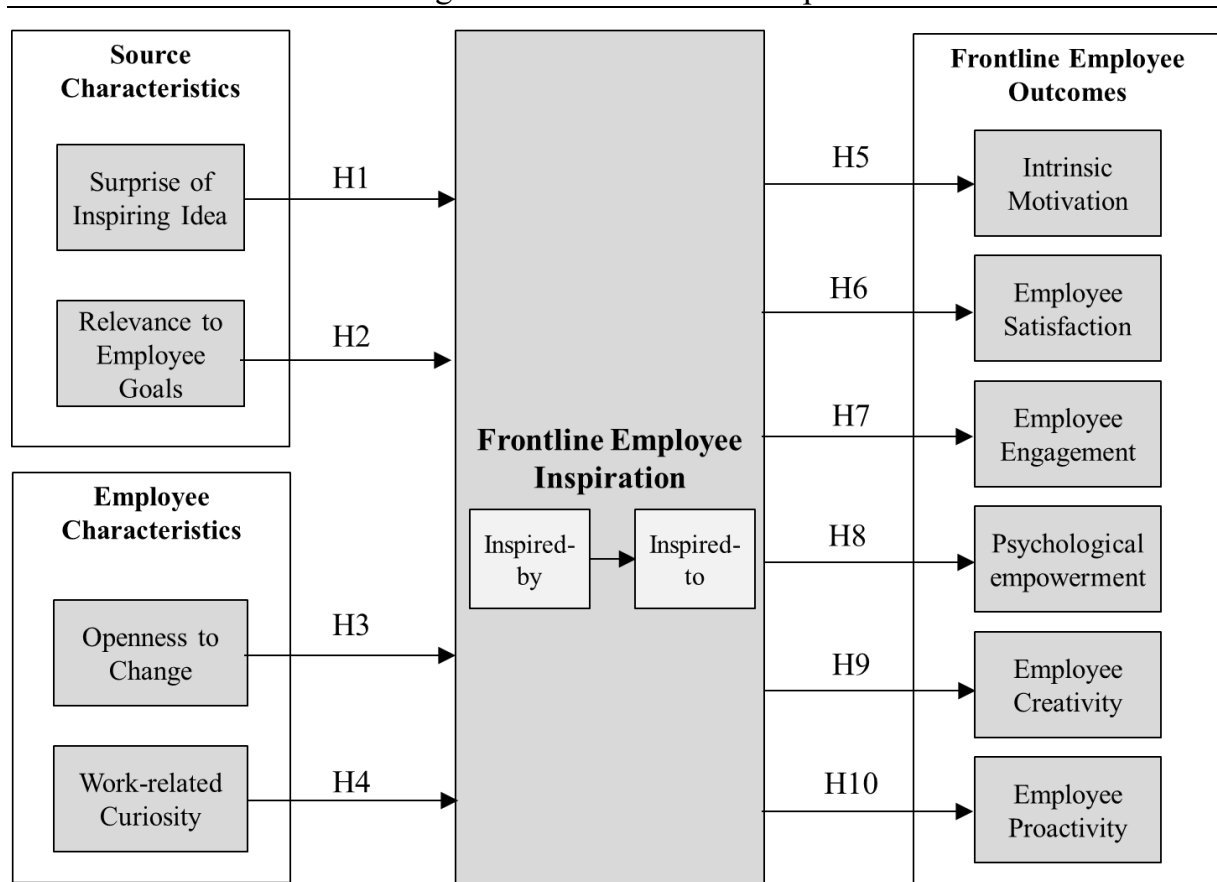
This chapter distinguishes FLE inspiration based on related constructs and proposes a set of hypotheses, classifying the established constructs as either antecedents or outcomes of FLE inspiration. As outlined in Section 1.3.2, marketing and service researchers in the field of marketing, service, and organizational behavior have investigated a wide range of established metrics to describe and explain employees' behaviors and attitudes. This includes employee satisfaction (e.g., Heskett et al., 1997), employee engagement (e.g., Kumar & Pansari, 2014; Schaufeli et al., 2006), employee creativity (Coelho et al., 2011), psychological empowerment (e.g., Chebat et al., 2002), intrinsic motivation (Zhang & Bartol, 2010), and discretionary work behaviors, such as proactivity (Griffin et al., 2007). It follows that it is crucially important to show the conceptual and empirical distinctiveness of FLE inspiration vis-à-vis these work-related attitudes (employee satisfaction), behaviors (i.e., employee creativity, discretionary work behaviors), and motivational states (i.e., intrinsic motivation, employee engagement, psychological empowerment). Furthermore, the qualitative findings from Study 1 highlight the importance of employee characteristics, such as work-related curiosity (S. Harrison & Dossinger, 2017) and employee openness (Wanberg & Banas, 2000), and two source characteristics (novelty and goal relevance) that may lead to FLE inspiration.

The objective of this chapter is to conceptually and empirically distinguish FLE inspiration from related construct. Therefore, the nomological network presented here explores the *direct* relationship between the focal construct (i.e., FLE inspiration) and related employee-level constructs. Thus, I model employee characteristics as direct antecedents. Furthermore, the model operationalizes the sources of inspiration as source characteristics (Böttger et al., 2017) and does not contain the specific sources of FLE inspiration (e.g., interacting with coworkers or customers) (see Chapter 4).

My conceptual delineation draws upon the three distinctive core features of FLE inspiration—transcendence, evocation, and approach motivation—and its unique transmission function (Thrash & Elliot, 2004; Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010; see also Chapter 2). In developing the hypotheses, I augment the theoretical rationales from the literature with insights obtained from the exploratory study (B. Dong et al., 2015). Figure 3-1

depicts the framework of hypothesized antecedents and outcomes, which is tested in Study 5 (Section 3.5.2). Table 3-2 (p. 80) provides an overview of the constructs and their definitions and relationship with FLE inspiration.

Figure 3-1:
Nomological Network for FLE Inspiration



Source: Author's illustration.

3.2.1 Source Characteristics (Antecedents)

Inspiration researchers have argued that an epistemic event or an evocative stimulus object that reveals new or better possibilities triggers inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2004). In other words, inspiration is triggered by a source that exhibits new or better possibilities to individuals (Böttger et al., 2017; Thrash & Elliot, 2003). As shown in qualitative Study 1, the sources of FLE inspiration are vast and vary across recipients. In line with the findings from Study 1, it is suggested that FLE inspiration is triggered by sources that share two characteristics, that is, they need to be inspiring to provide an

idea that is (1) surprising (i.e., novel or cognitively disruptive), and (2) relevant to FLE goals.

3.2.1.1 Surprise of Idea

The schema-congruity theory (Mandler, 1982) suggests that individuals organize their knowledge in mental structures (i.e., schemata). When confronted with an external stimulus, individuals seek to fit the new stimulus within their existing mental structures to be processed easily. If new or surprising stimuli do not fit within one's existing mental structures, they may produce a cognitive disruption, meaning that they force the individual to think differently about things (Meyers-Levy et al., 1994). The schema-congruity theory emphasizes that the sense of transcendence requires a shift in one's cognitive mental schema, allowing individuals to see things differently. Therefore, when becoming inspired, it is posited that FLEs gain awareness of new possibilities that transcend their previous thinking and may alter their mental schemata. A new idea inspires FLEs if they perceive it as incongruent with their current mental schemata and forces FLEs to think about things differently. Incongruence between new stimuli and extant schemata often leads individuals to experience surprise. Indeed, empirical evidence has shown that surprise is an important emotional reaction to a stimulus–schema incongruity (Alden et al., 2000). The surprise of an idea has been associated with aha-moments (Bowden et al., 2005; Lane, 2000), that give rise to inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). In line with past research and qualitative findings, FLEs become inspired by surprising ideas that change their existing mental schemata.

H1: Surprise of an inspiring idea positively influences FLE inspiration.

3.2.1.2 Relevance to Frontline Employee Goals

Relying on the qualitative insights (Chapter 2.2) and cognitive appraisal theory, it is expected that FLE inspiration becomes stronger with increased relevance of the source to FLE goals. The cognitive appraisal theory suggests that individuals evaluate events in terms of their goal relevance and goal incongruence (Lazarus, 1991). At the heart of the cognitive appraisal theory is the notion that individuals cognitively appraise the situation and encountered cues concerning their goals. In the work context, the cognitive appraisal theory explains that FLE inspiration starts with a cognitive stage in which the FLE cognitively appraises the new stimulus and evaluates the relevance to her/his goals. FLEs may appraise a stimulus as goal irrelevant, which does not elicit further action. As the relevance of the stimulus to FLEs' goals increases, FLEs experience stronger reactions to the stimulus.

H2: Goal relevance of an idea positively influences FLE inspiration.

3.2.2 *Employee Characteristics*

3.2.2.1 *Openness to Change*

From a broader perspective, openness to experience is a Big Five trait that describes individuals' tendency to be imaginative, curious, and have broad interests (Thrash & Elliot, 2002, 2003). Thrash and Elliot (2004) found that inspiration in daily life is more likely to occur among individuals high in openness to experiences and related traits because openness to experience is theorized to expand the range of objects that one perceives as inspiring and may, thereby, facilitate receptiveness to sources of inspiration. In the work context, this openness to experience is, for example, captured in the notion of openness to change, which is defined as "willingness to accommodate and accept change" at work (Wanberg & Banas, 2000; p. 135). FLE inspiration differs from openness to change in that it is a temporary epistemic motivation. Openness to change, in contrast, refers to employees' openness and readiness to accept new cues from the environment, which could lead to inspiration. In particular, openness to change has been identified as a required trait of employees to drive organizational change in their companies (Miller et al., 1994). In the FLE context, it is suggested that openness to change will broaden FLEs' minds and make them more sensitive to inspiring sources. Accordingly, it is suggested that FLEs high in openness to change are more sensitive to and appreciative of new approaches and solutions that change the status quo compared to FLEs who are low on openness to change (George & Zhou, 2001), leading to FLE inspiration.

H3: Openness to change positively influences FLE inspiration

3.2.2.2 *Work-Related Curiosity*

Curiosity has been commonly defined as "a desire to know, see, or experience what motivates exploratory behavior directed towards the acquisition of new information" (Litman, 2005, p. 793). Curiosity is triggered by novel, complex, uncertain, and conflicting cues, such as an unresolved puzzle or a question (Loewenstein, 1994), and drives exploratory behavior directed towards acquiring new information to fill the knowledge gap or solve a problem (Litman, 2005). Inspiration, in contrast, is triggered by an epistemic trigger object and drives the *transmission* of qualities from this epistemic trigger object (e.g., a creative insight) to a target object (e.g., a future self). Curiosity drives "exploratory and novelty-seeking tendencies [...] that facilitate learning" (Kashdan & Steger, 2007, p. 159) and stimulates individuals to cross domains of knowledge, to be open to new experiences, and to explore new ideas. In the work context, the desire for novelty increases FLEs' sensitivity and receptiveness to new stimuli

from their environment (Hardy et al., 2017; Kashdan et al., 2009). Curious FLEs tend to explore their environment and discover new things at work, facilitating receptiveness to inspiring influences.

H4: FLE curiosity positively influences FLE inspiration.

3.2.3 Frontline Employee Outcomes

3.2.3.1 Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation refers to the desire to expend effort based on interest in and enjoyment of the work itself (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000). It has been understood as “an evolved and inherent human propensity” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 124) dependent on one’s willpower (Locke, 1968; Locke & Latham, 2006). From the perspective of the tripartite conceptualization of inspiration, intrinsic motivation shares the motivational component with inspiration but lacks the qualities of transcendence and evocation (Böttger et al., 2017; Oleynick et al., 2014; Thrash & Elliot, 2003). The qualitative insights (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2.1) show that FLE inspiration is triggered by an epistemic insight, which exerts a press on the FLE to express, actualize or otherwise transmit what is newly apprehended. When becoming inspired, the FLE feels overtaken by the attractiveness of an idea that has entered her/his consciousness. By contrast, intrinsic motivation emphasizes pleasure and enjoyment as antecedents of employee behavior and effort (Grant, 2008). Another important difference is that intrinsically motivated employees are present-focused and concerned with the experience of performing the work itself (Grant, 2008). In contrast, inspired employees are future-oriented because they are concerned with transmitting the newly gained insight to their future selves or a future service interaction (i.e., target object). Based on prior empirical research and the qualitative findings of Study 1, it is hypothesized that feeling inspired will heighten FLEs’ level of intrinsic motivation. Inspiration in daily life involves an epistemic process (inspired-by) that gives rise to intrinsic motivation to actualize the newly learned idea (inspired-to) (Oleynick et al., 2014). In line with the strong motivational component inherent in the inspired-to process of inspiration, it is expected that FLE inspiration will predict FLE intrinsic motivation.

H5: FLE inspiration positively influences FLE intrinsic motivation.

3.2.3.2 Employee Satisfaction

Employee satisfaction describes an employee’s positive *attitude* towards work. Being satisfied with one’s job implies that the employee evaluates her/his perceived

work conditions (e.g., the supervisor, salary, or co-workers) positively against prior expectations (Locke, 1976). High levels of employee satisfaction are associated with satisfaction, comfort, and gratification of desires (Bowen & Schneider, 2014; Christian et al., 2011; Thrash, 2020). In contrast, in line with prior inspiration literature (Straume & Vittersø, 2012), the qualitative findings (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2.1) support the notion that FLE inspiration is an energizing experience that drives FLEs to implement changes in their (future) workplace routines and behaviors. In sum, while employee satisfaction is a work-related attitude, FLE inspiration describes the motivational process that may give rise to such attitudes. Prior empirical research has shown that inspiration in daily life drives attitudinal changes (Thrash & Elliot, 2003) and predicts satisfaction (Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010). Inspiration is conceptualized as an intrinsic motivational state (Oleynick et al., 2014), and intrinsic motivation has been shown to enhance one's level of satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, FLE inspiration is expected to enhance FLE satisfaction.

H6: FLE inspiration positively influences FLE satisfaction.

3.2.3.3 Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is defined as “a positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state” characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2008, p. 187). Vigor refers to high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties. Dedication is characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge at work. Absorption refers to investing one's energies into one's work role; being fully concentrated, happy, and deeply engrossed in one's work while time passes quickly; and experiencing difficulty detaching oneself from work (Salanova et al., 2005). From the tripartite conceptualization of inspiration, engagement shares with inspiration the motivational component but lacks the qualities of transcendence and evocation. Further, FLE inspiration differs from employee engagement in its unique transmission function. Specifically, FLE inspiration transmits (perceived) intrinsic values found in a stimulus object to the target object, while engagement is a state of mind full of absorption and dedication, resulting from being inspired (Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

Upon experiencing inspiration, individuals tend to engage in task-oriented behaviors (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). When individuals focus on their tasks, they are more likely to become absorbed in their work, feel energetic, and exhibit high engagement levels (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Spreitzer et al., 2005). Inspiration has been shown to lead to absorption into one's tasks and heighten energy and motivation (Thrash & Elliot, 2003),

all of which are the key constituents of employee engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002). In the work context, inspired FLEs are expected to experience higher levels of engagement because once inspired, they become absorbed into their tasks and experience high levels of energy to bring their new ideas to fruition.

H7: FLE inspiration positively influences FLE engagement.

3.2.3.4 Psychological Empowerment

Psychological empowerment refers to a state of increased intrinsic task motivation that comprises four cognitive components: a sense of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Meaning refers to a sense of feeling that one's work is personally important. Competence, or self-efficacy, refers to an individual's belief in her or his capability to perform activities. According to Spreitzer (1995), competence is analogous to agency beliefs and personal mastery (Bandura, 1989). Self-determination is an individual's sense of having choice initiating and regulating actions (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Impact describes the degree to which employees feel their work affects their organization. FLE inspiration differs from psychological empowerment in two ways. First, different antecedents drive the two constructs. While a new epistemic insight triggers FLE inspiration, psychological empowerment originates in an FLE's perception of having a choice in initiating and regulating actions, having the ability to perform the job well, being able to influence one's tasks and work in general, and the meaningfulness of the job (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). Second, psychological empowerment refers to an employee's active orientation towards a work role, i.e., the employee wishes and feels able to shape his or her work role (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). By contrast, FLE inspiration describes the experience of receiving a new transcendent idea and being motivated to implement this idea at work. While psychological empowerment increases employees' intrinsic task motivation (Spreitzer, 1995), inspiration demarcates the tasks worth pursuing.

Empirical research has shown that inspiration in daily life increases meaning in life, perceived competence, and self-determination (Thrash & Elliot, 2003; Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010), all of which are the key dimensions of psychological empowerment. Furthermore, feeling inspired has been shown to lead to self-efficacy, i.e., the belief in one's capability to perform a task with skill (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), which is a key antecedent of psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995). In line with this research,

it is posited that feeling inspired enhances FLEs' feelings of psychological empowerment because inspiration imbues them with meaning and boosts their competence and self-determination.

H8: FLE inspiration positively influences FLE psychological empowerment.

3.2.3.5 Employee Creativity

Creativity researchers have mostly defined employee creativity as an idea-generating process resulting in creative products (Amabile et al., 1996; Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Zhou & George, 2001). For example, Oldham and Cummings (1996) defined employee creativity as “products, ideas, or procedures that satisfy two conditions: (1) they are novel or original and (2) they are potentially relevant for, or useful to, the organization” (p. 906). Employee creativity ranges from suggestions for incremental procedural adaptations to radical breakthroughs in developing new products or processes (Madjar et al., 2011). While creativity focuses on creative output, FLE inspiration describes the motivational process that may give rise to such a creative output.

Psychological research suggests that inspiration is a motivational response to a creative idea. Inspiration bridges the gap between an idea entering consciousness and the motivation to act upon this idea (Oleynick et al., 2014). The result of this inspirational process is typically a tangible, creative product (e.g., a poem). In the work context, it is expected that FLE inspiration is the motivational process that gives rise to a work-related creative product (e.g., the idea of a creative sale, a creative service solution). FLEs become inspired by a new and useful (i.e., creative) idea, which they strive to actualize at work. The actualization of creative ideas is referred to as employee creativity (Y. Dong et al., 2015; G. Wang & Netemeyer, 2004).

H9: FLE inspiration positively influences FLE creativity.

3.2.3.6 Discretionary Work Behavior

Discretionary work behavior refers to employees' extra and voluntary effort to completing their task assignments (Collins & Mossholder, 2014), in other words, “extra things’ people do ‘above and beyond the call of duty’ to enhance organizational effectiveness (MacKenzie et al., 1999, p. 407). I investigate the relationship between FLE inspiration and two specific discretionary work behaviors, (1) Change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (see Study 4; Choi, 2007) and (2) employee proactivity (see Study 5; Griffin et al., 2007), because these two behaviors reflect FLEs' ten-

dency to challenge the status quo of the workplace and its procedures and make suggestions that will help companies face the challenging market environment (Choi, 2007; Griffin et al., 2007).

(1) Change-oriented OCB refers to “constructive efforts by individuals to identify and implement changes concerning work methods, policies, and procedures to improve the situation and performance” (Choi 2007, p. 469). In contrast to other discretionary work behaviors, such as employee prosocial behaviors (I. Smith, 2014) or customized service behaviors (Gwinner et al., 2005), which are concerned with *maintaining* and reinforcing the status quo (‘do it in a better way’), change-oriented OCB is concerned with employees’ willingness to *challenge* the status quo through suggestion for constructive changes in work procedures and processes (‘do it in a different way’) (Choi, 2007). (2) Employee proactivity refers to “the extent to which an individual engages in self-starting, future-directed behavior to change her or his organization and/or the way the organization works” (Griffin et al., 2007, p. 332). Employee proactivity involves employee behaviors that lead to larger-scale changes to improve the overall efficiency in the organization, such as making suggestions to improve the organization’s overall efficiency. Both employee proactivity and change-oriented OCB are highly desirable FLE behaviors in dynamic and uncertain market environments. Proactive FLEs “anticipate and act upon the external environment in self-directed ways to achieve effective outcomes” (Griffin et al., 2007, p. 331). Companies and customers may benefit from FLEs who engage in change-oriented OCB. In the FLE context, change-oriented OCB implies that employees scan for problems in service delivery, experiment with improvements in sales effectiveness, and communicate internally customer complaints which eventually may engender new services (Bettencourt, 2004).

It is posited that FLE inspiration enhances FLE discretionary work behavior, including change-oriented OCB and proactivity. In line with prior inspiration literature (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), FLE inspiration is conceptualized as an epistemic-motivational state that leads to the actualization of a *new* idea (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2.1). The epistemic component of FLE inspiration implies that inspired FLEs see something beyond their usual thinking that drives them to engage in behavioral changes and adapt to their environment. Inspiration involves challenging the status quo of work procedures and draws employees’ attention outside the self toward something beyond their limits (Shiota et al., 2014). Therefore, inspired FLEs become aware of new possibilities, which will drive them to engage in new, proactive work behaviors that improve the established work procedures or behaviors and benefit the company.

H10: FLE inspiration positively influences FLE discretionary work behaviors.

Table 3-2:
Delineation of Related Employee-Centric Constructs

Construct category	Construct	Definition	Core Characteristics				Example Item	Relationship to Employee Inspiration
			Evoca- tion	Trans- cendence	Motiva- tion	Trans- mission function		
Frontline Employee Inspiration	Psychological State	The intrinsic motivational state of the FLE triggered by a compelling idea and targeted towards the actualization of this idea at work.	✓	✓	✓	✓	“My imagination was stimulated” (new FLE inspiration scale).	/
Openness to Experience	Personality trait	Big Five personality traits expressing the extent to which individuals are proactive, have wide interests, look for novel experiences (McCrae, 1987).					“I see myself as someone who an active imagination” (Costa & McCrae’s, 1992).	Antecedent
Work-related Curiosity	Personality trait	“Desire for knowledge that motivates individuals to learn new ideas, eliminate information gaps, and solve intellectual problems,” experienced at work (Mussel, 2013).	✓		✓		“I carry on seeking information until I can understand complex issues” (Mussel et al., 2013).	Antecedent
Intrinsic motivation	Motivational state	Doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable (Ryan & Deci, 2000).			✓		Doing this job gives me pleasure (Coelho et al., 2011)-	Outcome
Employee satisfaction	Attitude	Evaluation of the employee’s overall job circumstances, such as supervisor, pay, or co-workers (Locke, 1992).					“Overall, I am quite satisfied with my job” (Homburg & Stock, 2004).	Outcome
Employee Engagement	Psychological state	“A positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, and Bakker, 2002, p. 74).			✓		I find the work that I do full of meaning or purpose.// My job inspires me (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004b).	Outcome

Psych. Empowerment	Psychological state	Psychological state expressing the degree to which individuals feel a sense of control over their work manifested through four dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Conger & Kanugo, 1988; Spreitzer, 1995).			✓		The work I do is meaningful to me (Spreitzer, 1995).	Outcome
Employee Creativity	Behavior	“Products, ideas, or procedures that satisfy two conditions: (1) they are novel or original and (2) they are potentially relevant for, or useful to, the organization” (Oldham & Cummings, 1996, p. 906).			✓		[This employee] suggests new ways to achieve goals or objectives (Zhou & George, 2001).	Outcome
Change oriented OCB ¹¹	Behavior	“Constructive efforts by individuals to identify and implement changes concerning work methods, policies, and procedures to improve the situation and performance” (Choi, 2007; p. 469)			✓		I often suggest work improvement ideas to others (Choi, 2007).	Outcome
Employee Proactivity ¹²	Behavior	“Extent to which an individual engages in self-starting, future-directed behavior to change her or his organization and/or the way the organization works” (Griffin et al., 2007, p. 332).			✓		I make suggestions to improve the organization's overall effectiveness (e.g., by suggesting changes to administrative procedures) (Griffin et al., 2007).	Outcome

Source: Author's illustration

¹¹ Specific type of discretionary work behavior (Measured in Study 4).

¹² Specific type of discretionary work behavior (Measured in Study 5).

3.3 Data Preparation for Scale Validation Studies

A preliminary examination of outliers, excessive multicollinearity, and departures from linearity, homoscedasticity, and normality was performed before data analysis.

3.3.1 *Treatment of Outliers*

Structural equation modeling (including confirmatory factor analysis) is very sensitive to outliers (Laroche et al., 2001). To detect univariate outliers (i.e., cases with an extreme score on a single variable) in the datasets, cases with standardized residuals above three were identified and eliminated (Evanschitzky et al., 2004). To identify multivariate outliers (extreme scores on two or more variables), cases with a Cook's distance of 1.0 or larger were identified and eliminated (Homburg et al., 2014).

3.3.2 *Requirements of Regression Models*

To run regression analysis and covariance-based structural equation models (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1982), assumptions of linearity, homoscedasticity, no/little multicollinearity, and normal distribution had to be met.

Linearity. To check whether there is a linear relationship between dependent and independent variables, I visually inspected scatter plots of standardized residuals (i.e., errors) against each dataset's dependent variable (employee inspiration). Because of the lack of systematic relationship between the standardized residuals and the dependent variable employee inspiration, the assumption of linearity was met (Keith, 2014).

Homoscedasticity refers to a constant variance of the residuals (i.e., the difference between the actual and the predicted value of a data point), regardless of changes in the independent variable (Salkind, 2010). Homoscedasticity violations pose a problem for conducting OLS regression analyses because they may result in biased statistical results and inaccurate inferences about the population. To test for heteroscedasticity in each dataset, I visually inspected the scatter plots of the residuals (Backhaus et al., 2016) and conducted the Breusch and Pagan's test. The test was non-significant, implying that the heteroscedasticity was not a problem in the data (Homburg et al., 2015).

Normal Distribution. OLS linear regression analysis assumes that the underlying data is normally distributed. Violation of this assumption may yield biased results because the standard error would be underestimated. To check for normal distribution of the data, I inspected the skewness and kurtosis values for each variable in the dataset (Song et al., 2018). Skewness represents an index for the degree of asymmetry around

the mean rating (recommended cutoff is $|2|$), while kurtosis represents an index for the peak on the scale's distribution (recommended cutoff is $|7|$) (Kline, 2010). The normality of each item is also a precondition for structural equation modeling (SEM). Since all values in the datasets were below the recommended cutoffs, normality was not violated.

Multicollinearity implies that the independent variables are highly correlated and share predictive power. If the independent variables were highly correlated and essentially shared the same information, none of them would have significantly influenced the dependent variable (Ho, 2006). These drawbacks make it necessary to check for multicollinearity for each independent variable, including control variables. Thus, for each dataset, the variance inflation factors (VIF) were inspected. Checking VIF values for each dataset showed that multicollinearity was not an issue in the data.

3.3.3 Common Method Bias

Using cross-sectional, single respondent data may cause common method bias (CMB), leading to artificially high correlations between constructs (Auh et al., 2016). To determine the presence of common method variance bias among the employee self-report variables (in Studies 4 and 5), I performed a (Harman) (1976) one-factor test following the approach outlined by previous researchers (e.g., Mattila & Enz, 2002). All employee self-reported variables were loaded into an exploratory factor analysis with a non-rotated solution. According to this technique, if a single factor emerges from the factor analysis that accounts for more than 50% of the covariation in the variables, common method variance is present. In Study 4, the first factor accounted for 49% of the variance in the data. In Study 5, the first factor accounted for 43% of the variance in the data, implying that common method bias was not to be a major issue in these studies (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

3.3.4 Structural Equation Modeling

Structural equation models (SEM) can estimate several regression models with different outcomes simultaneously (Bollen, 1989). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is a specific type of structural equation modeling that deals specifically with *measurement models*, that is, the relationships between observed measures or *indicators* (i.e., items) and latent variables or *factors* (T. A. Brown, 2006). CFA is commonly used during scale development to verify the number of underlying dimensions of the measurement scale (factors) and the pattern of item-factor relationships (factor loadings). CFA was used in Studies 2 to 5 and SEM in Study 5.

3.4 Scale Development

Following the framework proposed by Churchill (1979), an item pool for each of the two conceptualized FLE inspiration dimensions (inspired-by and inspired-to) was generated. To develop the FLE scale items, the 10-item customer inspiration scale offers a good point of departure (Böttger et al., 2017, see Table 3-3). Customer inspiration has been defined as a “customer’s temporary motivational state that facilitates the transition from the reception of a marketing-induced idea to the intrinsic pursuit of a consumption-related goal” (Böttger et al., 2017, p. 117). Reflecting this definition, the customer inspiration measures the customer’s experience of becoming inspired by a consumption-related idea (5 items) and feeling inspired to pursue a consumption-related goal (e.g., purchasing a product) (5 items). The reliability and validity of the customer inspiration scale have been demonstrated in various empirical studies. Like FLE inspiration, customer inspiration is conceptualized as a temporary motivational construct consisting of an inspired-by and an inspired-to component. While customer inspiration concerns consumption-related goals (e.g., purchasing, donating), FLE inspiration concerns work-related goals (e.g., providing a service to a customer). Therefore, the customer inspiration items had to be adapted to the specific context of work. Based on the qualitative study, I added ten additional items to the ten items from the customer inspiration scale to incorporate slightly different nuances of the meaning of FLE inspiration, thereby providing a better foundation for the new scale (Churchill, 1979). Table 3-3 (p. 85) provides an overview of the initial 20-item scale of FLE inspiration.

Inspired-by Subscale. Items by₁ to by₅ were taken from the customer inspiration scale (Böttger et al., 2017). The by-dimension of the customer inspiration scale describes the state of becoming inspired-by and is not specific to the consumption context. Therefore, the items did not need to be modified. Following the established marketing literature (Dabholkar et al., 1996), items by₆ to by₁₀ were developed based on qualitative insights from Study 1. New items were generated based on interviewee statements collected in Study 1, which helped conceptualize inspiration. The interviewees were asked the following questions: “What does inspiration at work mean to you?” “What are inspiring moments at work for you?” and “If you were to identify your peers’ level of inspiration at work, how would you measure it?” To generate items based on the qualitative interviews, I followed the established service literature (Dagger et al., 2007). Interview transcripts were read, and statements related to the definition and measurement of FLE inspiration were selected. These statements were consolidated into categories related either to the inspired-by or the inspired-to dimension (see below). Concerning

the inspired-by dimension, interviewees commonly referred to the following themes: experiencing an aha-moment, experiencing novelty, having one's horizon broadened. These themes were reworded into items.

Table 3-3:
Items Used in Study 2

Citation	Factor	Item
Böttger et al. (2017)	Inspired-by	by ₁ My imagination was stimulated.
		by ₂ I was intrigued by a new idea.
		by ₃ I unexpectedly and spontaneously got new ideas.
		by ₄ My horizon was broadened.
		by ₅ I discovered something new.
Study 1	Inspired-by	by ₆ I felt like an idea spontaneously originated within me and suddenly entered my awareness.
		by ₇ I had a compelling idea.
		by ₈ I had a spontaneous aha-moment
		by ₉ I saw things in a different light.
		by ₁₀ I had a brilliant idea of which I had not thought previously.
Böttger et al. (2017)	Inspired-to	to ₁ I was inspired to implement a new idea at work.
		to ₂ I felt a desire to implement a new idea at work.
		to ₃ My interest in implementing a new idea at work was increased.
		to ₄ I was motivated to implement a new idea at work.
		to ₅ I felt an urge to implement a new idea at work.
Study 1	Inspired-to	to ₆ I was motivated to express a new idea at work.
		to ₇ I was motivated to try a new idea out at work.
		to ₈ I was motivated to work intensely for long hours.
		to ₉ I was in a flow of doing things at work.
		to ₁₀ I was motivated to find creative solutions to work-related problems.

Source: Author's illustration.

Inspired-to Subscale. Items to₁ to to₅ of the FLE inspiration scale were adapted from the customer inspiration scale (Böttger et al., 2017) to fit the work context (e.g., “I was inspired to buy something” was adapted to “I was inspired to implement a new idea at work”). The adaptation was necessary because the customer inspiration scale specifies a consumption-related goal, while FLE inspiration is concerned with a work-related goal. The adaption was made based on the qualitative insights from Study 1 in which interviewees commonly associated inspiration with implementing a new idea at work. The development of the items to₆ – to₁₀ was based on the qualitative findings from Study 1. Concerning the inspired-to dimension, interviewees commonly referred to the following themes: Implementation, experimentation, problem-solution, sharing ideas, flow, and emulating others. These themes were reworded into items (Dagger et al., 2007). In Study 2 and Study 3, the item order was randomized. A definition of FLE inspiration was not provided (Thrash & Elliot, 2003) because the aim was to capture the different

nuances and facets of inspiration across different work situations without delimiting the scope of the new scale.

3.4.1 Study 2: Factor and Item Analysis

Participants and Procedure. Data was collected from 520 U.S.-based working adults across service industries via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), following the established retailing literature (Herhausen et al., 2020). Based on the existing service research, which defines FLEs as employees who regularly interact with customers (Marinova et al., 2017), participants who had seldom or never interacted with customers directly were excluded from the dataset. Eliminating participants who failed the attention check (Peer et al., 2014) and case-wise deletion of outliers yielded a final sample of $N = 290$. The average age of the respondents in the sample was 39.15 years, and 45.5% were male. The average organizational tenure was 7.31 years, and the average tenure in position was 5.90 years. Furthermore, 55.2 % of the participants had managerial responsibility (such as supervising a small team of FLEs). The final sample consisted of U.S.-based FLEs with regular customer contact (24.9% of respondents interacted with customers several times a week; 40.3% interacted with customers several times a day; 35.2% interacted with customers several times per hour).

Scale Purification. Iterative CFAs were used to purify the FLE inspiration and assess the reliability and validity of the proposed scale using the statistical software IBM SPSS AMOS version 25.0.0. First, a two-dimensional confirmatory factor model with all 20 initial items was estimated, revealing acceptable model fit ($\chi^2 = 434.29$, $df = 169$, $p < .01$, comparative fit index [CFI] = .96; Tucker–Lewis index [TLI] = .95; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .07; standardized root mean residual [SRMR] = .05) (Homburg & Baumgartner, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999). According to Hu and Bentler (1999), a reasonably good fit between the target model and the observed data, assuming maximum likelihood (ML) estimation, is achieved if (1) standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) values are close to .08 or below; (2) root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) values are close to .06 or below, and (3) the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) are close to .95 or greater; and (4) χ^2/df smaller is smaller than 3.0 (Kline, 2010). While this 20-item scale demonstrated acceptable model fit, it may be too lengthy. Shorter scales are preferable because they are more practical to administer to FLEs, and they may decrease demand effects, preventing practitioners from arbitrarily dropping specific scale items (Richins, 2004).

Subsequently, the scale was shortened based on the established guidelines (J. Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) and in line with prior scale-validation studies (Brocato et al.,

2012). Scale shortening and refinement procedures need to be guided by theoretical and empirical considerations. From a theoretical perspective, the analysis considered aspects such as the breadth of the theoretical content coverage by the item and the clarity of the meaning and comprehensibility of the item (Matsuno et al., 2000). Empirical considerations included an inspection of the item loadings, modification indices, and standardized residual covariance. (1) Two items were dropped because their factor loadings were below .70 (Hulland et al., 2018; Nunnally, 1975). Again, a CFA was performed with the remaining 18 items. (2) Modification indices were reviewed with the intent to pinpoint potential areas of model misspecification (Walsh & Beatty, 2007). The threshold for acceptable values for modification indices is <10 (Mentzer et al., 2001). Large modification indices indicate cross-loading of latent variables (Iacobucci, 2009). All modification indices were below the threshold. Thus, based on the modification indices, no items were dropped. (3) The standardized residual covariance values were expected to be smaller in absolute magnitude than 2.0. (Keith, 2014). The examination of standardized residuals revealed no nonlinearities. The scale purification process was continued while constantly checking face validity and fit statistics.

These analyses resulted in a 14-item scale which captured the two dimensions of FLE inspiration (9 inspired-by items; 5 inspired-to items). The remaining 14 items were subjected once more to a CFA, which revealed acceptable model fit ($\chi^2 = 170.40$, $df = 76$, $p = .03$; CFI = .98; TLI = .97; RMSEA = .07; SRMR = .03). The 14-item scale was subjected to further testing in Study 3, which aimed to shorten and validate the scale.

3.4.2 Study 3: Factor and Item Analysis

Participants and Procedure. Following the procedure used in Study 2, data were collected from 297 U.S.-based FLEs across service industries via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). As a result of the attention check, 8 out of 297 were excluded from the sample (Peer et al., 2014). Furthermore, one outlier was deleted. Following the established service research (Marinova et al., 2017), participants who seldom or never interacted with customers directly were excluded from the dataset, yielding a final sample of $N = 201$ U.S.-based FLEs. Overall, 54.7 % of the participants were male, with 36.67 years on average (for the questionnaire, see Appendix D).

Scale Purification. Iterative CFAs were used to purify the FLE inspiration scale and assess its reliability and validity. A two-dimensional confirmatory factor model with all 14 items was estimated. The model fit indices of this 14-item model did not meet acceptable thresholds ($\chi^2 = 208.41$, $df = 76$, $p < .01$; CFI = .95; TLI = .92; RMSEA = .09; SRMR = .05) (Homburg & Baumgartner, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Specifically,

the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEAs) was larger than the acceptable threshold, indicating poor model fit (Bentler, 1990). Following this analysis, the scale was refined based on an inspection of item loadings, modification indices, standardized residual covariance (see Study 2). I dropped two items (by₄ and by₅) because their factor loadings were below .70 (Nunnally, 1975) and again conducted a CFA with the remaining items. Based on large modification indices >10 (Mentzer et al., 2001), items by₇ and by₆ were dropped. Based on the inspection of the standardized residual covariance, items to₃, by₁₀, by₂, and by₅ were dropped. The final scale had eight items that captured the essence of the inspired-by (4 items: by₁, by₃, by₄, by₇) and the inspired-to (4 items: to₁, to₂, to₄, to₅) dimensions of FLE inspiration. All model fit indices of the two-dimensional 8-item scale were acceptable: $\chi^2 = 39.68$, $df = 19$, $p = .004$; CFI = .98; TLI = .97; RMSEA = .07; SRMR = .04 (Homburg & Baumgartner, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999) (see Table 3-4 for an overview).¹³

Table 3-4:
Overview of Results of Study 3

Items	Standardized Item Loadings
Inspired-by ($\alpha = .80$; AVE = .55; CR = .83)	
My imagination was stimulated. (by ₁)	.76
I unexpectedly and spontaneously got new ideas. (by ₃)	.77
My horizon was broadened (by ₄).	.78
I had a compelling idea (by ₇).	.65
Inspired-to ($\alpha = .84$; AVE=.70; CR=.91)	
I was inspired to implement a new idea at work. (to ₁)	.85
My interest in implementing a new idea at work was increased. (to ₂)	.84
I was motivated to implement a new idea at work. (to ₄)	.81
I felt an urge to implement a new idea at work. (to ₅)	.86
Observations (N)	201
Factor correlation ϕ	.88
The shared variance between constructs (ϕ^2)	.77
χ^2	39.68
df	19
Comparative fit index (CFI)	.98
Tucker-Lewis index (TLI)	.97
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	.07
Standardized root mean square residual (SRMR)	.04

Source: Author's illustration. Note: AVE = Average Variance Extracted; CR = Composite Reliability. The item loadings are standardized.

Convergent Validity. All items loaded significantly on their designated factors (i.e. inspired-by and inspired-to), with standardized factor loadings ranging from .65 to

¹³ Note that the traditional .06 cutoff value for RMSEA is less preferable with small sample sizes ($N < 250$) due to potential over-rejection of appropriate models (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

.83, and squared multiple correlation ranging from .69 to .84, and corrected inter-total correlations ranging from .47 to .69. Furthermore, coefficient alpha, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR) estimates for inspired-by ($\alpha = .80$; AVE = .55; CR = .83) and inspired-to ($\alpha = .84$; AVE = .70; CR = .91) were well above recommended thresholds (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), indicating convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity. One of the underlying assumptions throughout this dissertation was that inspired-by and inspired-to are conceptually related yet empirically distinct constructs (Thrash & Elliot, 2004). To assess discriminant validity, the commonly used procedure suggests comparing the AVE of each construct with the shared variance between constructs, i.e., squared factor correlation ϕ^2 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). For the 8-item model, discriminant validity between inspired-by and inspired-to was *not* supported because the AVE values for inspired-by and inspired-to were less than the squared correlation (i.e., shared variance) ($\phi^2 = .77$). In other words, 77% of the content that the inspired-by and inspired-to dimensions captured was the same, while the inspired-by items explained only 55% of the variance. Similarly, inspired-to items explained only 70% of the variance in the inspired-to dimension. This means that the factors inspired-by and inspired-to are more strongly related to each other (indicated by the squared correlation with another construct) than to their respective items (indicated by the AVE value).¹⁴

Since a high factor correlation indicates that a one-factor model may be superior to a two-factor model, it was necessary to assess the relative quality of the two-factor model over a one-factor model where all eight items are forced to load on a single factor. Comparing the unconstrained two-factor model and the unconstrained one-factor model¹⁵, the χ^2 values were not significantly different in the two-factor model (Bagozzi et al., 1991). The implication is that neither the two-factorial model nor the one-factorial model of FLE inspiration provides a good fit for the data (Keith, 2014).

In sum, the analysis showed that the two-factorial FLE inspiration does not meet the requirement of discriminant validity. If discriminant validity were not established, conclusions regarding relationships between the constructs under investigation could be incorrect. For example, the strength of the relationship could be overestimated, or the

¹⁴ Several alternative models were calculated. For these models, the factor correlation ranged between .86 and .93. For all alternative models, AVE of both constructs did not exceed the squared factor correlation, indicating a lack of discriminant validity. Note that discriminant validity between inspired-by and inspired-to could also not be supported, using the full sample, which included both frontline- and non-frontline employees ($N = 288$; model fit: $\chi^2 = 21.40$, $df = 8$, $p < .05$; CFI = .98; TLI = .97; RMSEA = .07; SRMR = .03).

¹⁵ The model indices for the one-factorial model did not pass acceptable thresholds: $\chi^2 = 45.36$; $df = 9$; $p < .001$; CFI = .96; TLI = .93; RMSEA = .12; SRMR = .05.

relationship could be found statistically significant when no real relationship exists (Farrell, 2010). Comparing the two-factorial and the one-factorial models did not support the superiority of the one-factorial model over the two-factorial model. In other words, neither the one-factor model nor the two-factor provided a suitable means to measure FLE inspiration. To tackle this problem, I revised the scale items.

3.4.3 Revision of Scale Items

Insufficient discriminant validity called into question whether the items designed to measure the two different dimensions of FLE inspiration capture the difference between an employee being inspired-by something and being inspired-to implement something in the work context. In other words, participants may not have captured the difference between these two dimensions and the respective items in an intended way. Therefore, the wording of all 14 items, initially tested in Study 4, was revised to better differentiate between the respective dimensions of inspired-by and inspired-to.

Table 3-5:
Revised Items

Items Used in Study 3 (Pilot Study)		Revised Items (Used in Study 4)
Inspired-by		
by ₁	My imagination was stimulated.	My imagination was stimulated.
by ₂	I was intrigued by a new idea.	I was intrigued by a new idea.
by ₃	I unexpectedly and spontaneously got new ideas.	A new insight came to me spontaneously.
by ₄	My horizon was broadened.	I learned something new.
by ₅	I discovered something new.	I discovered something new.
by ₆	I felt like an idea spontaneously originated within me and suddenly entered my awareness.	I felt like an idea spontaneously entered my mind.
by ₇	I had a compelling idea.	I did not have a flash of insight. (reverse coded)
by ₈	I had a spontaneous aha-moment	I had an aha-moment.
by ₁₀	I had a brilliant idea of which I had not thought previously.	I had an idea which I had not thought of previously.
Inspired-to		
to ₁	I was inspired to implement a new idea at work.	I was inspired to do my job in a new and better way.
to ₂	I felt a desire to implement a new idea at work.	I felt a desire to do my job in a new and better way.
to ₃	My interest in implementing a new idea at work was increased.	My interest in doing my job in a new and better way was increased.
to ₄	I was motivated to implement a new idea at work.	I was motivated to do my job in a new and better way.
to ₅	I felt an urge to implement a new idea at work.	I felt an urge to do my job in a new and better way.

Source: Author's illustration. Note: Changes from Study 3 compared to Study 4 are marked in bold. Items by₁₀, and to₆ to to₁₀ were eliminated in Study 2.

Specifically, the wording of items was simplified to enhance participants' comprehension. Furthermore, items of the inspired-to process were reworded to capture a more concrete work-related goal. Since being inspired involves the appreciation of new and

better possibilities, the inspired-to items now included the work-related goal of “doing a job in a new and better way” (see Table 3-5).

3.5 Scale Validation, Nomological Validity and Predictive Validity

3.5.1 Study 4: Scale Refinement and Initial Validation

Building on the findings from Studies 2 and 3, Study 4 sought to (1) purify the 14 revised FLE inspiration items (see Table 3-5), (2) provide initial evidence of construct validity (i.e., discriminant validity and convergent validity), and (3) establish nomological validity of the purified scale.

3.5.1.1 Participants and Procedure

The survey questionnaire was distributed to 269 U.S.-based retail FLEs using the crowdsourcing platform Prolific Academic, which has recently gained popularity in established service and retailing literature (Aiello et al., 2020; Jörling et al., 2019). The participants were prescreened based on the following criteria: (1) U.S. residence to ensure consistency with the previous studies; (2) English as a mother tongue to ensure comprehension of the questions; and (3) FLEs in the retail business with direct customer contact. Based on the attention check, 10 out of 269 FLEs were excluded from the sample (Peer et al., 2014). Further, case-wise deletion of outliers yielded a final sample of $N = 253$. In the final sample, 41.9 % of participants were male, with an average age of 29.86 years.

3.5.1.2 Measures

This study drew on established scales to measure the proposed multi-item constructs on seven-point Likert scales anchored at 1 = *strongly disagree (very unsatisfied/poorest value)* and 7 = *strongly agree (very satisfied/best value)*. The following constructs were measured (see Appendix E for the questionnaire).¹⁶

- *FLE satisfaction* was assessed with a 3-item scale from Lages and Piercy (2012). This study followed previous studies that have most frequently used the global assessment (e.g., Evanschitzky et al., 2011) rather than scales focusing on different job facets, such as satisfaction with one’s supervisor, pay, or promotion opportunities. A sample item is: “Most days, I am enthusiastic about my work.”

¹⁶ Note that these work-related constructs have been investigated in the frontline employee context (e.g., FLE creativity; Coelho et al., 2011) and in the non-frontline employee context (e.g., employee creativity; Gong et al., 2009). In this dissertation, I focused on the relationship between inspiration and established work-related construct exclusively in the FLE context.

- *FLE engagement* was assessed with the short 5-item validated version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Bledow et al., 2011) adapted from the original 15-item work engagement scale developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002). The scale has been extensively used in management and organizational studies (Knight et al., 2017; Rich et al., 2010). A sample item is: “At my work, I feel bursting with energy.”
- *FLE psychological empowerment* was measured with Spreitzer’s (1995) 12-item scale comprising four dimensions assessed by three items each: meaning (e.g., “The work I do is very important to me”), competence (e.g., “I am confident about my ability to do my job”), self-determination (e.g., “I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job”), and impact (e.g., “My impact on what happens in my department is very large”).
- *FLE creativity* was measured with a 4-item scale from Wilder et al. (2014) adapted from Zhou and George (2001). A sample item is: “I often have new and innovative ideas on how to improve my job performance.”
- *FLE discretionary work behavior* was measured using the 4-item change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior (Choi, 2007), defined as “constructive efforts by individuals to identify and implement changes with respect to work methods, policies, and procedures to improve the situation and performance” (Choi, 2007, p. 469). A sample item is: “I often suggest work improvement ideas to others.”
- *FLE curiosity* was measured with the Work-Related Curiosity Scale (Mussel, 2013), following the established research on employee behavior (Hardy et al., 2017; S. Harrison et al., 2011). This scale consists of two dimensions. Specific curiosity (5 items) refers to the desire to reduce uncertainty and resolve gaps in one’s understanding (sample item: “I work like a fiend at work-related problems that I feel must be solved.”). Diverse curiosity (5 items) is associated with the interest to explore unfamiliar topics and to learn something (sample item: “At work, I enjoy exploring new ideas.”).
- *FLE intrinsic motivation* was measured with the 3-item intrinsic motivation scale from Coelho et al. (2011). A sample item is: “Doing this job gives me pleasure.”

The reliability of these scales was assessed with a composite reliability coefficient (ranging from .82 to .97) and CFA, which confirmed the appropriateness of the operationalizations. Appendix F provides an overview of the items used and their validity and reliability statistics.

3.5.1.3 Scale Purification

Iterative CFAs were used to purify the employee inspiration scale and assess the reliability and validity of the proposed scale using the statistical software IBM SPSS AMOS version 25.0.0. A two-dimensional confirmatory factor model with initial 14 items was estimated (for items, see Table 3-5). For the initial 14-item model, the estimated model fit indices ($\chi^2 = 448.83$; $df = 76$; $p < .001$; CFI = .90; TLI = .87; RMSEA = .14; SRMR = .06) missed acceptable thresholds (Homburg & Baumgartner, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999). In the next step, the model was respecified, following the steps outlined in Study 2 (Section 3.4.1, p. 86). Scale purification was conducted based on item loadings, modification indices, standardized residuals, and theoretical considerations (Kline, 2010). Three items (by₃, by₄, and by₅) were dropped because their item loadings were below .70 (Nunnally, 1975). Items to₃ and to₅ were dropped because their modification indices were greater than 10 (Mentzer et al., 2001). Inspecting the standardized residual covariances, items by₇, by₈, and by₁₀ were dropped.

Table 3-6:
6-item Scale of FLE Inspiration

Items	Standardized Item Loadings
Inspired-by ($\alpha = .84$; AVE = .64; CR = .84)	
My imagination was stimulated. (by ₁)	.81
I was intrigued by a new idea. (by ₂)	.87
I felt like an idea spontaneously entered my mind. (by ₆)	.72
Inspired-to ($\alpha = .89$; AVE = .90; CR = .97)	
I was inspired to do my job in a new and better way. (to ₁)	.96
I felt a desire to do my job in a new and better way. (to ₂)	.93
I was motivated to do my job in a new and better way. (to ₄)	.96
Observations (N)	253
Factor correlation ϕ	.54
The shared variance between constructs (ϕ^2)	.29
χ^2	11.04
df	8
Comparative fit index (CFI)	.99
Tucker-Lewis index (TLI)	.99
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	.04
Standardized root mean square residual (SRMR)	.02

Source: Author's illustration. Note: AVE=Average Variance Extracted; CR=Composite Reliability.

The scale purification process yielded three items with high loadings ($> .70$) capturing the essence of inspired-by and three items with high factor loadings ($> .70$) capturing the essence of inspired-to (see Table 3-6). For the final 6-item model, the estimated model fit indices were excellent ($\chi^2 = 11.04$; $df = 8$; $p > .05$; CFI = .99; TLI = .99; RMSEA = .04; SRMR = .02) (Homburg & Baumgartner, 1995; Hu & Bentler,

1999). The following sections describe convergent validity, reliability, discriminant validity, and nomological validity.

3.5.1.4 Construct Validity

Reliability and Convergent Validity. Cronbach's α and composite reliability for inspired-by ($\alpha = .84$; CR=.84) and inspired-to ($\alpha = .89$; CR = .97) subscales were well-above the recommended threshold of .70 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Nunnally, 1975), supporting the reliability of the scale. Furthermore, construct validity was also supported, since all items loaded significantly on their designated factors, with standardized factor loadings ranging from .72 to .87 for inspired-by and .93 to .96 for inspired-to, and average variance extracted for inspired-by (AVE = .64) and inspired-to (AVE = .90) exceeded the threshold of .50 (see Table 3-6; Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

3.5.1.5 Discriminant Validity and Factor Structure

First, I assessed whether the two employee inspiration states, inspired-by and inspired-to, are empirically distinct from each other. Discriminant validity between inspired-by and inspired-to was supported because the average variance extracted (AVE) for both inspired-by (.64) and inspired-to (.90) exceeded the squared correlation between the constructs of $\phi^2 = .29$ (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This implies that 29% of the variance was shared between the inspired-by and inspired-to factors, which was below the variance explained through the respective items of each factor.

Second, to further investigate the latent factor structure, I compared the relative quality of the two-factor model to a one-factor model in which all six items were forced to load on a single factor. Toward this end, I conducted a chi-square difference test, comparing an unconstrained model in which both factors were allowed to covary and a constrained model in which the correlation between the FLE inspiration factors was fixed at 1 (Bagozzi et al., 1991). Comparing the constrained and unconstrained models, the χ^2 value was significantly lower ($p < .001$) in the unconstrained model. This indicates that the model in which the inspired-by and inspired-to factors were modeled as two second-order constructs provided a significantly better fit than when they were modeled as a single construct (Gwinner et al., 2005). These results expand on past work on general inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2004) and consumer behavior (Böttger et al., 2017), which has suggested two distinct inspiration states (inspired-by and inspired-to). Table 3-7 provides an overview of the psychometric properties of the two-factor model compared to the one-factor model.

Table 3-7:
Competitive Models and Relative Fit Quality

<i>Model</i>	<i>Chi-Square</i>	<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	<i>Chi-Square Difference (df Difference)</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>
One-factorial model	17.803	9	NA	.822	.062
Two-factorial model	11.039	8	6.764**	.998	.039

Source: Author's illustration. Note: NA = not applicable. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Furthermore, I assessed whether the two employee inspiration factors were empirically distinct from traditional employee constructs, including employee satisfaction, job engagement, employee creativity, job motivation, work-related curiosity, and psychological empowerment. Toward this end, I conducted a CFA with the first-order constructs of FLE inspiration containing two factors (inspired-by and inspired-to), psychological empowerment containing four factors (impact, self-determination, meaning, competence), and work-related curiosity containing two factors (specific and diversive work-related curiosity). All other variables were modeled as one-factor constructs. A first-order CFA allows assessing the discriminant validity of inspired-by and inspired-to vis-à-vis other first-level factors. I compared the squared correlation (i.e., the shared variance) between all 11 factors and the two states of FLE inspiration with the AVEs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). All squared correlations with the inspired-by factor and the inspired-to factor were smaller than the AVE for each construct, confirming discriminant validity (see Table 3-8).

Table 3-8:
Indicators of Discriminant Validity

<i>Construct</i>	<i>Squared Correlations with Inspired-by</i>	<i>Squared Correlations with Inspired-to</i>	<i>Average Variance Extracted (AVE)</i>
FLE satisfaction	.33	.36	.85
FLE engagement	.32	.34	.86
FLE creativity	.35	.33	.84
FLE Change-oriented OCB	.31	.29	.76
FLE intrinsic Motivation	.36	.33	.79
FLE empowerment: Meaning	.32	.23	.92
FLE empowerment: Impact	.22	.17	.87
FLE empowerment: Self-determination	.18	.20	.87
FLE empowerment: Competence	.02	.07	.81
FLE diversive Curiosity	.31	.29	.81
FLE specific Curiosity	.28	.26	.75
FLE inspiration: inspired-by	/	.29	.64
FLE inspiration: inspired-to	.29	/	.90

Note: OCB = Organizational citizenship behavior.

3.5.1.6 Nomological Validity

To examine nomological validity, I explored how each FLE inspiration state (inspired-by and inspired-to) correlates with first-order factors of established work-related scales (Walsh & Beatty, 2007), including employee satisfaction, employee engagement, employee creativity, work-related curiosity, psychological empowerment (meaning, competence, self-determination, impact), and change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior. I conducted a CFA with all variables modeled as first-order constructs because this allows a detailed analysis of correlations between first-order constructs. Correlations are listed in Table 3-9. Inspired-by and inspired-to correlated significantly with all hypothesized constructs, with correlations ranging from $\beta = .27$ to $\beta = .60$; $p < .001$. As an exception, competence (i.e., a first-order factor of the higher-order construct psychological empowerment) was not correlated with inspired-by. A Hotelling-William test (Steiger, 1980) assessed the differences in the *relative* strength between the measured constructs and the two states of FLE inspiration. The test revealed that meaning has a significantly stronger correlation with the inspired-by factor than the inspired-to factor ($p < .10$). Competence had a significantly stronger correlation with the inspired-to state than with the inspired-by factor ($p < .05$). Apart from meaning and competence, inspired-by and inspired-to correlated strongly with all related variables, supporting that inspired-by and inspired-to belong to the same second-order construct yet possess strong discriminant validity (see Table 3-9).

Table 3-9:
Correlations with Related Employee Constructs

Construct	Inspired-by	Difference Between Correlations	Inspired-to
FLE satisfaction	.57***	n.s.	.60***
FLE engagement	.57***	n.s.	.59***
FLE creativity	.59***	n.s.	.58***
FLE change-oriented OCB	.56***	n.s.	.54***
FLE intrinsic motivation	.60***	n.s.	.57***
FLE empowerment: Meaning	.56***	($p < .10$)	.48***
FLE empowerment: Impact	.47***	n.s.	.41***
FLE empowerment: Self-determination	.42***	n.s.	.45***
FLE empowerment: Competence	.13	$p < .05$	.27***
FLE diversive Curiosity	.56***	n.s.	.54***
FLE specific Curiosity	.53***	n.s.	.51***

Source: Author's illustration. Note: OCB = organizational citizenship behavior; n.s. = non-significant ($p > .05$).

Apart from competence, which did not correlated with inspired-by, all constructs correlated strongly with both inspired-by and inspired-to. One possible interpretation is that these constructs function both as a facilitator and outcome of FLE inspiration. For example, FLE satisfaction may facilitate inspiration because feeling satisfied, which is

associated with positive feelings, enhances FLEs' sensitivity to inspiring stimuli (Böttger et al., 2017; Thrash & Elliot, 2004). Similarly, FLEs' engagement with objects in their environment may increase their exposure to inspiring influences (Thrash & Elliot, 2004).

3.5.2 Study 5: Scale Validation, Nomological Validity, and Predictive Validity

Study 5 had three objectives: First, it validated the 6-item FLE inspiration, which emerged from the scale purification process. Here, the goal was to reconfirm the scale reliability and validity. Second, I sought to test the hypotheses and expand the nomological validity of the FLE inspiration scale beyond the measures tested in Study 4. Additional measures included the source characteristics, FLE openness to change, and FLE proactivity. Third, I offered evidence of predictive validity, i.e., the degree to which inspiration explains variance in relevant behavioral constructs above and beyond the established measures (e.g., FLE satisfaction).

3.5.2.1 Participants and Procedure

A questionnaire was administered to 234 U.S.-based retail FLEs via Academic Prolific. Identical to Study 4, only U.S. residents working as FLEs in retail with direct customer contact and speaking English as a mother tongue participated in the study. In line with current research guidelines, it was necessary to exclude two participants who failed the attention check (Peer et al., 2014). Further, case-wise deletion of outliers yielded a final sample of $N = 231$. In the final sample, 37.2% of participants were male, with an average age of 28.35.

3.5.2.2 Measures

In addition to the measures used in Study 4, Study 5 included the following multi-item measures assessed on seven-point Likert scales anchored at 1 = *strongly disagree* (very little/poorest value) and 7 = *strongly agree* (great deal/best value). (1) FLEs' level of *openness to change* measured employees' willingness to accommodate or accept changes using the 3-item openness to change scale (Wanberg & Banas, 2000; sample item: "I would consider myself open to the changes"). (2) *FLEs proactivity*, a specific type of discretionary work behavior, was measured with the 3-item employee proactivity scale developed by Griffin et al. (2007). This scale assesses employees' willingness and ability to self-initiate change that benefits their company (Crant, 2000), and it has been extensively used in prior organizational literature (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016; K. Strauss & Parker, 2018). A sample item is "Over the last month, how often have you made suggestions to improve the way your company works? (e.g., by suggesting changes to administrative procedures.)" (3) Since FLE inspiration may arise from multiple sources,

this study sought to examine the specific source characteristics that inspiring sources share across FLEs. Based on the qualitative interviews, this study focused on two important source characteristics: the surprise of the idea and relevance to employee goals. Following established marketing research, participants were asked to rate new ideas they had on a scale from 1 (*unsurprising*) to 7 (*extremely surprising*) (Lane, 2000; Winterich et al., 2019). Participants were further asked to rate the relevance of the new idea to employee goals on a scale from 1 (*not at all relevant to my work-related goals*) to 7 (*extremely relevant to my work-related goals*) (Lakshmanan & Krishnan, 2011) (see Appendix G for the questionnaire).

3.5.2.3 Validity Assessment

The 6-item scale was subjected to a CFA, using maximum likelihood estimation procedures in SPSS AMOS version 25.0.0. (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989), and resulted in a good overall fit ($\chi^2 = 16.68$; $df = 8$; CFI = .99; TLI = .99; RMSEA = .069; SRMR = .026; $p > .05$).¹⁷ The reliability of the subscales was acceptable since Cronbach's α and composite reliability (CR) for inspired-by ($\alpha = .84$; CR = .85) and inspired-to ($\alpha = .97$; CR = .97) were above recommended thresholds of $\geq .70$ (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Table 3-10:
Reliability and Validity Statistics of the 6-item FLE inspiration Scale

Factors and items	Standardized Item Loadings
Inspired-by ($\alpha = .84$; CR = .85; AVE = .65)	
My imagination was stimulated. (by ₁)	.79
I was intrigued by a new idea. (by ₂)	.87
I felt like an idea spontaneously entered my mind. (by ₆)	.75
Inspired-to ($\alpha = .97$; CR = .97; AVE = .90)	
I was inspired to do my job in a new and better way. (to ₁)	.97
I felt a desire to do my job in a new and better way. (to ₂)	.94
I was motivated to do my job in a new and better way. (to ₄)	.95
Observations (N)	231
Factor correlation (ϕ)	.65
χ^2	16.68
Comparative fit index (CFI)	.99
Tucker-Lewis index (TLI)	.99
Standardized root mean square residual (SRMR)	.026
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	.069

Source: Author's illustration. Note: Item loadings are standardized; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; CR = Composite Reliability.

¹⁷ Note that the traditional .06 cutoff value for RMSEA is less preferable with small sample sizes ($N < 250$) due to potential over-rejection of appropriate models (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Convergent validity was supported since all items loaded highly on their respective constructs (inspired-by and inspired-to) with standardized factor loadings ranging from .79 to .97 and squared multiple correlations ranging from .57 to .94. Discriminant validity between inspired-by and inspired-to was supported because the average variance extracted for inspired-by (AVE = .65) and inspired-to (AVE = .90) was above the squared correlation of the two constructs ($\varphi^2 = .42$). See Table 3-10 for an overview of the reliability and validity statistics.

Factor Structure. To provide evidence of the two-factorial structure of the FLE inspiration scale, a chi-square difference test between a one-factor model and a two-factor model was conducted following the established literature (Gwinner et al., 2005; Pons et al., 2006). The procedure was the same as outlined in Section 3.5.1.5 (i.e., in the two-factor model, inspired-by and inspired-to were allowed to covary, whereas the correlation between the two factors in the one-factor model was fixed at 1). The comparison of the two models revealed that the chi-square value was significantly lower in the two-factor model ($p < .001$), indicating that the two-factor model provides a significantly better fit compared to the one-factor model (Keith, 2014). Table 3-11 shows that the two-factorial model is statistically superior to the one-factorial model. This finding is consistent with the past research indicating that inspiration consists of two distinct states (Thrash & Elliot, 2004) and with the conceptualization of FLE inspiration as a two-dimensional construct (see Study 1).

Table 3-11:
Competitive Models and Relative Fit Quality

Model	Chi-Square	Degrees of Freedom	Chi-Square Difference (df Difference)	CFI	RMSEA
Two-factor model	16.68	8	NA	.99	.069
One-factor model	26.86	9	10.18**	.98	.094

Source: Author's illustration. Note: NA = not applicable. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

3.5.2.4 Hypotheses Testing of Nomological Net

To provide further evidence of nomological validity, I investigated FLE inspiration within a larger nomological network of theoretically related constructs. As depicted in the framework of hypotheses (see Figure 3-1 on p. 71), it is expected that established marketing and organizational constructs relate to FLE inspiration either as antecedents or as outcomes. Since FLE inspiration is a response to an inspiring source in the employee's environment, I also included two source characteristics in the model. To test the predictions, a structural equation model was calculated. J. Anderson and Gerbing (1988) recommended a two-stage model building approach. First, the measurement

model was tested to confirm the validity and reliability of the constructs. Second, the structural model was estimated.

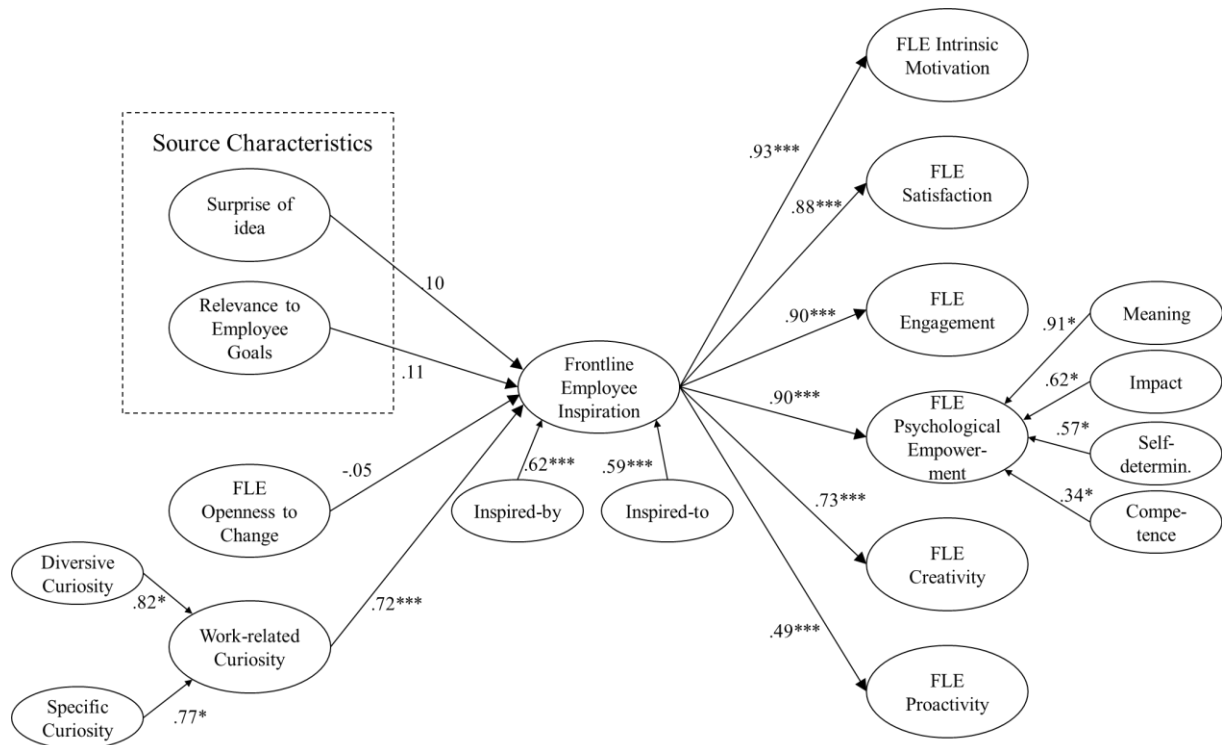
Measurement Model and Reliability and Validity Assessment. The entire measurement model, including all latent variables, was assessed using confirmatory factor analysis with maximum likelihood estimation procedures in SPSS AMOS 25.0 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989). In line with the established marketing research (Morhart et al., 2009), minor modifications were made. Error terms of two items of the employee satisfaction construct were allowed to covary because of their similar content. Similarly, error terms of two items of the engagement construct were covaried. The model exhibited an acceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 2002.68$, $df = 1100$; CFI = .95; SRMR=.08; TLI = .97; RMSEA = .06). All measures included in the analysis were reliable, with construct reliability estimates ranging from .70 to .90. In addition, convergent validity was supported as all items loaded strongly and significantly on their respective factors, and the average variance extracted (AVE) for each latent variable exceeded .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Furthermore, the average variance extracted for each latent factor exceeded the respective squared correlation between factors, providing evidence of discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Appendix H summarizes the composite reliability and validity statistics and correlations among the constructs.

Structural Equation Model. After assessing the measurement model, the full structural model was analyzed to determine the structural relationships between constructs. FLE inspiration was modeled as a second-order construct with two first-order factors, inspired-by and inspired-to. Consistent with prior research and theory, psychological empowerment was modeled as a four-factor second-order construct (Spreitzer, 1995), and work-related curiosity was modeled as a two-factor second-order construct (S. Harrison et al., 2011). All antecedents and outcomes were modeled to directly affect the second-order construct of FLE inspiration without any direct effects on inspired-by and inspired-to (see Figure 3-2). The estimation of the structural equation model produced acceptable fit measures ($\chi^2 = 2428.41$, $df = 1202$; CFI = .91; SRMR=.09; TLI = .97; RMSEA = .06) and revealed significant standardized factor loadings of both inspired-by ($\gamma = .62$; $p < .001$) and inspired-to ($\gamma = .59$; $p < .001$) on the second-order construct FLE inspiration. The effects of the control variables age, retail sector, and gender on FLE inspiration were non-significant.

Antecedents of Frontline Employee Inspiration. The data supported the hypotheses about the influence of the source characteristics. The surprise of an idea ($\beta = .10$; $p = .07$) and relevance to FLE goals ($\beta = .11$; $p = .08$) had marginally significant effects on FLE inspiration, supporting H1 and H2. However, no significant relationship

emerged between employees' openness to change and FLE inspiration ($\beta = -.05$; *n.s.*), disconfirming H3. The results indicated a strong influence of work-related curiosity on FLE inspiration ($\beta = .72$; $p < .001$), supporting H4.

Figure 3-2:
Structural Equation Model (Study 5)



Source: Author's illustration. Note: Factor loadings of observed measures on latent constructs omitted for readability. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Covariances between independent variables are omitted for readability.

Outcomes of Frontline Employee Inspiration. All path coefficients from FLE inspiration to its proposed outcomes were positive and significant (H5-H10). In support of H5, the results indicated that FLE inspiration is significantly related to FLE intrinsic motivation ($\beta = .93$; $p < .001$; supporting H5), FLE satisfaction ($\beta = .88$; $p < .001$; supporting H6), FLE engagement ($\beta = .90$; $p < .001$; supporting H7), FLE psychological empowerment ($\beta = .90$; $p < .001$; supporting H8), employee creativity ($\beta = .73$; $p < .001$; supporting H9), and FLE proactivity ($\beta = .49$; $p < .001$; supporting H10). Although not formally hypothesized, I also tested several moderating effects (surprise of idea x work-related curiosity, surprise of idea x FLE openness to change, relevance of idea x work-related curiosity, relevance of idea x openness to change) on FLE inspiration and the moderating effect of FLE inspiration and psychological empowerment on FLE outcomes (FLE intrinsic motivation, FLE satisfaction, FLE proactivity, FLE creativity). None of the moderating effects were significant.

Overall, FLE inspiration was significantly related to two source characteristics (surprise of idea and relevance to FLE goals), work-related curiosity, FLE satisfaction, FLE engagement, FLE creativity, FLE psychological empowerment (meaning, competence, self-determination, impact), and FLE proactivity. Unlike hypothesized, FLE inspiration was not related to FLE openness to change. (This result is discussed in Section 3.6.1.). Table 3-12 presents the empirical estimates for the structural equation model.

Table 3-12:
Results of Structural Model – Path coefficients (Study 5)

Hypothesized Relationship				Hypothesized Direction	Estimate
H1	Surprise of idea	→	FLE inspiration	+	.10 ($p = .07$)
H2	Relevance to FLE goals	→	FLE inspiration	+	.11 ($p = .08$)
H3	FLE Openness to change	→	FLE inspiration	+	-.05
H4	FLE curiosity	→	FLE inspiration	+	.72***
H5	FLE inspiration	→	FLE Intrinsic motivation	+	.93***
H6	FLE inspiration	→	FLE satisfaction	+	.88***
H7	FLE inspiration	→	FLE engagement	+	.90***
H8	FLE inspiration	→	FLE psychological empowerment	+	.90***
H9	FLE inspiration	→	FLE creativity	+	.73***
H10	FLE inspiration	→	FLE proactivity	+	.49***

Source: Author's illustration. Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

3.5.2.5 Predictive Validity

To test the predictive validity of the proposed scale, I analyzed whether FLE inspiration explains additional variance in two relevant employee outcomes (i.e., FLE creativity, FLE proactivity) beyond the effects of existing employee metrics (i.e., FLE engagement, FLE satisfaction, job motivation, psychological empowerment, work-related curiosity). To offer proof of the predictive validity of FLE inspiration, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted following the established literature in psychology (Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010) and marketing literature (Bradley & Sparks, 2002).

The control variables (managerial responsibility, educational level, gender, organizational tenure, age, and employment situation) were entered in *Step 1*. Existing metrics that gauge FLE behavior, attitudes, and motivation, were entered in *Step 2* (i.e., FLE satisfaction, FLE intrinsic motivation, FLE engagement, FLE psychological empowerment, and FLE curiosity). The domain-general inspiration scale (Thrash & Elliot, 2003) was entered in *Step 3* to prove that the new contextualized FLE inspiration scale is superior to the original general inspiration scale (Finn & Kayande, 2004). The new FLE inspiration variable was entered in *Step 4*.

Four separate hierarchical regression analyses were performed with two dependent variables, FLE creativity and FLE proactivity. FLE creativity and proactivity are highly relevant work behaviors for the following reasons: (1) *FLE creativity* is an important construct because it can involve minor changes in a work procedure to produce a breakthrough in science and technology (Zhou & George, 2003). FLE creativity is a crucial employee behavior in a highly turbulent environment because creative FLEs drive organizational innovation, change, and competitiveness (Amabile, 1988; Zhou & George, 2003). (2) *FLE proactivity* is also a desirable employee behavior in uncertain environments because proactive employees engage in self-starting, proactive, and future-directed work behavior, promoting change not only within narrow functional or departmental silos but also within the company as a whole (Griffin et al., 2007).

As displayed in Table 3-13, FLE inspiration predicted employee creativity and employee proactivity beyond the established employee-centric constructs. The findings were robust even when controlling for a diverse set of traits (e.g., age, gender, educational level), behaviors, motivation, and attitudes (i.e., FLE intrinsic motivation, FLE engagement, FLE satisfaction, FLE psychological empowerment, work-related curiosity). Specifically, the control variables (entered in *Step 1*) accounted for 12.1% of the variance in FLE creativity. Adding FLE psychological empowerment, FLE curiosity, FLE engagement, FLE satisfaction, and FLE intrinsic motivation to the model in *Step 2* explained an additional 45.2% of the variance in FLE creativity ($\Delta R^2 = .453, p < .001$). Notably, only intrinsic FLE motivation, FLE curiosity, and FLE psychological empowerment had a significant effect on FLE creativity, while FLE satisfaction and FLE engagement did not significantly predict FLE creativity. This supports the assumption that FLE satisfaction and FLE engagement have limited explanatory power when predicting desirable FLE behavior in uncertain environments. Adding the domain-general inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003) scale in *Step 3* did not significantly change R^2 , indicating that the domain-general inspiration scale does not explain variance in FLE creativity. Subsequently, the new FLE inspiration scale was entered in *Step 4*, resulting in a significant change in R^2 ($\Delta R^2 = .016; p < .001$). This implies that the FLE inspiration scale explains variance in FLE creativity beyond the domain-general inspiration scale and traditional FLE measures, i.e., intrinsic motivation, psychological empowerment, employee engagement, employee satisfaction, and work-related curiosity (Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

A similar procedure was adopted to test the predictive validity of FLE inspiration using FLE proactivity as a dependent variable. The control variables entered in *Step 1*

accounted for 7.7% of the variance in FLE proactivity. Adding psychological empowerment, work-related curiosity, FLE engagement, FLE satisfaction, and FLE intrinsic motivation to the model in *Step 2* explained an additional 25.3% of the variance in FLE creativity ($\Delta R^2 = .253, p < .001$). Notably, only work-related curiosity and psychological empowerment significantly influenced FLE proactivity, while FLE satisfaction, FLE engagement, and intrinsic motivation did not predict FLE creativity. Adding the domain-general inspiration scale in *Step 3* did not significantly change R^2 , indicating that the general inspiration scale does not explain variance in FLE proactivity. Subsequently, the new FLE inspiration scale was entered in *Step 4*, resulting in a significant change in R^2 ($\Delta R^2 = .017; p < .001$). This implies that FLE inspiration explains variance in FLE proactivity beyond the existing employee-centric measures and the domain-general inspiration scale.

Table 3-13:
Predictive Validity: Standardized Regression Coefficients (Study 5)

Outcome Variable	Independent Variable	Step			
		1	2	3	4
FLE Creativity	Age	.24***	.06	.06	.06
	Gender	.11	.06	.06	.05
	Education level	-.05	-.03	-.03	-.03
	Managerial responsibility	-.13	-.06	-.06	-.07
	Organizational tenure	-.09	-.05	-.04	-.04
	Employment situation	.07	-.07	-.08	-.06
	FLE psychological empowerment		.28***	.28***	.24**
	FLE intrinsic motivation		.31**	.30**	.31**
	FLE satisfaction		-.05	-.06	-.07
	FLE engagement		-.05	-.10	-.11
	FLE work-related curiosity		.32***	.31***	.28***
	Domain-general inspiration			.10	.01
	FLE inspiration				.18**
	ΔR^2	.121***	.435***	.004	.016**
FLE Proactivity	Age	0.00	-.11	-.11	-.11
	Gender	.00	-.04	-.04	-0.05
	Education level	-.08	-.06	-.06	-0.06
	Managerial responsibility	-.19*	-.12	-.13	-0.14*
	Organizational tenure	-.08	-.08	-.08	-0.08
	Employment situation	.13	.02	.02	0.03
	FLE psychological empowerment		.37***	.38***	0.34***
	FLE motivation		.11	.10	0.11
	FLE satisfaction		-.02	-.04	-0.04
	FLE engagement		-.15	-.21	-0.22
	FLE work-related curiosity		.27**	.26**	0.23**
	Domain-general inspiration			.12	0.03
	FLE Inspiration				0.18*
	ΔR^2	.077**	.253***	.005	.017*

Source: Author's illustration. Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; ***; $p < .001$.

Together, the results suggested that FLE inspiration affects relevant FLE outcomes, such as FLE creativity and FLE proactivity positively, even after controlling for work-related curiosity, psychological empowerment, work-related curiosity, FLE engagement, FLE satisfaction, and FLE intrinsic motivation.

3.6 Discussion and Implications

3.6.1 Theoretical Implications

Based on four FLE samples, I generated and validated a 6-item two-factor scale that taps onto the inspired-by (3 items) and the inspired-to (3 items) dimensions of FLE inspiration. The new scale builds on the conceptualization of FLE inspiration as consisting of two states, inspired-by and inspired-to, and assesses the degree to which different sources in FLEs' environment inspire and energize them to implement newly acquired ideas in their workplace (see Chapter 2; Section 2.2.2.1). The new scale was found to have good reliability and validity, and it can add a new perspective to FLE-related research.

First, this scale offers a new measurement instrument for researchers to investigate how FLEs gain awareness of new ideas that encourage them to engage in behavioral and attitudinal changes at work. By introducing the new FLE inspiration scale, I provide a means to understand the psychological mechanism that drives FLEs' attitudes and behaviors. Second, by conceptually and empirically delineating the differences between FLE inspiration and other work-related constructs and providing evidence of discriminant validity, I addressed an ongoing confusion about employee inspiration in the service and marketing literature. Marketing researchers have tended to use "employee inspiration" to refer to "employee motivation" (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2003; Morhart et al., 2009). Similarly, service researchers have used the term "inspiration" without clearly defining or measuring it, for example, when describing how FLEs emulate their supervisors (Kohli et al., 1998) or role models in company advertising (Wentzel et al., 2010) or gain a new idea from interacting with a customer (Lages & Piercy, 2012). In my research, I investigated FLE inspiration as a distinct and empirically unique construct and analyzed its effect on various FLE behaviors and attitudes. In doing so, I illustrated the strong relationship between FLE inspiration and FLE behaviors and attitudes.

The results of the structural equation model in Study 5 provided evidence that two source characteristics (surprise of idea and relevance to FLE goals) have a marginally significant effect on FLE inspiration. Furthermore, FLE curiosity was shown to be

a significant antecedent of FLE inspiration. While inspiration research in social psychology provided evidence that openness to experience is a significant antecedent of inspiration in daily life (Milyavskaya et al., 2012; Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010), Study 5 did not find support for the hypothesized relationship between FLE openness to change and FLE inspiration (Hypothesis 3). One possible reason for the inconsistency between prior research and this finding may be that openness to change is generally concerned with large-scale organizational changes that employees may perceive as burdensome or threatening to their workplace (Wanberg & Banas, 2000). In contrast, individuals high in openness to experience are imaginative, curious, and have broad interests (Thrash & Elliot, 2002); therefore, they might be open to smaller and possibly positive changes (e.g., openness to a new idea, behavior, or feeling) (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), which are easier to accommodate by individuals. As such, future research may investigate the association of openness to experience with FLE inspiration.

Based on two empirical studies (Studies 4 and 5), the findings showed that FLE inspiration is a key antecedent of FLE attitudes, motivation, and behaviors. FLE inspiration is significantly related to various outcome variables, including FLE satisfaction, FLE engagement, FLE creativity, FLE psychological empowerment (meaning, competence, self-determination, impact), and FLE proactivity. By establishing FLE inspiration as an important psychological mechanism driving FLE attitudes and behaviors, I substantively contribute to FLE-related research. For example, in recent years, FLE creative behaviors have attracted increasing attention from service researchers (Agnihotri et al., 2014; Sousa & Coelho, 2011; G. Wang & Netemeyer, 2004). By showing that FLE inspiration explains variance in FLE creativity beyond the explanatory power of intrinsic motivation, psychological empowerment, satisfaction, engagement, and curiosity, this dissertation provides creativity researchers with a more profound understanding of the psychological mechanisms that drive FLE creativity.

While I investigated the direct relationship between FLE inspiration and related employee-level constructs, future research could investigate alternative paths between the antecedents in the nomological network. For example, employee characteristics could be investigated as moderating variables influencing the effect of the sources of inspiration on FLE inspiration. Alternatively, employee characteristics may also be explored as distal antecedents influencing the emergence of the sources (Thrash & Elliot, 2003; Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010).

3.6.2 Managerial Implications

The findings highlight the importance of managing and leveraging FLE inspiration to positively influence FLE behavior and attitudes. Managers need to realize that FLE inspiration is crucial for coping with today's dynamic and volatile marketplace, and inspiring sources that contain elements of surprise and are relevant to FLE goals may drive FLEs to perform beyond expectations. Exploring FLE inspiration within its nomological network has important implications for retailers. The benefit of inspired FLEs depends on the generic business model that retailers follow. Rudolph (2000) differentiated between three generic business models in retailing: global discounters striving towards price leadership, content retailers seeking to attain product leadership, and channel retailers focused on customer leadership. This taxonomy helps us understand the advantages of FLE inspiration for different retailers.

FLE inspiration may strengthen global discounters' objective of delivering good quality at low prices because inspired FLEs are highly motivated, engaged, and proactive (Studies 4 and 5). Their high levels of intrinsic motivation, engagement, and proactivity may drive them to adjust their work behavior to change initiatives and optimize logistics and sales processes. Furthermore, FLE inspiration may strengthen content retailers' objective of developing innovative products because inspired FLEs are highly creative (Study 4). Content retailers may use their inspired FLEs' creative ideas to foster product innovation. Additionally, FLE inspiration has important implications for channel retailers. FLE inspiration has been shown to lead to enhanced creativity, intrinsic motivation, satisfaction, psychological empowerment, and engagement, all of which crucially influence customer outcomes during service interactions (Coelho et al., 2011; Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Chapter 6 (Section 6.3.1) provides a step-by-step guide aimed at enhancing FLE inspiration and elaborates on its benefits for each type of retailer.

The new construct of FLE inspiration can significantly improve managers' prediction of FLE outcomes, such as FLE creativity and FLE proactivity. In particular, the analysis of predictive validity showed that FLE inspiration significantly explains variance in FLE proactivity and creativity, two highly relevant work behaviors beyond traditional employee metrics, including FLE satisfaction, FLE intrinsic motivation, FLE psychological empowerment, and FLE engagement for firms to counter the adverse effects of an increasingly complex market environment (Study 5). Interestingly, FLE satisfaction, FLE motivation, and FLE engagement were not significantly related to FLE proactivity and creativity, implying that managers should seek to measure and influence FLE inspiration instead of focusing on engaging or satisfying FLEs. Considering that 70% of internal change initiatives fail mostly due to employee resistance (Beer &

Nohria, 2000), FLE inspiration suggests a new strategy to capitalize on FLEs' human capital and instill in them a drive to contribute to organizational objectives. In this context, the newly developed FLE inspiration scale is a crucial tool because it allows managers to diagnose, compare, track, and leverage the level of FLE inspiration.

Specifically, the new scale enables managers to observe and assess FLE inspiration and select and train FLEs based on their level of inspiration. To make appropriate decisions about FLE inspiration measures, managers can analyze the inspired-by and inspired-to dimensions separately. For example, if FLEs earn low scores on the inspired-by dimension, they could undergo training sensitizing them to potential sources of inspiration, such as new customer trends or changes in their work environment. If the inspired-to score is low, managers are well-advised to invest in training to improve FLEs' ability to bring their inspiration into fruition at work. The FLE inspiration scale may also be considered during employee selection and hiring. Most recruitment processes involve cognitive tests and/or work sample tests (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998); yet, no existing scale has been available to determine how strongly the job applicant is inspired by the company, its brand, its work environment, and its customers. Retail managers may assess applicants' inspirations by asking them to complete the FLE inspiration scale after the job interview. This will provide them with the first insights into whether the company can elicit a sense of inspiration in the job candidate and whether the job candidate is inspired to go beyond predefined role requirements. Chapter 6 (Section 6.3.1) elaborates on these managerial implications.

4 The Sources of Frontline Employee Inspiration

4.1 Introduction and Research Focus

The objective of this chapter is to investigate the sources of frontline employee (FLE) inspiration in two quantitative studies (hereafter referred to as Studies 6 and 7). I use the term “source,” also commonly referred to as stimulus object or trigger object in the inspiration literature (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), to describe the specific cues in the FLE’s environment that evoke FLE inspiration. Prior research on leadership and organizational research has studied the inspirational effect of various sources, such as leaders’ behavior (e.g., Bass, 1988; Shamir et al., 1998), the company’s vision (Larwood et al., 1995), ideological messages (Grant & Hofmann, 2011), coworkers’ success stories (Watkins, 2020), and artwork (An & Youn, 2018), on employees. However, research on the sources of *frontline* employee inspiration is lacking. Service research needs to offer a systematic and integrated account of the sources of FLE inspiration in the FLE’s environment that may trigger inspiration. This is a crucial gap to be addressed because FLEs operate at companies’ point of sale, face diverse customer needs, and interact with customers (Coelho et al., 2011). Therefore, they may be exposed to different sources of inspiration compared to employees without direct customer contact (e.g., administrative staff, storeroom workers).

To advance our understanding of the sources of FLE inspiration, I expand on the qualitative findings from Study 1 (Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2.2). Study 1 classified the various sources of FLE inspiration identified from the interview statements into two categories: (1) work-related sources (such as interacting with customers or other members of the workforce) and (2) sources that are not found in the immediate work environment but are relevant to achieving work-relevant goals (e.g., family). The qualitative study and the resulting conceptual framework constitute an ideal starting point for investigating the understudied topic of the sources of FLE inspiration. However, the findings from Study 1 were based on a small sample of Swiss FLEs ($N = 24$), and they may not be generalizable to the general population (McCracken, 1988). Addressing this limitation, I quantitatively investigated and tested the sources of FLE inspiration through two survey studies with two large samples of U.S. FLEs (Studies 6 and 7). Thus, Studies 6 and 7 served to methodologically triangulate the qualitative findings from Study 1 (Patton, 1990).

From the practitioners' perspective, understanding the effects of the sources of FLE inspiration is crucial because it provides managers with valuable information about factors that induce FLE inspiration which, in turn, leads to desirable FLE behaviors. Therefore, empirical insights into the sources of FLE inspiration may inform managerial decision-making and human resource strategies. Two important questions were addressed: How frequently and how intensely do FLEs become inspired *by* various sources (e.g., leaders, customers, physical store environment)? How do the identified sources inspire FLEs *to* act upon the newly acquired idea at work? Therefore, Study 6 investigated the frequency and intensity with which FLEs become inspired *by* certain sources (Section 4.2). Study 7 went one step further, investigating whether being inspired by these sources leads them to be inspired *to* implement the newly acquired ideas. Thereby, Study 7 (Section 4.3) investigated whether the various sources of inspiration can produce a shift within FLEs, inducing a transition from being inspired-by to being inspired to implement the newly acquired idea tangibly (e.g., by providing a new service idea to customers). Given the lack of theory on the potential sources of FLE inspiration, the objective of Studies 6 and 7 was not to develop and test a priori hypotheses about these sources but to investigate the role of various sources (e.g., customers, coworkers) in inspiring FLEs using a quantitative, explorative approach (Aspara et al., 2018; Wieringa & Verhoef, 2007). The study findings are compared and discussed in Section 4.4.1.

4.2 Study 6: Frequency and Intensity of the Sources of FLE Inspiration

Building on the qualitative findings of Study 1, which identified specific sources of FLE inspiration, Study 6 investigated the frequency and intensity of the occurrence of each source of inspiration among FLEs and further combined the sources into higher-order categories. Using a quantitative, exploratory approach (e.g., Aspara et al., 2018), Study 6 further generalized the findings using a different (U.S.) sample comprising FLEs from various service industries.¹⁸

4.2.1 Methodology

4.2.1.1 Procedure and Sample

Study 6 used the same dataset as Study 2 but extracted and analyzed a different set of questions from the questionnaire (for Study 2, see Chapter 3, Section 3.4.1). Data

¹⁸ Study 6 is one of the studies presented in a manuscript to be submitted to the *Journal of Service Research* (JSR); the pronoun “we” refers to my co-authors and me.

was collected from 520 U.S.-based adults working in different service industries using Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Following established service research, which has defined FLEs as those employees who regularly interact with customers (Coelho et al., 2011), participants who indicated that they seldom or never interacted with customers directly were excluded from the dataset.¹⁹ We also eliminated those participants who failed the attention check, yielding a final sample of $N = 290$. The final sample consisted of U.S.-based FLEs with regular customer contact (24.9% of respondents interacted with customers several times a week; 40.3% interacted with customers several times a day; 35.2% interacted with customers several times per hour). The average age of the respondents in the sample was 39.15 years, and 45.5% were male. The average organizational tenure was 7.31 years, and the average tenure in position was 5.90 years. Comparing the demographic characteristics with the U.S. workforce as a whole, respondents in this sample were more educated, with a higher percentage of participants holding a bachelor's degree (44.8%) compared to American workers (23.9%) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). This is in line with Paolacci et al. (2010), who showed that the educational level of MTurkers tends to be higher compared to that of the general population. Since Thrash and Elliot (2003) provided evidence that educational level does not influence one's level of inspiration, I expected the results of this study to be generalizable to the overall U.S. workforce. The other demographics of the sample corresponded well to those of the U.S. workforce. This sample included participants from service industries, mainly from retail (15.9%), followed by health care and social assistance (13.8%), and retail banking and insurance (8.3%) (see Appendix I for the questionnaire).

4.2.1.2 Measures

Sources of FLE Inspiration. To measure the frequency and intensity with which FLEs experience inspiration from different sources at work, the domain-general inspiration scale (IS), used in social psychology (Thrash & Elliot 2003), was adapted to fit the work context. Participants were asked to think about their current work situation and to consider all spontaneous and sudden moments of inspiration affecting their work.²⁰ Next, they were asked to indicate how strongly and how frequently they felt inspired at work by each of the fifteen different sources that were listed ("How I work is inspired

¹⁹ The frequency of customer contact was measured with a 5-point scale taken from Stock and Bednarek (2014) (5 = "several times an hour," 4 = "several times a day," 3 = "several times a week," 2 = "several times a month," and 1 = "very seldom/never"). Those participants who indicated having customer contact very seldom/never (= 1) or only several times a month (= 2) were eliminated from the sample.

²⁰ Following Thrash and Elliot (2003, 2004), we did not provide a definition to capture employees' lay understanding of inspiration in the work context.

by [source]...”). The list of the sources that we presented to survey participants was based on the qualitative insights from Study 1. In line with the findings from Study 1, the existing literature on the intersection of work and the private domain (e.g., Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1986) corroborated the importance of influences outside the employees’ immediate work environment. For the frequency subscale, response options for each source ranged from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*very often*), and for the intensity subscale, response options ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very strongly*) (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Following Thrash and Elliot (2003), the frequency and intensity scores were also averaged to create an overall inspiration measure for each source.

4.2.2 Analysis and Results

4.2.2.1 Descriptive Analyses

Table 4-1 provides descriptive data for each of the 15 sources of FLE inspiration. FLEs indicated that they become inspired most frequently and most intensely by sources in their extended work environment or private environment, that is, by their personal values ($M_{\text{Frequency}} = 5.28$; $M_{\text{Intensity}} = 5.37$) and cues in their personal life ($M_{\text{Frequency}} = 4.89$; $M_{\text{Intensity}} = 5.03$). Furthermore, sources found in FLEs’ immediate store environment play a crucial role in triggering inspiration. Customers ($M_{\text{Frequency}} = 4.68$; $M_{\text{Intensity}} = 4.62$) and coworkers ($M_{\text{Frequency}} = 4.37$; $M_{\text{Intensity}} = 4.37$) are especially likely to trigger intense and frequent moments of inspiration. On the other hand, external leaders ($M_{\text{Frequency}} = 2.97$; $M_{\text{Intensity}} = 3.07$) and social media ($M_{\text{Frequency}} = 2.58$; $M_{\text{Intensity}} = 2.61$) trigger inspiration less frequently and intensely compared to other sources.

Table 4-1:
Mean Scores of Frequency and Intensity of Sources

Source of FLE Inspiration	M	SD	$M_{\text{Frequency}}$	$SD_{\text{Frequency}}$	$M_{\text{Intensity}}$	$SD_{\text{Intensity}}$
Personal values	5.32	1.60	5.28	1.69	5.37	1.63
Private life (e.g., family)	4.96	1.63	4.89	1.68	5.03	1.75
Customers	4.65	1.76	4.68	1.75	4.62	1.90
Coworkers	4.37	1.64	4.37	1.66	4.37	1.72
Company's products / services	3.99	1.83	4.05	1.86	3.94	1.92
Company's success	3.98	1.83	3.99	1.89	3.98	1.88
Direct superior	3.81	1.87	3.86	1.91	3.77	1.94
Physical store environment	3.81	1.80	3.88	1.84	3.75	1.88
Company's values	3.78	1.85	3.85	1.90	3.71	1.88
Internal leader	3.70	1.88	3.67	1.90	3.73	1.97
Company's brand	3.49	1.89	3.55	1.96	3.43	1.93
Company's training	3.48	1.96	3.52	1.99	3.44	2.01
Company's history	3.16	1.82	3.19	1.84	3.13	1.86
External Leader	3.02	1.80	2.97	1.81	3.07	1.91
Social media	2.60	1.72	2.58	1.73	2.61	1.79

$N = 290$; Note that the mean refers to the average frequency and intensity with which each source inspires FLEs.

Next, we checked for differences in the frequency and intensity with which different sources of inspiration occur across different groups of FLEs. We differentiated between FLEs with and without managerial responsibility (Ashford et al., 1998), with different levels of customer contact (Stock & Bednarek, 2014), age, gender, and educational attainment (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Appendix J summarizes the findings from our group comparisons for each source.

Across all 15 sources, FLEs with managerial responsibility were more frequently and more intensely inspired by the respective sources compared to employees without managerial responsibility. Comparing the mean values of inspiration intensity and inspiration frequency for each source yielded differences between FLEs with and without managerial responsibility that were especially pronounced across company-related sources, such as the company's products ($M_{\text{FLE}} = 3.50$, $SD = 1.80$; $M_{\text{FLM}} = 4.67$, $SD = 1.84$; $t(288) = -4.46$; $p < .001$), success ($M_{\text{FLE}} = 3.57$, $SD = 1.82$; $M_{\text{FLM}} = 4.40$; $SD = 1.85$; $t(288) = -4.47$; $p < .001$), or history ($M_{\text{FLE}} = 2.66$; $SD = 1.70$; $M_{\text{FLM}} = 3.57$, $SD = 1.84$; $t(288) = -4.44$; $p < .001$). When looking at gender differences, we found that customers inspired more frequently female employees than male employees ($M_{\text{Fem}} = 4.89$; $M_{\text{Male}} = 4.44$; $t(288) = -2.18$; $p < .05$). Differences in the intensity of customer-evoked inspiration on female and male FLEs were marginally significant ($M_{\text{Fem}} = 4.80$; $M_{\text{Male}} = 4.42$; $t(288) = -1.70$; $p = .09$). No differences emerged in the extent to which the 15 different sources of inspiration inspired FLEs from varying educational backgrounds.

Interestingly, we found that the intensity and frequency of inspiration induced by different sources vary between FLEs with different amounts of customer interaction. It seems that FLEs with customer contact several times a day become more intensely and frequently inspired by the suggested sources compared to FLEs with more or less frequent customer contact. FLEs interacting with customers several times a day were more intensely inspired by their direct superiors ($M = 4.12$; $SD = 1.81$) compared to FLEs who interact with customers several times per week ($M = 3.79$; $SD = 2.01$) and FLEs who interact with customers several times per hour ($M = 3.63$; $SD = 1.93$; $F(2,287) = 3.05$; $p < .05$). Furthermore, FLEs who interacted with customers several times a day were more intensely inspired by their coworkers ($M = 4.68$; $SD = 1.62$) compared to FLEs interacting with customers several times per week ($M = 3.91$; $SD = 1.63$) and FLEs interacting with customers several times per hour ($M = 4.33$; $SD = 1.89$; $F(2,287) = 4.34$; $p < .05$). FLEs who interacted with customers several times a day were more intensely inspired by their internal leaders ($M = 4.09$; $SD = 1.82$) compared to FLEs who interacted with customers several times per week ($M = 3.61$; $SD = 1.89$) or several times per hour ($M = 3.41$; $SD = 1.87$; $F(2,287) = 3.66$; $p < .05$). Similarly, FLEs interacting with customers

several times a day were more frequently inspired by the brand they promoted ($M = 3.93$; $SD = 1.94$; $p < .05$) compared to FLEs who interacted with customers several times per week ($M = 3.29$; $SD = 1.95$; $p < .05$) and FLEs who interacted with customers several times per hour ($M = 3.29$; $SD = 1.91$; $F(2,287) = 3.82$; $p < .05$). The results also revealed significant differences between age groups for some sources. The mean frequency and mean intensity with which FLEs become inspired by personal values were higher in older age groups than in younger ones. Additionally, participants in younger age groups were more often and intensely inspired by social media (Intensity: $M_{18-29} = 3.27$, $SD = 1.92$; $M_{30-39} = 2.66$, $SD = 1.69$; $M_{40-49} = 2.00$, $SD = 1.34$; $M_{50-59} = 2.28$, $SD = 1.83$; $M_{60 \text{ and older}} = 2.36$, $SD = 1.59$; $F(4,285) = 4.72$; $p < .01$; Frequency: $M_{18-29} = 3.45$, $SD = 1.95$; $M_{30-39} = 2.69$, $SD = 1.80$; $M_{40-49} = 1.93$, $SD = 1.33$; $M_{50-59} = 2.22$, $SD = 1.70$; $M_{60 \text{ and older}} = 2.41$, $SD = 1.62$; $F(4,285) = 6.45$; $p < .001$).

4.2.2.2 Principal Component Analysis

A principal components analysis (PCA) was used to combine the fifteen sources into higher-order source categories (Gauri, 2013; Parasuraman et al., 2005). Following established service and marketing research with similar research designs (Larivière, 2008; Lusch, 1976; Rust et al., 2004) varimax rotation was used. Varimax rotation increases the squared correlation (i.e., variance) of items related to one factor, while reducing the correlation with any other factor (Dilbeck, 2017); thus, it enhances interpretability of the factors (Rust et al., 2004).²¹ Since the decision on extracting the appropriate numbers of factors needs to be guided by theoretical considerations, in addition to the statistical guidelines (Cenfetelli & Bassellier, 2009), we thoroughly reviewed the substantive meaning of the factors and corresponding items. Furthermore, we followed Rust et al. (2004), who recommend an eigenvalue cutoff of .6 to extract factors, which allows merging items into statistically meaningful dimensions while not losing important information or decreasing content coverage (Zwick & Velicer, 1982).²² The analysis yielded six orthogonal factors that explain 79.49% of the variance in the items and correspond to the source categories that we identified in our qualitative interviews (Study 1).

As shown in Table 4-2, Factor 1 comprises company-related sources and subsumes its products, services, and intangible values, such as the company's brand, history, values, and success. Factor 2 refers to observing or interacting with coworkers,

²¹ For reasons of completeness, I also conducted a PCA with promax rotation, which assumes that factors are correlated. PCA with Promax rotation confirms the presence of the same six factors.

²² The commonly applied Kaiser criterion (i.e., eigenvalue cutoff of 1.0) is not adequate in this study because it may specify too few factors and could result in a loss of important information, by ignoring a source or combining it with another source (T. A. Brown, 2006).

one's direct superior, and/or internal leaders at work. The company's training also falls into this category. One reason for this may be that observation and interaction with other company employees are especially intensive during training sessions. Factor 3 represents influences from FLEs' immediate private background (i.e., private life and personal values). Factor 4 refers to influences from social media and external leaders. Factor 5 captures customers as a source of inspiration. Factor 6 refers to the FLE's physical store environment (e.g., window decorations, technology used at the point of sale).

Table 4-2:
Results of Principal Component Analysis (Study 6): Factor Loadings

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
	Company	Workforce	Private environment	Social media and external role models	Customers	Physical store environment
Company's brand	0.79					
Company's success	0.77					
Company's history	0.77					
Company's values	0.75					
Company's products and services	0.73					
Direct superior		0.81				
Internal leader		0.78				
Company's training		0.58				
Coworkers		0.58				
Private life (e.g., family)			0.89			
Personal values			0.77			
Social media				0.80		
External Leader				0.77		
Customers					0.75	
Physical store environment						0.72

Note: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

4.2.3 Discussion of Study 6

Study 6 aimed to investigate the frequency and intensity with which certain sources at work inspired FLEs, drawing on an MTurk sample of FLEs across service industries. According to the descriptive results of Study 6, FLEs most frequently and intensely draw inspiration from their sources in their private environment, that is, personal values and their private life (e.g., family). Customers and coworkers are the most important sources of FLE inspiration in the immediate work environment. In contrast, external leaders, role models, and social media trigger inspiration less frequently and intensely.

The intensity and frequency of inspiration induced by different sources varied between FLEs depending on the extent to which they interacted with customers. The findings seemed to support an optimal stimulation level (Berlyne, 1970). FLEs with a

low level of customer interaction (i.e., several times a week) and those with a lot of customer contact (i.e., several times an hour) seem to be less intensely and frequently inspired by sources in their environment compared to FLEs with a moderate level of customer contact (i.e., several times a day). It appears that a moderate level of customer contact may be ideal for enhancing FLEs' receptiveness to potentially inspiring stimuli. FLEs with a higher level of customer contact (i.e., several times a day) could, in turn, feel stressed about providing service to customers quickly and therefore be less open to inspiring stimuli; in this respect, the qualitative findings (Chapter 2) indicated that time pressure may hinder the emergence of FLE inspiration. FLEs with a lower level of customer contact (i.e., several times a week) may lack the necessary exposure to new influences (e.g., customers' ideas) to become inspired. The finding implies an inverted U-shaped relationship, in which FLE inspiration increases with customer contact and then declines. This may be an interesting topic for future research.

Younger FLEs are more intensely and frequently inspired by social media, which is not surprising given that social media, in general, is much popular among younger age groups (Statista, 2019). Rather, what is striking is that social media and external leaders (role models) barely inspire FLEs for their work compared to all other sources. Considering that the average American spends 52% of his/her leisure time watching TV and nearly 10% surfing on the Internet (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015), the inspirational power of influences to which FLEs are exposed through telecommunication devices (e.g., TV, mobile phone) would be expected to be higher. One possible interpretation may be that personal encounters are more meaningful to FLEs than role models (e.g., encountered on TV or on social media), where one cannot interact face to face with the other person and exchange emotions and ideas.

Most sources inspire more frequently and intensely FLEs with managerial responsibility (e.g., frontline managers overseeing a small team of FLEs, making store plans or schedules). This may be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, research has suggested that employees with managerial responsibility are more responsive to cues in their environment compared to employees without such responsibility (Toegel et al., 2007). Such openness to environmental cues may also increase the inspirational power with which the various sources inspire FLEs with managerial responsibility. On the other hand, employees with managerial responsibility have higher discretion over their tasks (Toegel et al., 2007), giving them more freedom to act on new ideas. Such freedom to act on new ideas may enhance their openness to inspiration.

The PCA categorized the 15 sources into six higher-order categories, four of them work-related: Company-related factors (Factor 1, i.e., the company's products/services,

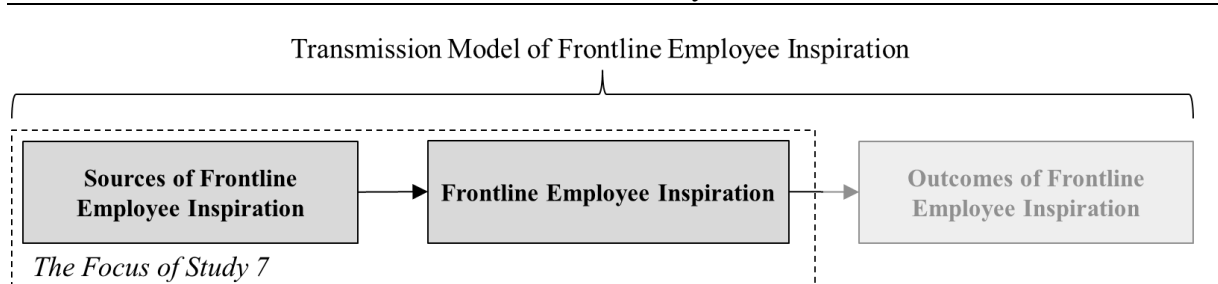
and intangible values such as company success), interacting with other members of the workforce (Factor 2, i.e., supervisors, leaders, and coworkers), customers (Factor 5), and FLEs' physical workplace (Factor 6, e.g., store signage). The other two categories concern sources that are not found in the workplace: Sources in one's private environment (Factor 3), and social media and external role models (Factor 4). Although the sources from both Factor 3 and Factor 4 concern sources from the FLE's private life, they form two categories. Factor 3 refers to personal communication with persons in one's private environment (e.g., friends, family), while Factor 4 comprises influences that may inspire FLEs indirectly through a telecommunication device (TV, computers, mobile phones). In other words, traveling, family, and friends (private life), and personal values (Factor 3) immediately affect the FLE and are in the FLE's direct surroundings, whereas FLEs do not necessarily have direct physical contact with new things they see on social media or with external leaders who they view as role models (Factor 4). Overall, Study 6 confirmed the sources identified by the conceptual model in Study 1.

4.3 Study 7: Sources of Specific Moments of Frontline Employee Inspiration

Study 7 complemented Study 6 in three ways. First, Study 6 analyzed FLE inspiration across service sectors (including healthcare, retail banking), whereas Study 7 focused on *retail* frontline employees. This focus was important because the retail sector is one of the most competitive sectors and subject to constant change (Kahn et al., 2018). Second, Study 6 studied how frequently and intensely FLEs generally became inspired by certain sources in their environment. Study 7, in contrast, focused on FLEs' *discrete moments of inspiration* at work, on the inspiring sources that trigger such discrete moments, and the effect of these sources on FLEs' motivation to express or actualize the newly acquired ideas at work (inspired-to). In other words, Study 6 explored FLE inspiration as a stable trait, exploring FLEs' general tendency to become inspired by certain sources (e.g., company values) (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Study 7, in contrast, referred to a specific moment of inspiration and investigated FLE inspiration as a more temporary state. A third way in which Study 7 complemented Study 6 was that it extended its generalizability by sampling from a different participant pool. Participants were recruited on Prolific Academic, which has recently gained popularity in the marketing and service literature (Aiello et al., 2020) because of its higher-quality data compared to other platforms, including MTurk (Peer et al., 2017).

An important contribution of Study 7 is that it applies the newly developed FLE inspiration scale (see Chapter 3, Section 3.5.1) to measure FLEs' state of inspired-to. From a practical perspective, the question of how strongly each inspiring source inspires FLEs to express, actualize, or transmit the newly gained idea at work is crucial because FLE inspiration becomes palpable and translatable into desirable outcomes only through the transition from being inspired-by to being inspired-to (e.g., FLE creativity, FLE proactivity, see Chapter 3; Section 3.5.2). Theoretically, I build on the transmission model of FLE inspiration, as shown in Figure 4-1, which views the sources as antecedents of FLE inspiration (Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010; see Chapter 2, Section 2.1). Therefore, the various sources were modeled as antecedents of FLE inspiration in the structural equation model (see Section 4.3.2.3).

Figure 4-1:
Focus of Study 7



Source: Author's illustration.

4.3.1 Methodology

4.3.1.1 Procedure and Sample

Study 7 used the same dataset as Study 4 but extracted and analyzed a different set of questions from the questionnaire (for Study 4, see Chapter 3, Section 3.5.1.1). Data were collected via questionnaire from 269 U.S.-based *retail* FLEs (e.g., workers at Walmart, Target, Best Buy, or Whole Foods) with direct customer contact using the crowdsourcing platform Prolific Academic. To measure the degree of customer contact, participants were asked to indicate the degree to which their daily work involved direct customer contact (in %): 49.2% indicated that 75-100% of their daily work involved direct customer contact, 16.3% indicated that they interacted with customers 50-75% of their work time, 13.5% of participants indicated that they interacted with customers between 25-50% of their work time, and 21.0% indicated that they interacted with customers between 10-25% of their work time (there were no cases below 10% customer contact).

In the final sample ($N = 253$), 41.9% of participants were male, and participants were 29.86 years of age on average. These demographic statistics are in line with the U.S. workforce census, which reports that retail workers are younger (about half of all retail workers are between 16 and 34 years) compared to the average member of the workforce, and women are more likely to work in retail jobs than are men (56.5% of U.S. retail workers are female) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020b). The participants' educational level corresponded to that of the overall U.S. workforce: 41.5% of participants had a high school diploma, 11.9% held an associate degree, and 22.9% held a bachelor's degree. 25% percent of participants were new job entrants (organizational tenure of one year or less), and the remaining 75% stayed at the company for more than one year. Most participants worked in food retail (41.6%), followed by apparel and fashion (19.5%), hobby items, books, and music (11.8%), and home improvement and furniture (7.1%). Other industries (e.g., electronics, pharmacies, and personal care) made up the remaining 20.0%.

4.3.1.2 Measures

The beginning of the questionnaire contained the following instructions: "Please think of your most recent moment of inspiration at work. Please describe this moment of inspiration at work in 1-2 sentences (i.e., What exactly inspired you? Were you inspired to do something at work? How did it feel like?)." Sample answers were:

"A customer was printing a few different canvases for a birthday gift and was looking for some advice on what pictures to print and how to edit them. This inspired me because I was able to showcase my abilities with photography, graphic design, and canvas." (Photo specialist).

"I was inspired to make floor plan changes in my warehouse. I was just about tired with the way things were being executed because they were inefficient." (Retail salesperson).

"One of my coworkers' hard work inspired me to become a better worker." (FLE at a small gas and dairy company).

Sources of Frontline Employee Inspiration. After writing a brief account of their most recent moment of inspiration at work, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which different sources of inspiration triggered their moment of inspiration. Participants read the statement, "This moment of inspiration was triggered by [...]" (Thrash & Elliot, 2004), which was followed by sixteen items that included the various potential sources of FLE inspiration (see Table 4-3). The order of the items was randomized. Each item was rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 =

strongly agree. Participants were instructed to check 1 = *strongly disagree* if the particular source did not trigger their moment of inspiration at work. The items (i.e., the 16 sources of FLE inspiration) were the same as in Study 6 but slightly reworded to enhance participants' understanding. The company's mission statement was added as another source because mission statements (e.g., Walmart's mission statement is: "to save people money so they can live better," www.walmart.com) guide employees' work behavior (Rudolph & Schweizer, 2019) and may thus inspire FLEs.

Frontline Employee Inspiration (Inspired-to). FLE inspiration comprises two processes, inspired-by and inspired-to (see Chapter 2). The above-described source items represented the *inspired-by* process of FLE inspiration (cf. "this moment of inspiration was triggered by"). Therefore, I sought to measure the extent to which each of these inspiring sources affects FLEs' process of being *inspired to* act upon the newly acquired ideas. To measure how strongly FLEs felt *inspired to* implement the ideas and insights that the source revealed to them, participants rated the three inspired-to items of the new FLE inspiration scale on a 7-point Likert scale anchored at 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree* (a sample item is: "I was inspired to do my job in a new and better way." Items are listed in Chapter 3; Section 3.5.1). The reliability of the inspired-to ($\alpha = .89$) subscale was above the threshold of .70 (Nunnally, 1975). The mean score of inspired-to was 4.81 ($SD = 1.83$).

Control variables. In line with Study 6, I controlled for managerial responsibility, age, gender, educational attainment, and level of customer contact. To measure the level of customer contact, participants were asked to indicate the degree to which their daily work involved customer contact (in %). I included the degree of customization of the service the FLE provided to customers as an additional control variable (Homburg et al., 2011) by asking participants to indicate the kind of services they provided to their customers in their daily work (1 = *highly customized* and 7 = *highly standardized*) (see Appendix D for the questionnaire).

4.3.1.3 Analytical Strategy

The analysis consisted of three steps. First, I computed descriptive statistics for the 16 sources that triggered participants' moment of inspiration at work (Section 4.3.2.1). Second, I conducted a principal components analysis (PCA) (Section 4.3.2.2) following the procedure outlined in Study 6. Third, I used the factors extracted from the PCA to measure the effect of the sources on FLEs' motivation to act upon the newly acquired idea at work (inspired-to) (Section 4.3.2.3). These results provide insight into

which inspirational sources are most critical in driving FLEs to implement newly learned ideas at work (inspired-to).

4.3.2 Analysis and Results

4.3.2.1 Sources of FLE Inspiration

In this section, I provide an overview of the descriptive results on the sources of FLE inspiration and the differences between groups of FLEs. On average, participants indicated that their most recent moment of inspiration at work was triggered primarily by their personal values ($M = 4.40$; $SD = 2.18$), followed by their physical workplace environment ($M = 3.89$; $SD = 2.30$). The least important source of FLE inspiration was influence from charismatic role models ($M = 1.72$; $SD = 1.49$) and social media ($M = 1.92$; $SD = 1.65$) (see Table 4-3).²³

Table 4-3:
Descriptive Statistics of Source Items

Sources of Frontline Employee Inspiration	Mean	SD
This moment of inspiration at work was triggered by ...		
... my personal values.	4.40	2.18
... my physical workplace environment.	3.89	2.30
... observing, interacting, or dealing with a coworker.	3.73	2.34
... observing, interacting, or dealing with a customer.	3.71	2.46
... my company's products and services.	3.39	2.23
... my company's values.	3.12	2.21
... observing, interacting, or dealing with my direct supervisor.	3.09	2.19
... my company's success.	2.93	2.14
... the brand I am working for.	2.85	2.23
... my company's mission statement and its meaning.	2.81	2.16
... the training that my company provides.	2.80	2.11
... my company's history.	2.63	1.99
... somebody or something in my private life (a friend, a family member, something I encountered while traveling).	2.35	1.90
... a charismatic leader who is working at my company (e.g., the CEO of your company).	2.34	1.89
... something I encountered on social media.	1.92	1.65
... a charismatic leader of another company (e.g., Steve Jobs, Henry Ford).	1.72	1.49

Source: Author's illustration. Note: SD = Standard Deviation; $N = 253$.

I checked whether certain sources evoked different levels of inspiration in different groups of FLEs. Both FLEs with managerial responsibility ($N = 97$) and FLEs without managerial responsibility ($N = 156$) were most strongly inspired by their personal

²³ Participants were asked to rate their most recent moment of inspiration at work, where 1 = *strongly disagree* if their moment of inspiration had not been triggered by the respective source. Therefore, the mean scores were low compared to Study 6 (ranging from 1.72 to 4.40). This may also explain the relatively high standard deviations, ranging from 2.46 for customers to 1.49 for charismatic leaders.

values (ranked 1st), followed by the physical work environment (2nd) and coworkers (3rd). FLEs without managerial responsibility found interacting with customers (4th) more inspiring than the company's products and services (5th), while the opposite result was found for FLEs with managerial responsibility. Independent sample *t*-tests showed that FLEs with managerial responsibility were significantly more inspired by their physical workplace ($M = 4.42$; $SD = 2.17$) compared to FLEs without managerial responsibility ($M = 3.56$; $SD = 2.32$; $t(251) = 2.68$; $p < .05$). Interacting with coworkers was also perceived as more inspiring by FLEs with managerial responsibility ($M = 4.12$; $SD = 2.41$) compared to FLEs without managerial responsibility ($M = 3.48$; $SD = 2.27$; $t(251) = 2.14$; $p < .05$). FLEs with managerial responsibility ($N = 97$; $M = 3.54$; $SD = 2.26$) attributed their most recent moment of inspiration more strongly to interacting with their direct supervisor compared to FLEs without managerial responsibility ($N = 156$; $M = 2.81$; $SD = 2.11$; $t(251) = 2.60$; $p < .05$). Additionally, company values were more important in triggering FLE inspiration among FLEs with managerial responsibility ($M = 3.75$; $SD = 2.27$) than among FLEs without managerial responsibility ($M = 2.73$; $SD = 2.07$; $t(251) = 2.60$; $p < .05$).

Table 4-4:
Significant Differences According to Managerial Responsibility

Sources of Frontline Employee Inspiration	M_{FLE} ($N=156$)	SD	M_{FLM} ($N=97$)	SD	p value
This moment of inspiration at work was triggered by					
...					
... my personal values.	4.26	2.22	4.61	2.11	ns
... my physical workplace environment.	3.56	2.32	4.42	2.17	*
... observing, interacting or dealing with a coworker.	3.48	2.27	4.12	2.41	*
... observing, interacting or dealing with a customer.	3.82	2.51	3.53	2.39	ns
... my company's products and services.	3.10	2.17	3.86	2.26	*
... my company's values.	2.73	2.07	3.75	2.27	***
... observing, interacting or dealing with my direct supervisor.	2.81	2.11	3.54	2.26	*
... my company's success.	2.66	2.07	3.37	2.18	*
... the brand I am working for.	2.50	2.07	3.41	2.37	**
... my company's mission statement and its meaning.	2.51	2.01	3.28	2.31	*
... the training that my company provides.	2.55	1.97	3.21	2.26	*
... my company's history.	2.38	1.90	3.03	2.07	*
... somebody or something in my private life (a friend, a family member, something I encountered while travelling).	2.30	1.88	2.42	1.95	ns
... a charismatic leader, who is working at my company (e.g., the CEO of your company).	2.15	1.79	2.63	2.00	ns
... something I encountered on social media.	1.80	1.56	2.11	1.78	ns
... a charismatic leader of another company (e.g., Steve Jobs, Henry Ford).	1.72	1.49	1.98	1.77	*

Note: Author's illustration; M_{FLM} = Mean score of frontline managers (i.e., frontline employees with managerial responsibility); M_{FLE} = Mean score of frontline employees (i.e., without managerial responsibility). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

No significant differences between FLEs with and without managerial responsibility were found for two work-related sources (customers, leaders from the company one is working for) and several non-work-related sources (i.e., personal values, private life, social media, and leaders from other companies). Table 4-4 shows an overview of the differences between means of FLEs with/without managerial responsibility.

Table 4-5:
Significant Differences According to Level of Service Customization

Sources of Frontline Employee Inspiration	M_{CUS} ($N = 90$)	SD	M_{STAN} ($N=163$)	SD	p value
This moment of inspiration at work was triggered by					
... my personal values.	4.80	2.15	4.17	2.17	*
... my physical workplace environment.	3.78	2.30	3.95	2.31	ns
... observing, interacting or dealing with a coworker.	3.89	2.45	3.64	2.28	ns
... observing, interacting or dealing with a customer.	3.98	2.38	3.56	2.50	ns
... my company's products and services.	3.97	2.37	3.07	2.09	**
... my company's values.	3.49	2.28	2.92	2.15	*
... observing, interacting or dealing with my direct supervisor.	2.97	2.20	3.15	2.19	ns
... my company's success.	3.39	2.22	2.68	2.05	ns
... the brand I am working for.	3.11	2.39	2.71	2.13	ns
... my company's mission statement and its meaning.	3.17	2.30	2.61	2.06	*
... the training that my company provides.	3.04	2.19	2.67	2.05	ns
... my company's history.	2.83	2.04	2.52	1.95	ns
... somebody or something in my private life (a friend, a family member, something I encountered while travelling).	2.09	1.71	2.49	1.99	ns
... a charismatic leader, who is working at my company (e.g., the CEO of your company).	2.41	1.98	2.29	1.84	ns
... something I encountered on social media.	1.81	1.50	1.98	1.73	ns
... a charismatic leader of another company (e.g., Steve Jobs, Henry Ford).	1.92	1.72	1.61	1.34	ns

Note: Author's illustration. M_{CUS} = rather customized services (values 1-4); M_{Stan} = rather standardized services (values > 4) * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

I also conducted a set of independent sample t -tests to evaluate significant differences between FLEs who provide more standardized services to customers, such as restocking supermarket shelves (values ≥ 4 ; $N = 163$), and FLEs who provide more customized services to customers, such as repairing shoes (values < 4 ; $N = 147$). The results indicated that FLEs who provide customized services to their customers were more strongly inspired by their personal values ($M = 4.80$; $SD = 2.15$) compared to FLEs who provide more standardized services to their customers ($M = 4.17$; $SD = 2.17$; $t(251) = -2.22$; $p < .05$). Additionally, FLEs were more strongly inspired by their company's products and services ($M = 3.97$; $SD = 2.37$) than were FLEs working in more standardized jobs ($M = 3.07$; $SD = 2.09$); $t(251) = -3.10$; $p < .01$). Similarly, FLEs who provided customized services were more inspired by their company's mission statement and its

meaning ($M = 3.17$; $SD = 2.30$) compared to FLEs who provided standardized service ($M = 2.61$; $SD = 2.06$); $t(251) = 1.98$; $p < .05$). No significant differences between FLEs providing highly customized services and FLEs providing highly standardized services were found for all other sources (see Table 4-5).

Furthermore, FLEs with high levels of customer interaction ($> 50\%$ of their daily work involved direct customer contact; $N = 165$; $M = 4.27$; $SD = 2.45$), became significantly more strongly inspired by customers, compared to FLEs with lower levels of customer interaction ($\leq 50\%$ of their daily work involved direct customer contact; $N = 87$; $M = 2.61$; $SD = 2.01$; $t(250) = 5.36$, $p < .001$). No significant differences between FLEs providing highly customized services and FLEs providing highly standardized services were found for all other sources. No significant differences were found between participants with different educational levels, gender, or age groups.

4.3.2.2 Principal Component Analysis

Following the procedure outlined in Study 6, I ran a PCA (with varimax rotation)²⁴ combining the sixteen sources into higher-order source categories (Gauri, 2013). PCA yielded six orthogonal factors that accounted for 78.40% of the variance in the items. *Factor 1* pertained to the company (i.e., company values, its mission statement, meaning, history, success, brand), products/services, and training). *Factor 2* represented interpersonal interactions at work (interaction with company-internal leaders, direct superior, and coworkers). *Factor 3* represented influences from the FLE's private environment (i.e., a friend, a family member, new ideas acquired while traveling; social media; role models, such as Steve Jobs or Henry Ford). *Factor 4* pertained to the FLE's physical workplace (e.g., store design and layout). *Factor 5* represented personal values. *Factor 6* pertained to interaction with customers (see Table 4-6)

²⁴ Varimax rotation is the commonly applied rotation method in service and marketing research to extract factors which are used as independent variables in regression analyses (Rust et al., 2005; Parasuraman et al., 2005; Naik, 2000). In contrast to other rotation methods (e.g., oblimin, promax), varimax constraints the factors to be uncorrelated (orthogonal). Due to the orthogonal factors, this approach combats the potential risk of multicollinearity in the data reasonably well (Gustafsson & Johnson, 2004).

Table 4-6:
Results of Principal Component Analysis: Factor Loadings

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
	Company-re- lated factors	Interaction with cowork- ers	Influences from private environment	Physical Workplace	Personal val- ues	Customers
My company's success	0.79					
My company's values	0.78					
My company's history	0.76					
The brand I am working for	0.76					
Mission statement	0.75					
Company's products and ser- vices	0.67					
Company's training	0.59					
Direct supervisor		0.86				
Charismatic leader (internal)		0.72				
Coworker		0.67				
Social media			0.78			
Private life			0.77			
External a charismatic leader			0.68			
Physical workplace environ- ment				0.84		
Personal values					0.86	
Customers						0.93

Source: Author's illustration. Note: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

4.3.2.3 Structural Equation Model

The six factors identified in the PCA were then used as independent variables in a structural equation model, providing insight into sources that are most critical for encouraging FLEs to implement their newly acquired idea in the workplace (inspired-to). Following established marketing research (Naik et al., 2000; Parasuraman et al., 2005), the factors extracted from PCA were used as independent variables to combat the risk of multicollinearity affecting the model results. To check for multicollinearity of independent variables, I inspected the variance inflation factors of the 15 source items (Bloom & Perry, 2001).²⁵ Several independent variables (sources) passed the threshold of 2.5 (Allison, 1999),²⁶ indicating a risk of multicollinearity in the data.^{27 28}

²⁵ VIF is calculated as $VIF_j = 1 / (1 - R^2_j)$.

²⁶ Several VIF values were above the recommended threshold of 2.5 (Allison, 1999): Coworker (VIF = 3.00); company's mission statement (VIF = 3.10); history (VIF = 2.70); success (VIF = 2.75); company values (VIF = 4.04).

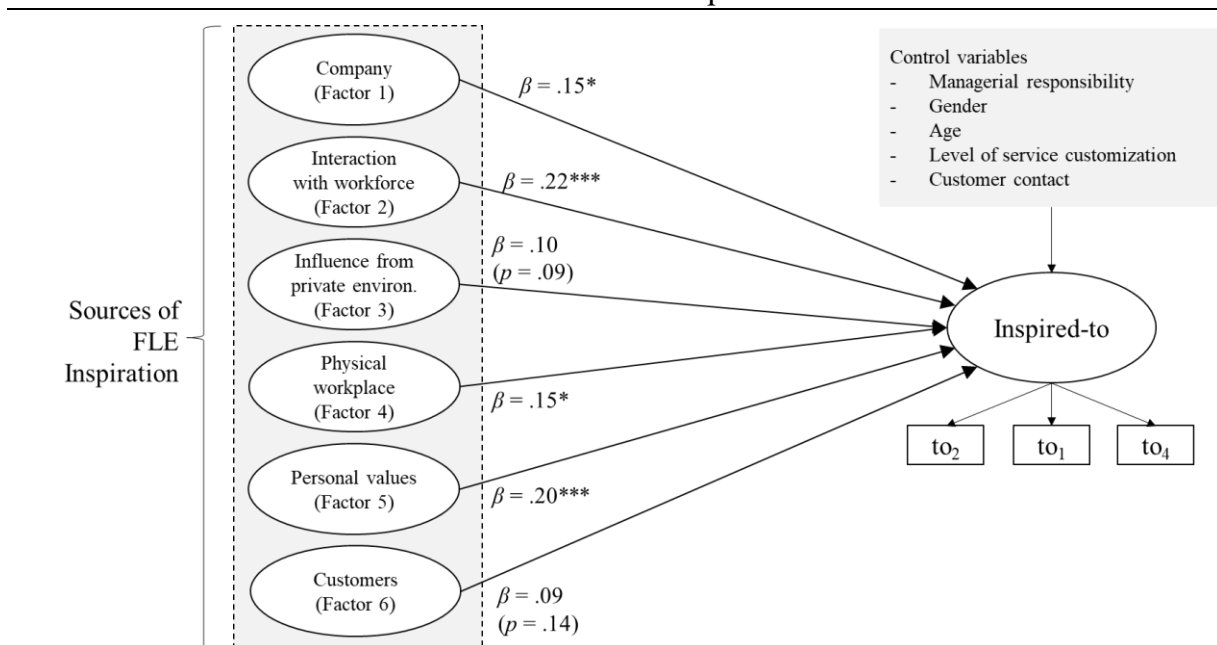
²⁷ The threshold of 2.5 for VIF values is the most conservative one. Other researchers have suggested higher VIF values. Established researchers recommend conducting additional analyses to counteract the risk of multicollinearity affecting the model results, even despite satisfactory VIF values (Verhoef et al., 2004).

²⁸ I also tested a structural equation model, using all 16 original items (sources) as independent variables. The analysis yielded inconclusive results: All β coefficients, apart from personal values, had a non-significant effect on inspired-to). This highlights the need to use the extracted factors as independent variables (Ho, 2006).

The tested structural equation model produced good fit ($\chi^2 = 26.13$, $df = 20$; CFI = .99; SRMR=.01; TLI = .99; RMSEA = .02) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). As shown in Figure 4-2, examination of the structural equation model indicated that the control variables of managerial responsibility, gender, age, and degree of customer contact did not significantly affect inspired-to. The level of standardization significantly affected inspired-to ($\beta = -.22$; $p < .001$), indicating that FLEs offering more standardized services score lower on inspired-to.

Interaction with the workforce (Factor 2), company-related aspects (Factor 1), the physical workplace (Factor 4), and personal values (Factor 5) had a significant positive effect on inspired-to. In fact, interaction with the workforce (Factor 2; $\beta = .22$; $p < .001$) and personal values (Factor 5; $\beta = .20$; $p < .001$) had the greatest effect on inspired-to. Company-related factors (Factor 1; e.g., the brand, the mission statement; $\beta = .15$; $p < .01$) and the physical workplace (Factor 4; $\beta = .15$; $p < .01$) also had an important effect on inspired-to, although to a lesser extent. Inspiring sources from FLEs' private environment had a marginally significant effect (Factor 3; $\beta = .10$; $p = .09$) on inspired-to. The effect of inspiration by customers was not significant (Factor 6; $\beta = .09$; $p = .14$). All independent variables accounted for 22% of variance ($R^2 = .22$) of inspired-to.

Figure 4-2:
Results of the Structural Equation Model



Note: Factor loadings of observed measures on latent constructs and covariances between independent variables are omitted for readability. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Managerial responsibility (1 = *with*; 0 = *without*); gender (1 = female; 0 = male); level of service customization (1 = *fully customized* to 7 = *fully standardized*).

4.3.3 Discussion of Study 7

Study 7 focused on retail FLEs' most recent moment of inspiration at work, the sources that drive it, and FLEs' motivation to act upon this inspiration at work (inspired-to). According to the descriptive results, sources that triggered discrete moments of inspiration at work included mostly personal values, the physical workplace, coworkers, and customers. The PCA was conducted with the 16 sources forming six factors, that is, sources related to the company (Factor 1), interaction with members from the workforce (Factor 2), the influence of one's private environment (Factor 3), sources found in FLEs' physical workplace environment (Factor 4), personal values (Factor 5), and customers (Factor 6). Four of these factors were work-related (Factors 1, 2, 4, 6), and two of them were related to FLEs' private life (Factors 3 and 5). Thus, Study 7 also confirms the sources identified by the conceptual model in Study 1.

I then used these factors as independent variables in a structural equation model to investigate the effects of the various sources of FLE inspiration on FLEs' motivation to act on inspiring ideas at work (inspired-to). The results indicated that personal values, the workforce, company-related factors (e.g., the brand, mission statement), and the physical workplace significantly influence FLEs' state of being inspired-to. One interesting finding is that customer-evoked inspiration did not significantly affect inspired-to, hinting at a discrepancy between feeling inspired *by* customers and acting upon customer-evoked inspiration (inspired-to). While FLEs consider customers to be a rather important source of inspiration (inspired-by), the customers' inspiring influence did not eventually lead employees to act in the workplace (inspired-to). One potential reason may be that FLEs are not sensitized to the need to act upon customers' ideas or lack internal support (e.g., a conducive team climate; internal feedback channels). This finding underlines the importance of conceptualizing and measuring FLE inspiration as a state consisting of two processes, inspired-by and inspired-to. Measuring FLE inspiration with two subscales allows to identify possible discrepancies between the inspired-by and inspired-to scores. FLEs may well feel inspired by a source, but feeling inspired by a sources does not necessarily lead to FLEs' inspired-to state.

Furthermore, FLEs who provide more customized services were more strongly inspired by their values and the company's products, services, and mission statement. A further interesting result is that FLEs' level of service customization significantly affected inspired-to, such that with increasing levels of service customization, FLEs felt more inspired to implement their newly gained ideas. It seems that FLEs who provide more customized services to customers have more possibilities to act upon their inspiring ideas (inspired-to). Frontline employees with managerial responsibility were more

inspired by their physical workplace environment, coworkers, products and services, values, supervisor, company success brand, meaning training, and company history compared to FLEs without managerial responsibility. Surprisingly, FLEs' managerial responsibility did not affect their motivation to act upon the newly gained ideas at work (inspired-to). This implies that FLEs with managerial responsibility were more responsive to most inspiring sources but not necessarily more motivated to act upon the inspiring impulses.

4.4 Discussion and Implications

The purpose of Study 6 and 7 was to examine the various sources of FLE inspiration. Whereas Study 6 focused on the frequency and intensity with which various sources at work inspired FLEs, Study 7 examined the effects of the sources found in FLEs' environment on their inspiration to implement the newly gained idea. The findings have rich implications for theory and practice.

4.4.1 Theoretical Implications

Studies 6 and 7 extend current service literature by providing empirical insights into the sources of FLE inspiration in the workplace. FLEs are placed in an environment full of inspiring stimuli, including work-related sources (e.g., coworkers, company values, and physical store environment) and non-work-related sources, such as personal values. Thereby, my research adds a new perspective to extant organizational research, which has thus far exclusively focused on the inspirational effect of leaders (Bass, 1985), artworks (An & Youn, 2018), and coworker narratives (Watkins, 2020) on employees. Building on the psychological conceptualization of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), my research also advances the study of inspiration in service research and provides the possibility of bridging disciplines. For example, marketing researchers have found that marketing-induced efforts (e.g., ads, print campaigns, frontline employees; Böttger et al., 2017), branded videos (Chang, 2020), and recycling campaigns (Winterich et al., 2019) may inspire consumers. Marketing research on customer inspiration and my research on FLE inspiration share a common theoretical foundation (i.e., the social-psychological conceptualization of inspiration), allowing for meaningful comparisons between study results and advancing inspiration research in the service context. For example, future research may investigate the extent to which the same sources of inspiration (e.g., store environment) inspire customers and FLEs alike.

Study 6 hints at the importance of sources found off-the-job for inspiring FLEs. FLEs experience frequent and intense inspiration from sources found in their private

environment (e.g., family, friends). Marketing researchers have thus far considered the possibility that FLEs may personally advocate the company's brand (off the job) to friends and family (Löhdorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014; Morhart et al., 2009). Here, I provide a complementary view, showing that there may also be an "outside-in" effect, where the private environment influences FLEs and provides them with new ideas, thereby influencing the way they act in the work environment. Although the two studies should be compared with caution due to methodological differences in data collection,²⁹ it is striking that Study 6 hints at the high importance of the private environment in triggering FLE inspiration, whereas the results from Study 7 show that sources in the FLEs' private life are less important in triggering discrete moments of inspiration at work. One interpretation is that FLEs may experience "more permanent" inspiration from sources in their private life (e.g., an FLE may generally feel inspired by her/his family to do a good job). However, when asked about their most recent moment of inspiration at work, FLEs may think of a concrete new work-relevant idea that arrived during a sudden moment of insight (aha-moment). In this case, FLEs may be more inclined to think about specific ideas related to their job instead of their family as a source of general inspiration.

Furthermore, the findings from both studies stress the importance of FLEs' personal values, i.e., personal beliefs about how they should behave in their social environment (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998), in triggering FLE inspiration. This further supports the qualitative findings from Study 1, where several FLEs mentioned that their personal values, such as honesty, inspire their work behavior. One interview, for example, narrated, "Honesty inspires me. When I am a customer myself, I prefer salespeople treating me in an honest way. [...] I try to pass this honesty on to customers" (ID 16). This is an important contribution to service research, which has thus far overlooked the role of FLEs' personal values in influencing FLEs and their work behavior. Another interesting finding is that personal values more frequently and intensely inspire older FLEs, indicating that future research needs to investigate values that may drive FLE inspiration, taking into account age differences. To study the influence of various values in driving FLE inspiration, Schwartz's value model (1994) may provide an adequate point of departure. This model includes ten values organized into higher-order groups: openness to change (self-direction, stimulation), conservation (conformity, security, tradition), self-

²⁹ Study 6 was based on an MTurk sample with FLEs across service industries, whereas Study 7 used a Prolific Academic sample with retail FLEs. Study 6 focused on the frequency/intensity of FLE inspiration, whereas Study 7 focused on one's most recent moment of inspiration. Inspiration is measured by the domain-general inspiration scale in Study 6 (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), whereas in Study 7, the new FLE inspiration scale was used. This limits the comparison between the two studies.

enhancement (achievement, hedonism, power), and self-transcendence (benevolence, universalism).

4.4.2 Managerial Implications

Understanding the sources that contribute to FLE inspiration is a strategically important issue for retailers because when FLEs are inspired, they will grow beyond their limits and engage in new workplace behaviors that are beneficial to the company. Retail managers should actively stimulate FLE inspiration. Important instruments in this respect are actions to raise the inspirational power of company-related factors (i.e., the brand, the mission statement, the company's success, products, and services) and the workforce factors (i.e., coworkers, leaders, and direct superiors). Apart from work-related sources, the results hint at the relevance of sources found off-the-job in triggering FLE inspiration. In this respect, Study 6 highlights the importance of personal values and private life in triggering FLE inspiration. This implies that to drive FLE inspiration, managers should identify their FLEs' value orientations. In this respect, prior research has suggested that younger employees are more open to change and more self-enhancing, whereas older employees may be more conservative (Egri & Ralston, 2004). Managers may accommodate generational value differences, for example, by giving younger generations more flexible work assignments.

Extant service literature, with a few exceptions (e.g., Bitner, 1992; Parish et al., 2008), has focused on the effect of the physical store environment on customers (Bitner, 1990). My research shows the salient role of the FLE's physical store environment (e.g., window decoration, product assortment, store layout) in triggering FLE inspiration (inspired-by) and driving the inspired-to process. In line with this finding, an FLE working at a large warehouse chain interviewed in Study 1 explained: "I become inspired by [...] our interior decoration. Our interior decoration, for example, how they dress mannequins, is always beautiful." (ID 1) Thus, retailers need to consider that the physical store environment may have an inspiring effect not only on customers (Böttger et al., 2017) but also on FLEs. Therefore, the design of the physical store environment cannot be delegated simply to architects, designers, and facility planners; instead, it is rather a central marketing and human resources issue.

The leadership literature emphasizes that employee behavior and attitudes can be influenced through enhancing leaders' inspirational skills. My research highlights the fact that retailers need to expand their focus from leaders as the main sources of inspiration to other inspiring sources in FLE's work environment, such as coworkers, customers, brand and company values (e.g., the mission statement, the company's history),

and products and services the company provides to customers. One important implication is that retailers need to understand that FLEs perceive inspiration and its sources differently. For example, FLEs with managerial responsibilities are generally more responsive to inspiring sources found at work compared to FLEs without managerial responsibility.

Retailers should foster a “culture of inspiration” and provide FLEs with an adequate work environment that facilitates the implementation of inspiring ideas at work. The ways in which FLEs work together within their teams and interact with customers have important implications for FLE inspiration. Since interacting with the workforce drives both the inspired-by and the inspired-to processes, retailers should allow FLEs to exchange ideas with each other through formal and informal means of communication to inspire each other to adapt to the new stimuli in their environment. Retailers should try to enhance the team climate for innovation by anchoring the importance of innovation in the organization’s vision and mission and promoting its importance in everyday business (Eisenbeiss et al., 2008).

FLEs likely feel inspired *by* interacting or observing customers, but this customer-evoked inspiration does not lead FLEs to channel their inspiration toward a worthwhile end at work (i.e., being inspired-by without being inspired-to). From a managerial perspective, this implies that FLEs may lack the skills or internal support needed to translate their responses to customers’ ideas into tangible outcomes in the workplace. For example, FLEs may lack an adequate internal feedback channel that allows them to forward ideas internally or may not understand the need for acting on new ideas acquired from customers (e.g., by adapting a service to a customer need or internally relaying a customer’s idea). Possible strategies include installing adequate internal feedback channels for FLEs and/or offering training that sensitizes FLEs to the need for new ideas (from customers) to drive organizational success.

5 The Effect of Frontline Employee Inspiration on Customer Outcomes

5.1 Introduction and Research Focus

One strategy for retailers to gain competitive advantage and stand out in today's highly competitive market is exceptional service quality (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). In this chapter, I argue that frontline employee (FLE) inspiration can play an important role in providing such exceptional service and strengthening retailers' competitive advantage. I contend that inspired FLEs influence customer perceptions of the service interaction positively so that customers feel inspired, are more inclined to buy additional products, and become more loyal to the retailer. Thereby, I address Research Question 5: How does FLE inspiration affect customer responses during service interactions? This chapter presents important theoretical approaches within the employee–customer linkage literature: the service–profit chain framework (Heskett et al., 1997) and emotional contagion (S. D. Pugh, 2001). Subsequently, I demonstrate that the research presented here contributes to the current employee–customer linkage literature by advocating the *employee–customer inspiration linkage* based on the contagion model of inspiration (Thrash et al., 2017).³⁰

5.2 Employee–Customer Linkage Literature

In retail and other service environments, the interaction between customers and employees may affect customer perceptions of the shopping and consumption experience. Commensurate with the importance of service interactions for retailers' competitive advantage, a robust body of literature has explored interactions between employees and customers (Bitner et al., 1994; Evanschitzky, Sharma et al., 2012; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Within the so-called customer–employee linkage research (Payne & Webber, 2006), considerable effort has been made to investigate the relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction (S. Brown & Lam, 2008). I seek to contribute to the customer–employee linkage research by introducing the employee–customer inspiration model and investigating the relationship between

³⁰ To mirror the wording of extant employee–customer linkage literature, I call the linkage between FLE inspiration and customer inspiration “employee–customer inspiration linkage.”

employee inspiration and *customer inspiration*. Before developing the employee–customer inspiration model as a basis for the linkage between employee inspiration and customer inspiration, it is necessary to look at the employee–customer *satisfaction* linkage and its theoretical foundations. This will help us understand how the employee–customer *inspiration* linkage can enrich researchers’ understanding of the association between internal (employee) and external (customer) metrics.

Most of the literature on the employee–customer linkage has been dedicated to the relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction (Homburg & Stock, 2004). Employee satisfaction is generally defined as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (Locke, 1976, p. 1300). Customer satisfaction is a predominantly affective reaction based on comparing expected and perceived service or product quality (Rust & Oliver, 1994). In sum, employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction emerge from comparing one’s perceived experience with prior expectations. The view that employee job satisfaction positively affects customer satisfaction has been grounded primarily in two theoretical approaches (S. Brown & Lam, 2008), (1) the service–profit chain and (2) emotional contagion framework (Grandey et al., 2011; Homburg & Stock, 2004; Netemeyer et al., 2010; Wangenheim et al., 2007). These two theoretical concepts are compatible but differ in the focus and underlying mechanism. I now review these two underlying theoretical approaches to determine whether and how they can contribute to our understanding of the employee–customer *inspiration* linkage.

5.2.1 The Service–Profit Chain

Over the last decades, the service–profit chain (Heskett et al., 1994) has enjoyed high popularity among academics in the retail marketing, service, management, human resources, and organizational behavior fields (Evanschitzky, Sharma et al., 2012; Evanschitzky, Wangenheim et al., 2012; Homburg et al., 2009; Kamakura et al., 2002; Loveman, 1998; Maxham et al., 2008). The service–profit chain provides an integrative framework for understanding how a firm’s investments in employees can enhance customer service perceptions and behaviors, which, in turn, translates into profits (Kamakura et al., 2002). Linking the company-internal (employee) perspective to the external (customer) perspective, the service–profit chain stands at the intersection of research in human resources, organizational behavior, and marketing. The core of the service–profit chain is the “satisfaction mirror,” i.e., the notion that employee satisfaction translates to customer satisfaction (Heskett et al., 1997). According to the satisfaction mirror, employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction are highly correlated because satisfied em-

ployees provide higher service quality, enhancing customer satisfaction. Many of today's leading companies have grasped the basic logic of the satisfaction mirror and follow the maxim "happy employees make happy customers." Among these companies is, for example, Google, which seeks "to create the happiest, most productive workplace in the world" (Stewart, 2013).

The initial part of the chain deals largely with human resource issues. Following this line of argumentation, operational investments, that is, "support services and policies that enable employees to deliver results to customers" (e.g., workplace design, tools for increasing employee effectiveness; Heskett et al. 1994, p. 165), enhance employee satisfaction. Employee satisfaction is viewed as a source of motivational energy directed toward organizational goals (Grandey et al., 2011). Satisfied employees are more productive and loyal to the company (D. Harrison et al., 2006), which, in turn, engenders more positive service experiences for the customer (Bowen & Schneider, 2014) and leads to customer satisfaction. Satisfied customers tend to be more loyal (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001). The service-profit chain shows that loyal customers are highly important to a firm's success because they increase sales by frequent repurchases and customer referrals and are more likely to stay loyal to the brand (Kamakura et al., 2002).

In sum, the service-profit chain posits an *indirect* effect of employee satisfaction on customer satisfaction, suggesting that satisfied employees are more productive and provide better service quality and value compared to less satisfied employees, leading to higher customer satisfaction (S. Brown & Lam, 2008). While the service-profit chain suggests an *indirect* association between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction, the notion that employee satisfaction can *directly* influence customer satisfaction has also been supported (Grandey et al., 2011). This direct relationship is based on the emotional contagion theory discussed in the following section.

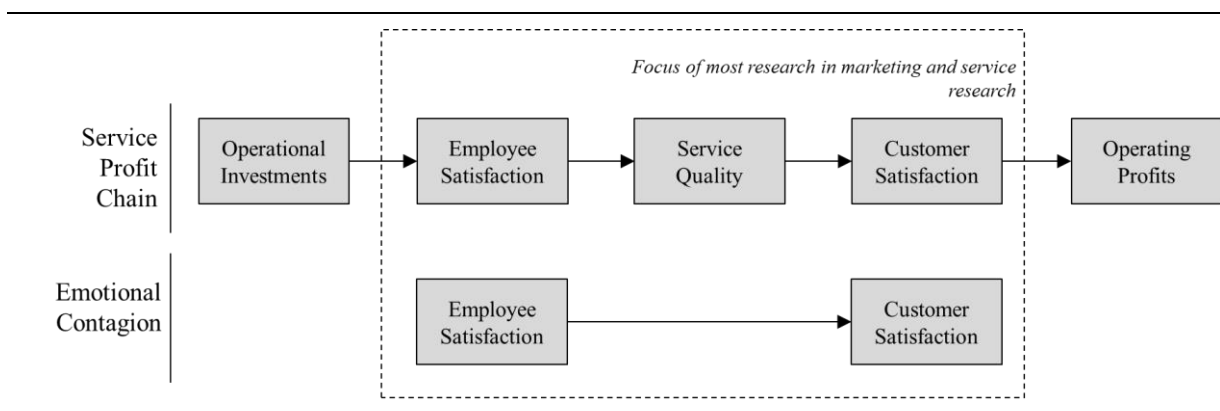
5.2.2 Emotional Contagion

Emotional contagion describes the flow of emotions from one person to another, with the receiver "catching" the sender's emotions (Hatfield et al., 1993). Emotions are defined as "brief reactions to particular persons or events that are intense and manifest distinctly, for example, as anger, joy, and fear" (Zablah et al., 2017, p. 77). The concept of emotional contagion has frequently been used in service literature and marketing to explain the link between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction (S. Brown & Lam, 2008; Homburg & Stock, 2005; S. D. Pugh, 2001; Tsai, 2001) and between employee positive affect and customer positive affect (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006; Paul et al., 2015; S. D. Pugh, 2001; Tsai, 2001; Wangenheim et al., 2007). In the service context,

emotional contagion occurs when FLEs display emotions that customers detect. This emotion transfer can, in turn, influence customer service satisfaction (Mattila & Enz, 2002; Zablah et al., 2017). More precisely, when FLEs are more satisfied, they express this satisfaction through positive moods and smiling, and customers interpret the FLE's emotional display as part of the service itself (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006). Customers, in turn, notice the positive emotions from FLEs and are thus more satisfied with the service experience (Grandey et al., 2011).

Emotional contagion can occur at the subconscious and conscious levels (Barsade, 2002). At the subconscious level, emotional contagion implies that people “automatically mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, and movements with those of another person and, consequently, [...] converge emotionally” (Hatfield et al., 1993, p. 5). For example, seeing an FLE smile at the customer may prompt the customer to smile back at her/him. At the conscious level, emotional contagion implies a social comparison process, meaning that individuals compare their moods with others and then respond according to what seems appropriate for the situation (Barsade, 2002). In this case, the recipient uses emotion as a type of social information to understand how she/he should be feeling. Concerning the service context, a customer may, for example, perceive an FLE as positive and happy, which in turn drives her/him to adapt her/his attitude and emotional display because it fits the situation better. Figure 5-1 provides an overview of the service–profit chain framework and the emotional contagion concept.

Figure 5-1:
The Service–Profit Chain and Emotional Contagion



Source: Author's illustration based on Heskett et al. (1994) and Evanschitzky et al. (2012).

5.2.3 *Synthesis: Service–Profit Chain and Emotional Contagion*

Though compatible, the emotional contagion concept and the service–profit chain differ in important ways. The scope of the emotional contagion concept is narrower than that of the service–profit chain. While the emotional contagion concept focuses on affect

transfer in the context of one-time person-to-person interactions, the scope of the service–profit chain is greater. The service–profit chain is not limited to affect transfer within specific service encounters but suggests that “cumulative perceptions of service quality and value are foundations of the ES [employee satisfaction]–customer response relationships” (S. Brown & Lam, 2008, p. 245). Therefore, service–profit chain may explain how FLE satisfaction affects customer satisfaction during specific service encounters and how operational investments in employees (across the whole company) may lead to superior levels of customer satisfaction at the business unit level of analysis. While both theoretical concepts provide a rationale *that* employee-centric metrics influence customer-centric metrics, they cannot fully explain the underlying mechanism of inspiration contagion during service interactions. The limitations of the emotional contagion concept and the service–profit chain framework are detailed in the following sections.

Emotional contagion is limited to explaining the transfer of emotions (e.g., joy, anger, enthusiasm) or affects from employees to customers.³¹ Service researchers have focused primarily on the transfer of *positive* affect, a pleasure-mood state characterized by high energy, full concentration, and positive, pleasurable excitement (Watson et al., 1988; Watson et al., 1999). Thrash et al. (2017) emphasized that the transfer of inspiration between one person and another cannot be explained through mere emotional contagion due to important differences between positive affect and inspiration. While positive affect has been found to be the strongest correlate of inspiration, the two concepts differ empirically and conceptually (Böttger et al., 2017; Thrash & Elliot, 2003). From a conceptual perspective, inspiration involves higher levels of transcendence and lower levels of volitional control compared to positive affect. Second, positive affect facilitates the *acquisition* of goods (e.g., food, shelter), while inspiration *transmits* knowledge and insight. Unlike affect, inspiration contagion is neither an automatic process nor an affective reaction to a cue in one’s environment; instead, it arises from epistemic, eye-opening insights (e.g., new ideas) and motivates the transmission of this new idea (Barsade, 2002; Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

While the conventional service–profit chain provides a rationale for the employee–customer satisfaction linkage, it offers only limited guidance to understand the employee–customer *inspiration* linkage. FLE inspiration differs from employee satis-

³¹ Emotions and affect have often been used interchangeably to refer to subjective feelings (Barsade et al., 2018).

faction conceptually and empirically (see Chapters 2 and 3). In particular, FLE inspiration is an intrinsic motivational state triggered by an epistemic event and directed towards implementing a new idea. Employee satisfaction, in contrast, is a job attitude resulting from positive past experiences. At the same time, customer satisfaction importantly differs from customer inspiration. Böttger et al. (2017) provided evidence for the construct validity of customer inspiration and distinguished it from customer satisfaction: “Customer inspiration is a motivational state at the beginning of the customer journey when a need is recognized, whereas satisfaction is positioned as an evaluation after the product or service has been consumed” (Web Appendix). Due to the conceptual and empirical differences between employee satisfaction and employee inspiration on the one hand and customer satisfaction and customer inspiration, on the other hand, the conventional service–profit is limited when explaining inspiration contagion from FLEs to customers.

Importantly, FLE inspiration can explain additional variance in FLE behavior beyond the predictive power of FLE satisfaction (see Chapter 3). Likewise, Böttger et al. (2017) provided evidence that customer inspiration explains variance in relevant customer outcomes beyond the predictive power of customer satisfaction. Together, these findings imply that research should focus on the employee–customer inspiration linkage rather than the employee–customer satisfaction linkage. Since FLE satisfaction has been a core construct in the linkage literature, it is important to show how FLE inspiration predicts customer inspiration relative to FLE satisfaction. Therefore, I seek to extend the conventional service–profit chain framework by introducing the employee–customer inspiration linkage.

In sum, the conventional service–profit chain narrowly focuses on satisfaction as a core construct, and emotion contagion is limited to the affect transfer between individuals. Due to these limitations, the conventional service–profit chain and the emotional contagion framework cannot provide a rationale for explaining inspiration contagion from one person to another. Rather, to explain inspiration contagion from FLEs to customers, I draw on the model of inspiration contagion as a theoretical foundation (Section 5.3). After describing how the inspiration contagion model may apply to the service context (Sections 5.3.2.1 and 5.3.2.2), I elaborate on how this dissertation expands the existing employee–customer linkage literature (Section 5.3.2.3).

5.3 Inspiration Contagion

5.3.1 *Inspiration Contagion in Social Psychology*

As detailed in Chapter 2, social psychologists have conceptualized inspiration in three complementary models (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004), the tripartite model, the process model, and the transmission model. Building on their previous research, Thrash et al. (2017) proposed a fourth model, the *contagion model of inspiration*. These authors suggested that inspiration is infectious, such that it may be passed on from one individual to another through a process called *inspiration contagion*. Thrash et al. (2017) applied the contagion model of inspiration to the literary context, showing that inspiration can be passed on from a writer to a reader through the text.

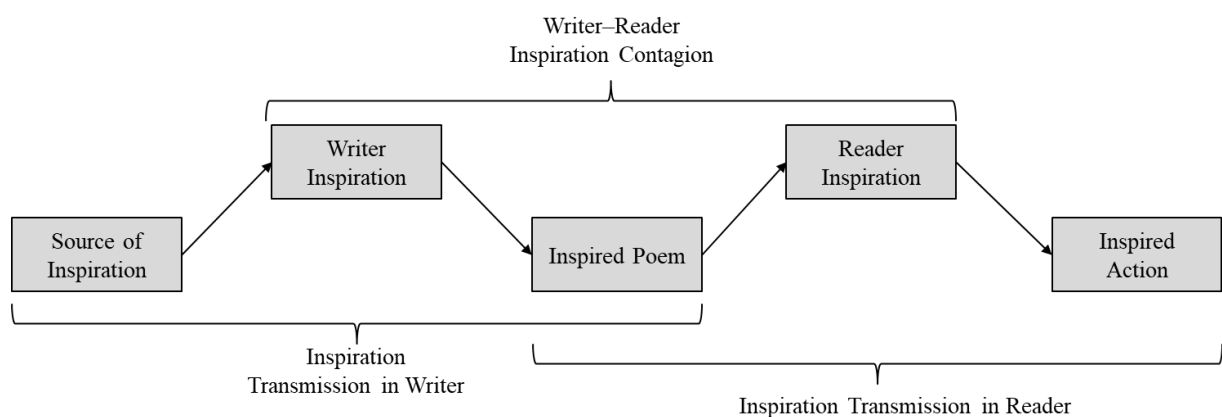
The contagion model of inspiration is theoretically grounded in the transmission model of inspiration. Inspiration transmission and inspiration contagion are conceptually distinct but overlap iteratively, as shown in Figure 5-2. In the transmission model, inspiration mediates the relationship between the source of inspiration and the outcome of inspiration. Thereby, inspiration is theorized to motivate the *transmission* (e.g., articulation, actualization, or extension) of ideas appraised as intrinsically valuable (Thrash, Moldovan, Oleynick et al., 2014) (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1 for an overview). Thrash et al. (2017) applied the transmission model to the writing and reading process. In the writer transmission process, inspiration is a mediating variable that explains the transmission of a writer's perceived intrinsic value (idea → writer inspiration → text). The writer becomes inspired by an appealing idea during a moment of illumination, which inspires him to express the new idea through a written product (e.g., a piece of poetry). For example, a writer draws inspiration for a protagonist in his novel from the compelling story of his father's life.

Similarly, in the reader transmission process, inspiration is a mediating variable that explains the transmission of perceived intrinsic value by a reader (text → reader inspiration → future goal). The reader is inspired by a piece of text or poetry, which awakens the reader's desire to express or embody this new epistemic awareness. For example, reading a novel about a compelling story of life inspires the reader to model her/his own life after the protagonist (Thrash et al., 2017).

The contagion model integrates the writer transmission process and the reader transmission process. In the contagion model, writer inspiration serves as an independent variable, while reader inspiration serves as the dependent variable mediated by the qualities of the text (writer inspiration → text → reader inspiration). Writers who are

more inspired by an idea write texts that reveal greater insights. More insightful texts evoke higher levels of inspiration in the reader. Thereby, the writer's inspiration is a response to inspiring influences (stimuli), and the reader's inspiration is a response to the inspired text that the writer has produced (Thrash, 2020). The inspiration contagion process complements and extends the transmission function of inspiration such that a given experience of inspiration has the potential to spark reverberations in others via the written word or personal encounters (Thrash et al., 2017). Figure 5-2 shows how the writer–reader contagion integrates the writer transmission and the reader transmission.

Figure 5-2:
Contagion Model of Inspiration



Source: Thrash (2020).

In sum, the contagion model of inspiration integrates the writer and the reader transmission processes, suggesting that the writing process, the text, and the reading process are linked. The inspiration transmission process in the writer produces an inspired text, which, in turn, serves as input for an inspiration transmission process in the reader. Below, I apply the contagion model of inspiration to the service context, where the service interaction (between employees and customers) is the primary medium for transmitting inspiration from employees to customers.

5.3.2 *Inspiration Contagion in Service Interactions*

Thrash et al. (2017) highlighted that the contagion model of inspiration applies not only to the literary domain where inspiration is passed on from a writer to a reader through a piece of text. Rather, the authors argued that inspiration contagion is broadly relevant across domains and can be transmitted from person to person through *personal encounters*. Since service interactions constitute such personal face-to-face encounters, I contend that inspiration may be passed on from an FLE to a customer through inspiration contagion. Following a call for more service–profit chain research beyond the traditional employee–customer satisfaction linkage (Homburg et al., 2009), I propose a

complementary service–profit chain that builds on the contagion model of inspiration and includes FLE inspiration and customer inspiration as core constructs. To do so, I introduce the *inspiration contagion model for service interactions*, which integrates the transmission model of FLE inspiration (Section 5.3.2.1) and the transmission model of customer inspiration (Section 5.3.2.2).

5.3.2.1 *Transmission Model of Frontline Employee Inspiration in the Service Context*

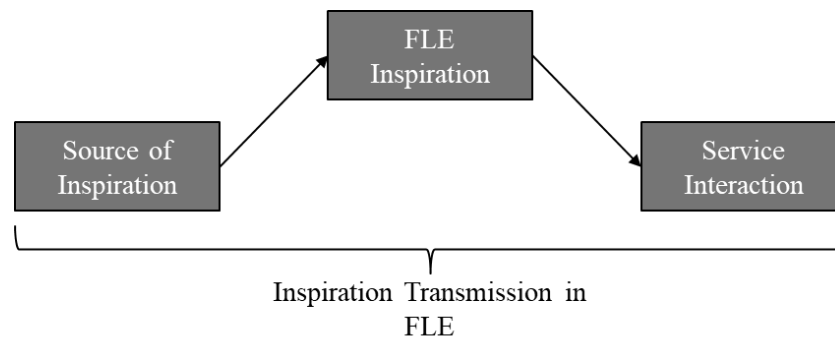
As boundary-spanning workers, FLEs assume three crucial roles in ensuring firm success: (1) external representation, (2) internal influence, and (3) service delivery (Betencourt & Brown, 2003). First, FLEs play an important role in representing the organization to outsiders (including customers) and enhancing the firm’s image and legitimacy through advocating the firm and its products and services. Second, their boundary-spanning position provides them with many opportunities to share information internally about evolving customer needs and possible improvements in service delivery. Third, customer responses and service quality perceptions are largely dependent on FLE service delivery behaviors (Rapp et al., 2015).

FLE inspiration is a temporary, intrinsic motivational state during which FLEs spontaneously gain epistemic insights (directly or through intrapsychic processes) from within or outside the workplace (inspired-by) and feel compelled to actualize or express these epistemic insights at work (inspired-to) (see Chapter 2). This definition applies to the three roles that FLEs assume. Regarding external representation, inspired FLEs may develop new ideas to advocate the retailer’s image, products, and services. Concerning internal influence, inspired FLEs may take initiative to communicate new ideas to improve service delivery to their superiors or coworkers. Regarding service delivery, inspired FLEs may channel their inspiring ideas to customers. In this chapter, I focus on the latter, arguing that inspired FLEs positively influence customer interactions. Thus, this study is of great interest to marketing and service researchers because it investigates FLE inspiration from a customer perspective or, more broadly, a market perspective.

FLE inspiration serves to actualize, express, or otherwise transmit a newly acquired idea to customers during a service interaction. Therefore, I refine the initial definition of FLE inspiration to fit the specific context of service interactions: A temporary state during which FLEs spontaneously gain epistemic insights from within or outside the workplace (inspired-by) and feel compelled *to actualize or express these insights during a service interaction and transmit them to customers (inspired-to)*. As shown in

Figure 5-3, an epistemic idea from a source (antecedent) triggers FLE inspiration (mediator), which drives the FLE to implement this idea during the service interaction (outcome). More precisely, FLE inspiration is viewed as a mediator that motivates the transmission of new possibilities revealed by a stimulus object (source) to a target object (i.e., future service interaction). For example, discovering a recipe posted on Pinterest (source) might inspire the FLE to share this recipe with the customer during a service interaction. The outcome of the inspiration transmission process is an inspired service interaction, during which the inspired FLE articulates novel and creative ideas to solve customer problems (G. Wang & Netemeyer, 2004) and displays new work behaviors that contribute to sales performance, such as proactively catering to customer needs (Wilder et al., 2014).

Figure 5-3:
Transmission Model of Frontline Employee Inspiration



Source: Author's illustration.

5.3.2.2 *Transmission Model of Customer Inspiration*

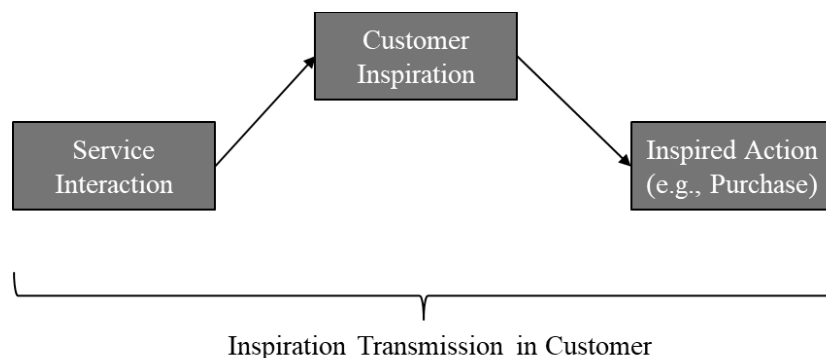
In marketing and consumer behavior literature, Böttger et al. (2017) defined customer inspiration in the marketing context as “a customer’s temporary motivational state that facilitates the transition from the reception of a marketing-induced idea to the intrinsic pursuit of a consumption-related idea” (p.117). For example, discovering an attractive outfit posted on Instagram may inspire the customer to visit the store website to purchase the outfit.

Like FLE inspiration, customer inspiration consists of two processes that together account for an episode of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2004). First, customer inspiration involves an epistemic (activating) process where customers gain awareness of new or better possibilities that they would not have recognized by themselves (inspired-by). The inspired-by state involves the reception of a marketing-induced new idea (i.e., evocation) and shifts customer awareness toward new consumption possibilities (i.e., transcendence). For example, customers may become inspired through marketers’ efforts,

including print ads, novel product assortments, and personalized messages. Second, customer inspiration involves a motivational process that drives customers to act on newly gained awareness (inspired-to) (Böttger et al., 2017). The inspired-to process relates to the intrinsic pursuit of a consumption-related goal, such as purchasing (Böttger et al., 2017) and recycling products (Winterich et al., 2019) or developing more positive brand attitudes (Chang, 2020).

Like FLE inspiration, the conceptualization of customer inspiration is based on the transmission model of inspiration (Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010). More precisely, customer inspiration (mediator) is evoked in response to getting a consumption-related idea (antecedent) and motivates the customer to actualize an idea through the intrinsic pursuit of a consumption-related goal (outcome). The transmission model of customer inspiration may also be applied to the specific case of service interactions. During service interactions, the FLE provides a cue that triggers customer inspiration. FLEs, their ideas, and behaviors may reveal new or better consumption possibilities to customers, which trigger customer inspiration. After experiencing inspiration, customers act upon the idea they gained from the inspired FLE. In the specific case of service interactions, the customer translates the newly acquired idea, revealed by the FLE (e.g., idea about purchasing a special kind of cheese for a starter) into a consumption-related outcome (e.g., purchasing the cheese) (see Figure 5-4).

Figure 5-4:
Transmission Model of Customer Inspiration



Source: Author's illustration based on Böttger et al. (2017).

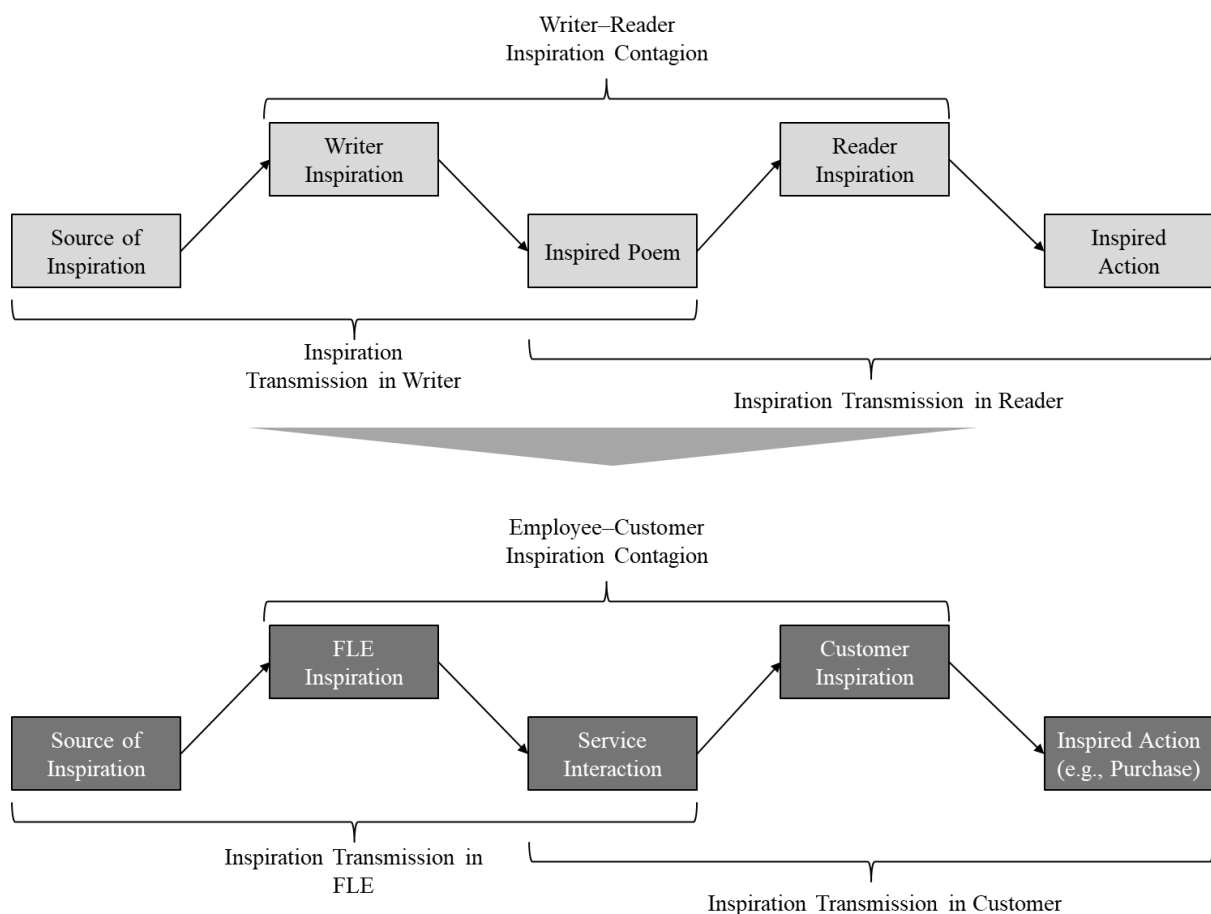
Furthermore, Böttger et al. (2017) showed that customers with an idea shopping motivation, i.e., hedonic motivation to go shopping with the intent to see new products or innovations and fashions (M. Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Wagner & Rudolph, 2010), are more receptive to customer inspiration and thus experience stronger inspiration compared to other customers exposed to the same source of inspiration. Based on this, it may be expected that customers' level of idea shopping motivation moderates the effect of

the inspired service interaction on customer inspiration (see hypotheses in Section 5.4.2).

5.3.2.3 Integrating Customer Inspiration and Frontline Employee Inspiration

The contagion model of inspiration in service interactions integrates the FLE and the customer transmission processes, suggesting that FLE inspiration, service interaction, and customer inspiration are linked. Here, the service interaction is the primary medium for transmitting inspiration from FLEs to customers. The process of employee–customer inspiration contagion runs parallel to writer–reader inspiration contagion. Analogous to writer inspiration transmission, where a writer expresses her/his inspiration using a poem, FLEs may express their inspiration when interacting with customers. Analogous to the reader inspiration transmission, where a reader becomes inspired by a poem and is inspired to translate the newly gained awareness into an actionable goal, customer inspiration may be triggered by new information, revealed by the FLE gained during service interaction (Figure 5-5).

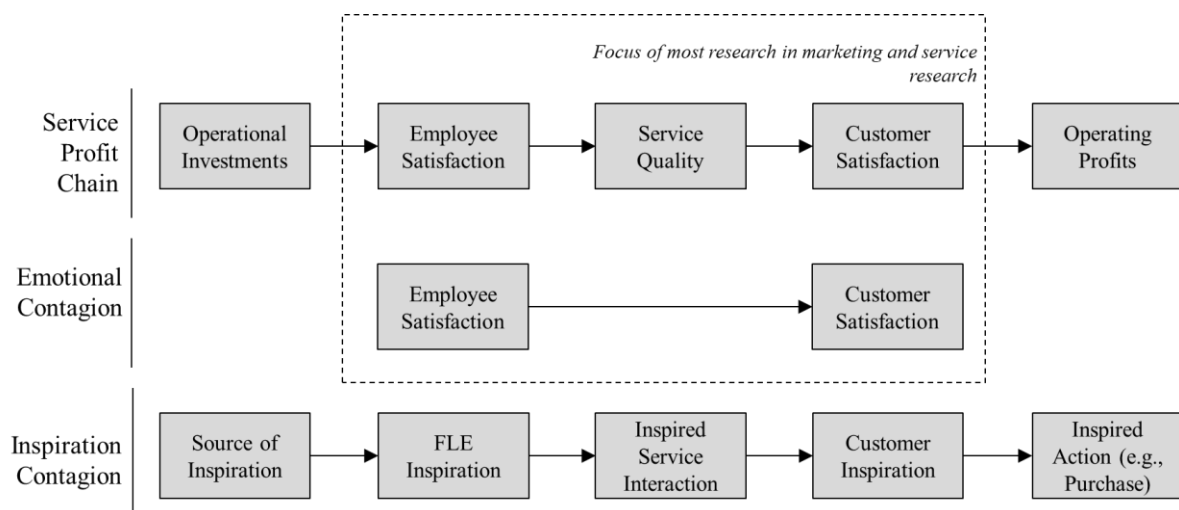
Figure 5-5:
Application of the Inspiration Contagion Model to the Service Context



Source: Author's illustration based on Thrash (2020), Böttger et al. (2017).

In sum, I introduce the employee–customer inspiration contagion model. I seek to contribute to employee–customer linkage literature in two ways. First, I extend the conventional service–profit chain based on employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction as core constructs by introducing two additional constructs: FLE inspiration and customer inspiration. Second, I introduce inspiration contagion as a psychological mechanism that explains the transfer of inspiration from FLEs to customers. Since the emotional contagion framework is limited to direct affect transfer, it cannot provide a rationale for explaining inspiration contagion from FLEs to customers. The model of inspiration contagion in service interactions is related to service–profit chain in that it suggests an indirect linkage between FLE inspiration and customer inspiration mediated by the inspired service interaction. Like emotional contagion, the model of inspiration contagion in service interactions focuses on specific service encounters, seeking to explain the transfer of inspiration within person-to-person service interactions (see Figure 5-6).

Figure 5-6:
Service–Profit Chain, Emotional Contagion, and Inspiration Contagion



Source: Author's illustration based on Heskett et al. (1994) and Evanschitzky et al. (2012).

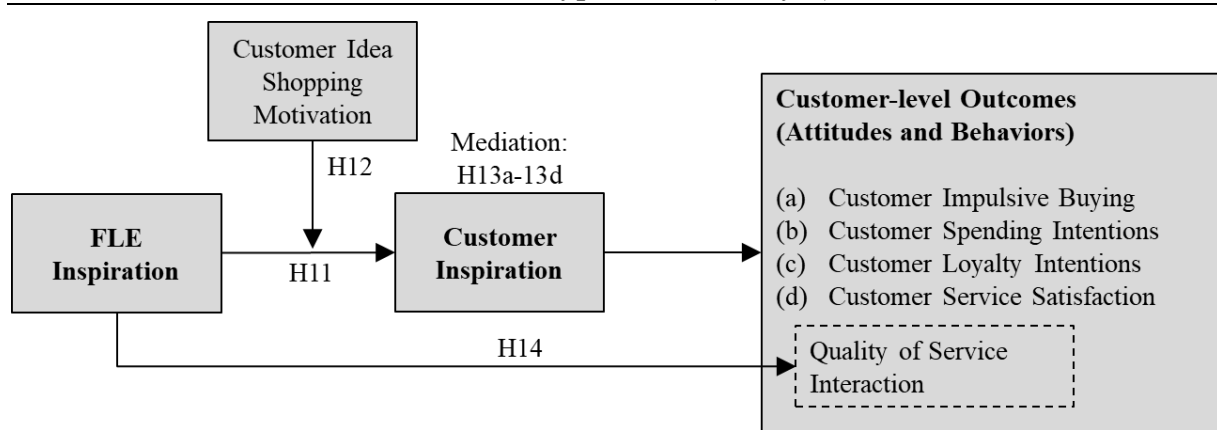
5.4 Hypotheses

This section describes the development of hypotheses to assess the customer outcomes of FLE inspiration. A large body of service–profit chain literature has focused on *specific links* within the service–profit chain (Homburg & Stock, 2004; Wangenheim et al., 2007). Accordingly, I focus on the link between FLE inspiration, customer inspiration, and customer-level behaviors and attitudes.

The inspiration contagion model of service interaction (see Figure 5-5) supports the FLE inspiration → inspired service interaction → customer inspiration linkage. In

the scenario-based experiment, I study employee–customer inspiration contagion in the context of service interactions. For reasons of simplicity, I operationalized FLE inspiration and the resulting inspired service interaction as one (manipulated) variable because FLE inspiration describes an FLE’s psychological state, which may manifest itself through FLE behaviors and attitudes during service interactions with customers. Therefore, I focus on the *direct* linkage between FLE inspiration and customer inspiration.

Figure 5-7:
Model of Hypotheses (Study 8)



Source: Author’s illustration. Note: FLE inspiration is the manipulated variable.

This dissertation aims to find support for the core link between FLE inspiration and customer inspiration and downstream customer-level outcomes (i.e., behaviors and attitudes). The hypotheses tested in this study are depicted in Figure 5-7. First, FLE inspiration (IV) is hypothesized to influence customer inspiration (DV) (H11).³² Second, customer shopping motivation (low versus high) is proposed to moderate the effect of FLE inspiration on customer inspiration (H12). Third, customer inspiration is hypothesized to mediate the effect of FLE inspiration (IV) on customer-level outcomes (DV) (H13a – H13d). Fourth, the direct effect of FLE inspiration on the quality of customer interaction, i.e., customers’ perception of the service interaction (H14) is expected to be significant. In developing the hypotheses, I build both on prior inspiration literature (e.g., Thrash & Elliot, 2003) and the qualitative insights from Study 1—this procedure is in line with established service literature (B. Dong et al., 2015; Kohli & Jaworski, 1990).

5.4.1 Effect of Frontline Employee Inspiration on Customer Inspiration

Based on the contagion model of inspiration (Thrash et al., 2017), it is posited that inspired FLEs pass their inspiration on to customers during service interactions. If

³² To avoid confusion with Study 5, the hypotheses are numbered consecutively, starting with H11.

a new idea or vision inspires an FLE, she/he is energized to actualize this new idea during customer interaction (e.g., by articulating this new idea/consumption possibility to the customer) and to engage in behaviors that represent an improvement over existing approaches or work procedures (e.g., offering customers unexpected and new service solutions) (Madjar & Ortiz-Walters, 2008). Thereby, the FLE's actualization of his/her inspiring idea serves as a source of inspiration to customers (Böttger et al., 2017) because it shifts the customers' awareness to new consumption possibilities and inspires the customer to implement the newly acquired idea. In short, the inspired FLE's insights, transmitted through the service interaction, may trigger customer inspiration because they unveil novel or useful ideas that the customer has overlooked.

Furthermore, it is expected that a satisfied FLE will evoke lower levels of customer inspiration compared to an inspired FLE. Satisfied FLEs are content with their overall job circumstances, such as their team or salary (Locke, 1976). They express their satisfaction through increased levels of positive affect (e.g., enthusiasm, happiness) and appear to be more pleased with their environment compared to their less satisfied peers (Homburg & Stock, 2004). FLEs' positive affect alone cannot trigger customer inspiration because it lacks inspirational content (i.e., a new idea) and, thus, does not expand the customer's horizons through a new idea (Böttger et al., 2017). While the ideas of an inspired FLE have the power to trigger customer inspiration, an FLE's emotional display (being happy) does not shift the customer's awareness to new consumption possibilities (Böttger et al., 2017). Therefore, the effect of FLE inspiration on customer inspiration will be expected to be greater compared to the effect of FLE satisfaction on customer inspiration.

H11: Compared with FLE satisfaction, FLE inspiration will affect customer inspiration more strongly, such that a customer will report higher levels of customer inspiration when interacting with an inspired FLE rather than with a satisfied, but not inspired, FLE.

5.4.2 Moderating Role of Customer Idea Shopping Motivation

Thrash et al. (2017) showed that readers' openness to experience moderates inspiration contagion in the literary context such that the effect of writer inspiration on reader inspiration is greater for readers higher in openness. In the consumption context, Böttger et al. (2017) found evidence that customers with an idea shopping motivation, i.e., hedonic motivation to go shopping with the intent to see new products innovations, and fashions (M. Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Wagner & Rudolph, 2010), are more re-

ceptive to inspiration and thus experience stronger inspiration compared to other customers exposed to the same source of inspiration. When idea shopping motivation is high, shoppers desire to learn about new products, emerging trends, and new ways to use a product. When idea shopping motivation is low, shoppers feel the need to buy a particular product they have in mind and regard the shopping trip as a means to an end, providing functional value (Wagner & Rudolph, 2010). In line with this prior research and the findings from Study 1 (see Section 2.2.2.5 on p. 57), it is posited that customer idea shopping motivation facilitates customer's receptiveness to inspiration from FLEs during service interactions and therefore moderates the effect of FLE inspiration on customer inspiration.

H12: Customer idea shopping motivation moderates the effect of FLE inspiration on customer inspiration such that the effect will be stronger for customers with high idea shopping motivation compared to customers with low idea shopping motivation.

5.4.3 Mediating Role of Customer Inspiration

Based on the contagion model of inspiration (Thrash et al., 2017) and the transmission model of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2004), the following paragraphs summarize the hypotheses on how customer inspiration mediates the effect of FLE inspiration on customer behaviors (i.e., customer impulsive buying and customer purchase intentions) and customer attitudes (i.e., loyalty intentions and customer service satisfaction). First, the contagion model of inspiration provides a rationale for the link between FLE inspiration and customer inspiration. Second, the transmission model provides a rationale for the link between customer inspiration and customer-level outcomes, explaining how ideas acquired during the service interaction (source) trigger customer inspiration, which, in turn, leads to the actualization of this idea in a consumption-related way (Böttger et al., 2017). Note that the experimental design of this study allows testing customer purchase and loyalty *intentions* rather than their actual purchase and loyalty behavior.

Customer Impulsive Buying and Customer Purchase Intentions. In line with the contagion model of inspiration (Thrash et al., 2017), it is posited that FLE inspiration enhances customer inspiration, which, in turn, drives customers to pursue a consumption-related goal. In the service context, it is expected that customers acquire new ideas through interacting with inspired FLEs (e.g., a creative suggestion for meal preparation) and actualize these ideas through impulsive buying behavior (i.e., buying products spontaneously, immediately, and unreflectively) (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998) and extra spending (Böttger et al., 2017).

Service Satisfaction. Per definition, being inspired involves transcending one's daily limits or mundane concerns and "challenging our expectations about what is and what can be" (Shiota et al., 2014, p. 363). Thus, inspiration implies an improvement over the status quo. In the service context, inspired FLEs are expected to express new and useful service solutions that represent an improvement over existing approaches or past service experiences (Y. Dong et al., 2015; Madjar & Ortiz-Walters, 2008). These new and unique service solutions have the power to trigger customer inspiration because they reveal new and better consumption possibilities (Böttger et al., 2017). With these inspiring new ideas and service solutions, customers are more likely to perceive the service as satisfying. Service satisfaction, a customer's judgment of the service provided by the FLE (Oliver, 1981), is an important outcome variable because it captures cognitive and affective responses to a single service episode (Oliver, 1993) and predicts a wide range of financial outcomes (Gupta & Zeithaml, 2006).

Customer Loyalty Intentions. Service research provides empirical evidence that a positive interaction between FLEs and customers increases customer loyalty (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991). Based on the model of inspiration contagion, it is expected that FLEs will pass their inspiration to customers during service interactions. When customers are inspired by new consumption possibilities revealed by the FLE, they "enter[...] into a relation not only with the intrinsically valued stimulus [i.e., the new idea] but also with the agent [...] responsible for it [i.e., the FLE and the retailer]" (Belzak et al., 2017, p. 125). Therefore, the inspiration contagion from the FLE to the customer strengthens the customer's feelings of connectedness with the FLE and the retailer. Such feelings of connectedness enhance customer loyalty, i.e., the customer's favorable attitude toward a company, resulting in repurchase and recommendation intentions and behavior (Zeithaml et al., 1996).

H13: FLE inspiration positively affects (a) customer impulsive buying, (b) customer purchase intentions, (c) customer service satisfaction, and (d) customer loyalty intentions through customer inspiration as a mediator.

5.4.4 Direct Effect of Frontline Employee Inspiration on Customer Inspiration

Quality of Customer Interaction. In line with relevant marketing literature, it is proposed that FLE inspiration directly affects the quality of customer interaction. This construct is defined as the degree to which customers evaluate service interactions with the FLE as open, flexible, and customer-oriented (Homburg & Stock, 2004). Conceptually, inspiration is a response to an external cue and motivates certain behavior. Research

shows that inspiration leads to openness to experience and flexible thinking, task absorption, and increased focus (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). In the service context, inspired FLEs are expected to be highly responsive to customer needs, open to suggestions from customers, flexible when dealing with customers during service interactions, and focused on fulfilling customer needs. Together, these FLE behaviors contribute to the customer's perception of service quality.

H14: FLE inspiration directly enhances the perceived quality of service interaction.

5.5 Study 8

The objective of Study 7 was to investigate the proposed effects (H11 – H14) of FLE inspiration on customer-level outcomes during service interactions using an online-scenario-based experiment. This experimental study aimed to isolate the causal link between FLE inspiration and customer inspiration and further customer-related measures. Additionally, this study sought to provide further evidence of predictive validity by assessing whether interacting with an inspired FLE—as opposed to a satisfied or merely neutral FLE—can significantly improve customer-level outcomes (i.e., customer inspiration, customer loyalty intentions, customer impulsive buying, customer service satisfaction, customer purchase intentions). As detailed below, the experiment required participants to imagine themselves as customers of a fictitious specialty shop where they would be buying groceries for their birthday dinner and interacting with an FLE. Subsequently, customer-level outcomes were measured. In the experimental setting, FLE inspiration and customer idea shopping motivation were manipulated.

This study followed the previous service and retailing literature, which has successfully used scenario-based design in the service context, for example, to explore the effect of service failure and recovery on customer outcomes (DeWitt et al., 2008; B. Dong et al., 2008), and the effect of customer satisfaction on FLE satisfaction in a professional services context (Frey et al., 2013). A scenario-based study was chosen for two reasons. First, this method makes it easier to operationalize the manipulations and control for otherwise unmanageable variables (Bitner, 1990). The scenario-based method strengthens the internal validity—“the extent to which a result can be attributed to a particular independent variable and not to some uncontrolled factor” (Sawyer et al., 1979, p. 63). Second, the use of scenarios avoids the difficulties associated with observing services in the field, including ethical considerations or concerns from managers (A. Smith & Bolton, 1998).

5.5.1 Methodology

5.5.1.1 Procedure and Sample

A 2 (*customer idea shopping motivation*: high vs. low) x 3 (*FLE behavior*: inspired vs. satisfied vs. neutral) between-subjects design was used. Participants were randomly assigned to conditions. In the beginning, participants were asked to imagine planning a birthday dinner for close friends that would take place in a few days. Subsequently, they read one of the two customer shopping scenarios. In the next step, they were asked to imagine interacting with an FLE in a specialty shop where they intended to buy the products for their birthday dinner. Each participant was then asked to complete a questionnaire containing a battery of structured questions measuring the constructs of interest in this study. 356 participants were recruited through the crowdsourcing platform Prolific Academic. 14 participants did not pass the attention check and were eliminated from the dataset, yielding a final sample of $N = 342$. In the final sample, 49.1% of the participants were male, and the average age was 35.15, ranging from 18 to 80 years.

5.5.1.2 Pretests

Two pretests were conducted. The first pretest ($N = 60$) used a recall-based experiment that asked participants to recall a personal experience (Gremier, 2004; Griskevicius et al., 2010; Piff et al., 2015). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions. In the first condition, respondents were asked to recall and describe a time when they interacted with an “inspired” FLE. In the second condition, respondents were asked to recall and describe a time when they interacted with a “satisfied” FLE. In the third condition, respondents were asked to recall and describe a time when they interacted with an “emotionally neutral” FLE. However, several participants commented that it was difficult to remember the desired service interaction because social distancing measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 reduced the number of recent personal service encounters. Overall, 50% of participants in the first pretest indicated that their service interaction had happened four or more weeks ago. Therefore, this study design may be flawed due to recall bias, which could have prompted the participants to reinterpret the experienced service interaction (Herhausen et al., 2019; Herhausen et al., 2020).

To counteract the problem of recall bias, a scenario-based design was chosen for the second pretest. Since scenario-based experimental designs depend on participants’ imagination instead of their memory, they are useful for data collection, especially amid

the COVID-19 pandemic. The second pretest ($N = 60$) involved FLE behavior manipulations, ensuring that the FLE behavior scenario was understandable and realistic. As a result of the second pretest, only minor changes were made to the wording of the FLE behavior manipulations. The pretest respondents were not included in the final sample.

5.5.1.3 Stimuli Development

Participants were asked to imagine that they were planning a dinner party for close friends that would take place in a few days. This introductory text was followed by one of the two customer shopping motivation conditions and one of the three FLE behavior conditions. The following section describes the conditions and their development in detail.

Customer Idea Shopping Motivation Condition (high vs. low). The two conditions were developed based on a review of the literature on consumer shopping motivation (M. Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Böttger et al., 2017; Wagner & Rudolph, 2010). Based on prior research, participants in the high idea shopping motivation condition were asked to imagine a scenario in which consumers actively search for new ideas in a shop and desire to learn about new products, emerging trends, and new ways of using the product. Therefore, participants in this condition were not expected to form a concrete idea before entering the store; instead, they were expected to be more open to inspiring ideas from the FLE. Participants in the high idea shopping motivation condition read the following text:

Please take a moment and *imagine* the following situation.
Please imagine it is your birthday and you are planning a dinner party for 3 close friends that takes place in a few days.

You do not have a specific dish in mind that you want to cook for your friends in this situation. Rather, you thrive on discovering new products in a specialty food store nearby. You enjoy learning about new products and getting new ideas.

You have no plans what groceries you want to buy and decide to approach a **specialty food store** nearby.

The "Submit"-button will show in 15 seconds.

In contrast, participants in the low idea shopping motivation condition were asked to think about a concrete meal for their dinner party and its ingredients before going to the specialty shop. These participants were asked to picture specific products that they would purchase quickly and easily. Therefore, since these participants would have already formed a concrete idea before entering the store, they were expected to be less open to ideas from an inspired FLE. Participants in the low idea shopping motivation condition read the following text:

Please take a moment and *imagine* the following situation.
Please imagine it is your birthday and you are planning a dinner party for 3 close friends that takes place in a few days.

Please think of a specific dish that you would cook for your close friends in this situation:

Imagine you research a couple of recipes and compile a shopping list of the ingredients you need. Please name four ingredients that are on your shopping list:

Ingredient 1:

Ingredient 2:

Ingredient 3:

Ingredient 4:

You want to get exactly the ingredients that are on your shopping list in the least amount of time. With this in mind, you decide to approach a **specialty food store** nearby.

The "Submit"-button will show in 15 seconds.

Frontline Employee Behavior Conditions. After reading the shopping motivation condition, participants were assigned to three conditions in which I manipulated their perception of FLE behavior (inspired FLE, satisfied FLE, and neutral FLE behavior) during the service interaction. Specifically, in the inspired FLE scenario, the participant interacted with an inspired FLE. In the satisfied FLE scenario, the participant interacted with a satisfied FLE. In the neutral FLE scenario, the participant interacted with a neutral FLE who showed neither positive nor negative emotions. The inspired FLE scenario served as an experimental condition, while the satisfied FLE condition and the neutral FLE condition served as control conditions. This procedure allowed us to compare customers' responses who interacted with an inspired FLE and those of customers who interacted with a satisfied or neutral FLE. The conditions are detailed in the following paragraphs.

(1) Inspired Frontline Employee Condition. Based on the previous conceptualization of FLE inspiration and extant inspiration research (Böttger et al., 2017; Thrash & Elliot, 2003), FLE inspiration was manipulated by describing how the FLE gains a spontaneous and compelling new idea that energizes him or her to make novel product suggestions to the customer. Per definition, inspiration is related to the transcendence of previous concerns and limits (Belzak et al., 2017) and brings about behavioral change in individuals (Oleynick et al., 2014). Therefore, this scenario described the FLE as transcending his/her role requirements and engaging in behavioral changes by trying out new work procedures. Based on prior literature and qualitative insights from Study 1, the following inspired FLE condition was developed:

When you enter the nearby specialty food store, a service employee smiles at you, enthusiastically greets you and asks how he can help you today.

Please image **engaging with the service employee in the following way.**

- You tell him that it is your birthday soon and that you are planning a dinner party for your close friends.
- He has a compelling new idea for a range of products that may suit you and is eager to share his ideas for the dinner party with you.
- When servicing you, he is not simply content with offering you standard service, but rather tries out new work procedures and goes beyond his role requirements.
- The service employee seems to be inspired by a deep sense of purpose, which energizes him to do his job beyond your service expectations.

The "Submit"-button will show in 30 seconds.

(2) *Satisfied Frontline Employee Condition.* FLE satisfaction was chosen as a control condition because it is one of the most widely studied constructs in marketing and service research (Homburg & Stock, 2004). The effect of FLE satisfaction on customer responses (e.g., customer satisfaction) has received a great deal of academic attention in the literature focusing on employee–customer linkage and service–profit chain (S. D. Pugh et al., 2002; Vandenberghe et al., 2007). The popularity of the employee satisfaction constructs made it necessary to validate the role of FLE inspiration in predicting customer-related outcomes beyond the effects of FLE satisfaction. The satisfied FLE scenario was manipulated based on previous research, which has argued that satisfied FLEs are pleased with their overall work situation (S. Brown & Peterson, 1993) and thus feel no need to change the established work procedures (Straume & Vittersø, 2012; Zhou & George, 2001). Furthermore, prior research has suggested that satisfied employees are positively minded at work (Grandey, 2003; Rafaeli, 1989) and offer service that meets customer expectations (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997; Oliver & Desarbo, 1988). Based on this literature review and qualitative insights from Study 1, the following satisfied FLE condition was developed:

When you enter the nearby specialty food store, a service employee smiles at you, greets you and asks how she can help you today.

Please image **engaging with the service employee in the following way.**

- You tell her that it is your birthday soon and that you are planning a dinner party for your close friends.
- He briefly thinks about your needs and then suggests a range of products for the dinner party that suit your expectation.
- When servicing you, she is content with offering you standard service. She sticks to established work procedures and works within her role requirements.
- This service employee seems to be satisfied with her job and happy with her overall working situation.

The "Submit"-button will show in 30 seconds.

(3) *Neutral Frontline Employee Condition.* Following prior inspiration literature (Thrash, Elliot et al., 2010), this study included a neutral FLE condition. In this condition, the FLE was supposed to display a neutral job attitude and offer “neutral” customer service (Paul et al., 2015). “Neutrality” means that FLEs display a neutral facial expression without expressing a positive or negative attitude towards their jobs or customers

(Z. Wang et al., 2017). Based on previous research, which has identified specific behavioral indicators of emotionally neutral service interactions, the FLE was described as serving the customer without smiling (Luong, 2005) or exhibiting any creative or customer-oriented behavior (Trogakos et al., 2011; Tsai, 2001). Participants in the neutral FLE condition read the following text:

When you enter the nearby specialty food store, a service greets you without a smile and asks how he can help you today.

Please image **engaging with the service employee in the following way.**

- You tell him that it is your birthday soon and that you are planning a dinner party for your close friends.
- The service employee quickly grabs some products from the shelf and mentions in a monotonous voice that these products are popular among customers who organize dinner parties these days.
- He services you in a neutral way, which is neither positive nor negative.
- You have the impression that the service employee does not express how he feels about his work and does his job primarily to make a living.

The "Submit"-button will show in 30 seconds.

5.5.1.4 Measures and Validity Assessment

Manipulation Checks. The effectiveness of the FLE behavior manipulation (inspired, satisfied, neutral) was measured with three items. Participants were asked to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale the degree to which they (1) had the impression that the FLE felt inspired by their work; (2) were satisfied with meeting your service expectations; and (3) had a neutral attitude toward their work (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Following Wagner and Rudolph (2010) the effectiveness of the customer shopping motivation manipulation was measured with two items from the idea shopping motivation scale, which were combined to form a composite index (i.e., “I wanted to get new ideas”; “I wanted to discover products that are new to me”).

Dependent Variables. After exposure to the stimulus conditions, the constructs of the conceptual framework were assessed with established scales. Specifically, (1) The 10-item customer inspiration scale from Böttger et al. (2017) was slightly modified to fit the service context. (2) Customer loyalty intentions were measured with a 5-item scale developed by Zeithaml et al. (1996). This scale has been commonly used in the service and retailing literature (e.g., Srinivasan et al., 2002). (3) Customer impulsive buying was measured utilizing a 3-item scale from Rook and Fisher (1995). (4) Customer service satisfaction was measured employing the 4-item service satisfaction scale adopted by K. L. Wang and Groth (2014) based on Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006) and Gremler and Gwinner (2000). (5) Customer spending was measured by asking participants how much they would spend in US\$ on a birthday dinner for their three closest friends (Böttger et al., 2017). Because the distribution of the customer purchase intentions scores is skewed, the scores were log-transformed. Log transformation of the cus-

customer purchase intentions variable ensures the stability of the effect of customer inspiration on customer purchases since the logarithm is less affected by outliers (Gao et al., 2020). (6) Quality of customer interaction was measured with a 4-item scale developed by Homburg and Stock (2004). Customer inspiration, customer loyalty intentions, customer impulsive buying, were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, anchored at 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Participants rated the quality of customer interaction relative to other retailers on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *much worse* to 7 = *much better*. Table 5-1 provides an overview of the latent constructs used in this study and their validity and reliability statistics.

Control Variables. Gender, age, educational attainment, household income (Böttger et al., 2017), and gender congruity were included as control variables. Gender congruity between the customer and the FLE was controlled by setting up a dummy variable (Mattila & Enz, 2002) because the gender of the FLE has been shown to influence customers' perceptions of service quality (Fischer et al., 1997). Two versions of the experimental conditions were designed. In one condition, the participants had to imagine interacting with a female FLE, while in the other condition, participants had to imagine interacting with a male FLE. Participants were assigned to two scenarios randomly, such that 50% of all participants were assigned to a scenario with a female FLE, while the remaining 50% were assigned to a scenario with a male FLE.

Validity Assessment. To assess the convergent and discriminant validities of the latent constructs, a CFA model, including customer inspiration, customer impulsive buying, customer loyalty intentions, service satisfaction, and quality of customer interaction, was estimated using SPSS 26.0. The model exhibited an acceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 744.33$; $df = 263$; CFI = .97; SRMR = .02; RMSEA = .07). The factor loadings, Cronbach's α , composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded their well-established limits, supporting the convergent validity of all measurement scales (see Table 5-1).

Table 5-1:
Constructs Used in Study 8 – Construct Validity and Reliability Statistics

Constructs and Items	Factor load-ings
Customer Inspiration	
Based on the service interaction, you have just imagined, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.	
Inspired-by ($\alpha = .96$, AVE = .88; CR = .94)	
The service employee I interacted with stimulated my imagination.	.83
I was intrigued by a new idea the service employee suggested to me.	.94
Interacting with the service employee, I unexpectedly and spontaneously got new ideas.	.92
My horizon was broadened by interacting with the service employee.	.95
When interacting with the service employee, I discovered something new.	.92
Inspired-to ($\alpha = .97$, AVE = .89; CR = .95)	
I felt an urge to buy something.	.93
I felt a desire to buy something.	.95
My interest in buying something was increased.	.94
I was inspired to buy something.	.95
I was motivated to buy something.	.94
Service Satisfaction ($\alpha = .97$, AVE = .90; CR = .96)	
Based on the service interaction, you have just imagined, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.	
I was delighted with this service experience.	.94
I liked this service experience.	.96
I did the right thing by interacting with this service employee for my service needs.	.89
Based on the service experience I imagined, I am satisfied with the service this retailer	.93
Quality of customer interaction ($\alpha = .95$, AVE = .87; CR=.96)	
Relative to other retailers, please evaluate the imagined service interaction with respect to	
... the service employee's customer orientation.	.94
... the service employee's flexibility in dealing with customers.	.94
... the service employee's openness in providing information to customers.	.93
... the service employee's openness to suggestions from customers.	.90
Customer Loyalty Intentions ($\alpha = .97$, AVE = .90; CR = .97)	
Based on the shopping experience you just imagined, how likely would you ...	
Say positive things about this store to other people?	.96
Recommend this store to someone who seeks your advice?	.97
Consider this store your first choice to buy groceries?	.90
Do more business with this store in the next few years?	.94
Encourage friends and relatives to do business with this store?	.96
Customer Impulsive Buying ($\alpha = .94$, AVE = .85; CR = .94)	
Based on the service interaction, you have just imagined, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.	
I would buy specialty food on the spur of the moment.	.93
I would buy specialty food spontaneously.	.98
I would buy specialty food without thinking.	.85
Customer Spending	
You previously imagined that you would invite your 3 best friends to your dinner party.	
How much would you spend on your dinner party in this specialty food store?	NA

Source: Author's illustration. Note: AVE = Average variance extracted ; CR = composite reliability.

5.5.1.5 Analysis Strategy

First, manipulation checks were conducted to ensure the validity of the scenarios used in the experimental design (Section 5.5.2.1). Second, the differences between the

experimental groups were analyzed using a two-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), controlling for gender, income, education, age, and gender incongruity (Section 5.5.2.2). Third, hypotheses were tested with the ordinary least square regression method using the SPSS macro PROCESS Version 2.15 (Section 5.5.2.3; Hayes & Preacher, 2014). Following Hayes and Preacher (2014) and established service research (Becker et al., 2020), the FLE behavior condition (inspired, satisfied, neutral) was integrated into the model as the multi-categorical independent variable. Customer idea shopping motivation (high vs. low) served as a multi-categorical moderator variable (Hayes & Preacher, 2014). Dependent variables included (1) customer inspiration, (2) customer loyalty intentions, (3) customer impulsive buying, (4) customer service satisfaction, (5) customer spending, and (6) quality of customer interaction.

5.5.2 Results

5.5.2.1 Manipulation Checks and Realism Checks

The FLE behavior manipulation and the customer shopping motivation manipulation worked as intended. First, the manipulation check indicated that the shopping idea motivation manipulation was successful. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that participants in the idea shopping motivation conditions indicated a significantly higher level of idea shopping ($M = 5.99$) compared to those in the low idea shopping condition ($M = 4.00$; $F(1, 341) = 153.79, p < .001$).

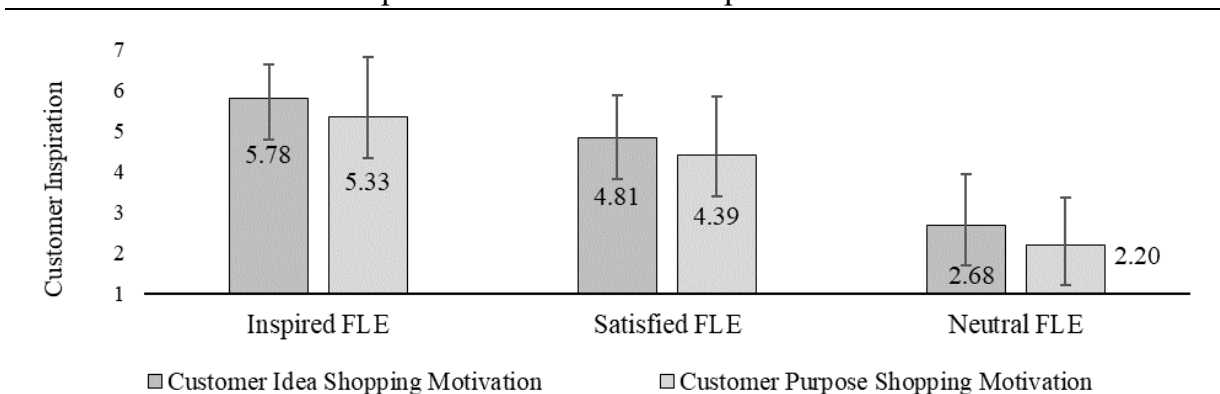
Second, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that the FLE behavior manipulation was successful. Participants in the inspired FLE condition ($M = 6.06$) perceived the FLE to be significantly more inspired compared to participants in the satisfied FLE condition ($M = 4.45$) and in the neutral FLE condition ($M = 1.77$; $F(2, 339) = 282.38, p < .001$). Participants in the satisfied FLE condition ($M = 5.55$) indicated that they perceived the FLE to be significantly more satisfied compared to participants in the inspired FLE condition ($M = 4.46$) and the neutral FLE condition ($M = 4.04$; $F(2, 339) = 20.32, p < .001$). Participants in the neutral FLE condition ($M = 5.48$) indicated that they perceived the FLE to be significantly more neutral compared to participants in the inspired ($M = 2.50$) or satisfied ($M = 3.87$; $F(2, 339) = 84.45, p < .001$) FLE conditions. Furthermore, the realism of the scenarios was assessed on a 7-point Likert-type scale. The mean of the realism check was 5.30 (on a scale of 1 = *very unrealistic* to 7 = *very realistic*), exceeding comparable values found in related research (e.g., Garnefeld et al., 2010) and signifying that participants found the described scenarios realistic.

5.5.2.2 Analysis of Covariance

A separate set of 3 x 2 ANCOVAs was run to test the differences between the experimental groups in the dependent variables. Dependent variables included (a) inspired-by, (b) inspired-to, (c) customer loyalty intentions, (d) customer impulsive buying, (e) service satisfaction, and (f) customer service interaction quality. The analysis controlled for participants' age, gender, income, and gender congruity.

Effects of Frontline Employee Inspiration on Customer Inspiration. A 3 (FLE behavior: inspired vs. satisfied vs. neutral) x 2 (idea shopping motivation: high vs. low) analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to analyze the core link between FLE inspiration and customer inspiration, controlling for the effects of participants' age, education, income, and gender congruity. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of the FLE condition ($F(2, 342) = 191.38, p < .001$). The interaction effect between the employee condition and customer shopping motivation was not significant ($F(2, 342) = .006, p = .994$). The effect of the control variables did not reach statistical significance. To interpret these results, an LSD test was conducted. As predicted, participants in the inspired FLE condition experienced significantly higher levels of customer inspiration ($M = 5.56$) compared to participants in the satisfied FLE condition ($M = 4.60$) and participants in the neutral FLE condition ($M = 2.45; F(2, 336) = 191.38; p < .001$). Figure 5-8 illustrates the customer inspiration scores for each experimental condition.

Figure 5-8:
Customer Inspiration Scores in the Experimental Conditions



Source: Author's illustration.

Furthermore, participants exposed to the inspired FLE scored significantly higher on customer inspiration in the high idea shopping motivation condition ($M = 5.78$) compared to the low idea shopping motivation condition ($M = 5.33; F(1, 113) = 6.59; p < .05$). Table 5-2 offers an overview of the mean scores for each customer variable across experimental conditions.

Table 5-2:
Mean Scores in Experimental Conditions

		Experimental Condition											
		High Idea Shopping Motivation						Low Idea Shopping Motivation					
		Inspired FLE (n = 60)		Satisfied FLE (n = 60)		Neutral FLE (n = 56)		Inspired FLE (n = 55)		Satisfied FLE (n = 56)		Neutral FLE (n = 55)	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Customer Inspira-		5.78	0.83	4.81	1.27	2.70	1.46	5.33	1.04	4.39	1.46	2.20	1.17
	Inspired-by	5.86	1.11	4.71	1.55	2.71	1.17	5.33	0.84	4.01	1.37	2.13	1.41
	Inspired-to	5.70	1.07	4.91	1.28	2.68	1.60	5.33	1.16	4.77	1.58	2.27	1.36
Service Satisfac-		6.28	1.22	5.33	1.34	2.85	1.43	5.65	0.91	5.33	1.25	2.83	1.50
	Interaction Quality	6.13	0.78	5.00	1.15	3.08	1.42	5.80	0.98	5.07	1.30	3.14	1.30
	Customer Loyalty	6.09	0.81	5.27	1.29	2.95	1.58	5.82	1.04	5.30	1.34	2.93	1.55
	Impulsive Buying	4.61	1.41	4.23	1.48	3.39	1.64	4.62	1.74	3.79	1.37	2.71	1.55

Source: Author's illustration. Customer loyalty and impulsive buying refer to intentions.

5.5.2.3 Hypothesis Testing

To test the hypotheses, I ran a series of multi-categorical ordinary least square regressions using the SPSS macro PROCESS Version 2.15 (Hayes, 2017). In my analyses, the FLE behavior condition (inspired, satisfied, neutral) served as the independent multi-categorical variable (Hayes, 2017). To include multi-categorical variables in a model, they needed to be recoded as dummy variables. Note that simple regression models (without multi-categorical independent variables) were not suitable because they assume that the independent variable is continuous or dichotomous (H. B. Pugh et al., 2018). Accordingly, two dummy variables for FLE behavior were specified (Cohen et al., 2013; Hayes & Preacher, 2014) following prior experimental service research (Uhrich et al., 2013; Wentzel et al., 2010). The dummy variable $D_{\text{ins-neu}}$ compared the inspired FLE condition to the neutral FLE condition and sought to quantify the effect of being in the inspired FLE condition *relative* to being in the neutral FLE condition. The dummy variable $D_{\text{ins-sat}}$ compared the inspired FLE condition to the satisfied FLE condition and referred to the difference between FLE inspiration and FLE satisfaction.

Separate regression analyses were performed for each of the five dependent variables (i.e., customer inspiration, customer loyalty intentions, customer impulsive buying, customer service satisfaction, customer purchase intentions, quality of customer interaction measures). Four control variables representing participants' level of education, age, income, and gender were also included in the regression models. Note that plots of

residuals for all three equations indicated no outliers, and a normal probability plot suggested no violation of the normality assumption (Kline, 2010). All coefficients in the subsequent regression analyses were unstandardized.

H11 and H12: It was hypothesized that FLE inspiration would affect customers' inspiration more strongly (H11) compared to FLE satisfaction, and shopping motivation would moderate this effect (H12). A model linking the FLE condition (dummy variable) with customer inspiration (DV), moderated by customer shopping motivation (dummy variable), was estimated to examine these hypotheses (SPSS PROCESS Macro: Model 1; 5000 bootstrapped samples). The results revealed that FLE inspiration, compared to neutral FLE behavior, significantly predicts customer inspiration ($b_{\text{ins-neu}} = 3.13, SE = .16, p < .001$). Moreover, compared to FLE satisfaction, FLE inspiration significantly predicted customer inspiration ($b_{\text{ins-sat}} = .96, SE = .16, p < .001$). The coefficient $b_{\text{ins-neu}}$ represents the mean difference in perceived customer inspiration between participants in the inspired FLE condition and participants in the neutral FLE condition. Specifically, participants exposed to an inspired FLE condition scored on average 3.13 units higher on the customer inspiration scale compared to participants in the neutral FLE condition. Similarly, the coefficient $b_{\text{ins-sat}}$ denotes the mean difference in perceived customer inspiration between participants in the inspired FLE condition and participants in the satisfied FLE condition. Participants exposed to an inspired FLE felt significantly more inspired (on average .96 units more) compared to participants in the FLE satisfaction condition. Therefore, H11 was confirmed. The two interaction effects ($D_{\text{ins-neu}}/D_{\text{ins-sat}}$ interacting with customer shopping motivation) were not statistically significant ($p > .90$), disconfirming H12.

H13a: Frontline Employee Inspiration → Customer Inspiration → Impulsive Buying. Hayes PROCESS Model 4 with 5000 bootstrapped samples (Hayes, 2017) was used to test customer inspiration as a mediator between FLE behavior (multi-categorical IV) and impulsive buying (DV). FLE inspiration significantly increased customer inspiration ($b_{\text{ins-neu}} = 3.13, SE = .16, p < .001$; $b_{\text{ins-sat}} = .96, SE = .16, p < .001$), which in turn positively affected impulsive buying ($b = .60, SE = 0.06, p < .001$). The indirect effect of FLE inspiration (relative to neutral FLE) on impulsive buying through customer inspiration was significant ($b_{\text{ins-sat}} = .58$; $BootSE = 0.11$; 95% confidence interval [CI] = [.369, .813]). Likewise, the indirect effect of FLE inspiration (relative to FLE satisfaction) on impulsive buying through customer inspiration was significant ($b_{\text{ins-sat}} = 1.89$; $BootSE = 0.20$; 95% [CI] = [1.48, 2.30]). The data supported the mediating effect of customer inspiration (H13a), as the 95% confidence intervals excluded zero

(Iacobucci et al., 2007). The direct effects of FLE inspiration ($D_{\text{ins-neu}}$; $D_{\text{ins-sat}}$) on customer impulsive buying were not statistically significant ($p > .20$). These results indicated full mediation because the path from FLE inspiration to impulsive buying was insignificant, while the indirect path through customer inspiration was significant (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Thus, H13a was confirmed.

H13b: Frontline Employee Inspiration → Customer Inspiration → Customer Purchase Intentions. The analysis followed the same procedure as that used to test H13b. FLE inspiration significantly increased customer inspiration ($b_{\text{ins-neu}} = 3.13$, $SE = .16$, $p < .001$; $b_{\text{ins-sat}} = .96$, $SE = .16$, $p < .001$), which in turn positively affected customer purchase intentions ($b = .07$, $SE = .01$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of FLE inspiration on customer purchase intentions through customer inspiration was significant for both dummy variables (inspired FLE vs. neutral FLE: $b_{\text{ins-neu}} = .23$; $BootSE = .06$; 95% [CI] = [-.244, -.012]; inspired FLE vs. satisfied FLE: $b_{\text{ins-sat}} = .07$; $BootSE = .017$; 95% confidence interval [CI] = [.040, .108]). The data supported the mediating effect of customer inspiration, as the 95% confidence intervals excluded zero (Iacobucci et al., 2007), confirming H13b. Furthermore, FLE inspiration had a significant negative direct effect on customer purchase intentions ($D_{\text{ins-neu}}$: $b_{\text{ins-neu}} = -.13$, $SE = .06$, $p < .05$; 95% [CI] = [-.244, -.012]; $D_{\text{ins-sat}}$: $b_{\text{ins-sat}} = -.10$, $SE = .04$, $p < .05$; 95% [CI] = [-.188, -.021]). Overall, these results indicate “inconsistent mediation,” where the mediator customer inspiration suppressed the relationship between FLE inspiration and customer purchase intentions. In other words, the indirect effect via customer inspiration was positive, while the direct effect of FLE inspiration on customer purchase intentions was negative (MacKinnon et al., 2000; MacKinnon et al., 2007).

H13c: Frontline Employee Inspiration → Customer Inspiration → Customer Service Satisfaction. FLE inspiration significantly increased customer inspiration ($b_{\text{ins-neu}} = 3.13$, $SE = .16$, $p < .001$; $b_{\text{ins-sat}} = .96$, $SE = .16$, $p < .001$), which in turn positively affected customer service satisfaction ($b = .77$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of FLE inspiration on customer service satisfaction through customer inspiration was significant for both dummy variables (inspired FLE vs. neutral FLE: $b_{\text{ins-neu}} = 2.41$; $BootSE = 0.7$; 95% [CI] = [2.09, 2.75]; inspired FLE vs. satisfied FLE: $b_{\text{ins-sat}} = .73$; $BootSE = 0.13$; 95% confidence interval [CI] = [.492, .994]). The data supported customer inspiration as a mediator (H13c), as the 95% confidence intervals excluded zero (Iacobucci et al., 2007). The direct effect of FLE inspiration, compared to neutral FLE behavior ($D_{\text{ins-neu}}$), on customer service satisfaction was significant ($b_{\text{ins-neu}} = .74$, $SE = 0.16$, $p < .001$; 95% [CI] = [.412, 1.071]). The direct effect of FLE inspiration, compared to FLE satisfaction ($D_{\text{ins-sat}}$), on customer service satisfaction did not

reach statistical significance ($p > .40$). These results supported full mediation for $D_{\text{ins-sat}}$ because the direct path from FLE inspiration to customer service satisfaction was insignificant, while the indirect path through customer inspiration was significant. In the case of $D_{\text{ins-neu}}$, the results indicated partial mediation because both the indirect and the direct paths were significant (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

H13d: Frontline Employee Inspiration → Customer Inspiration → Customer Loyalty Intentions. FLE inspiration significantly increased customer inspiration ($b_{\text{ins-neu}} = 3.13, SE = .16, p < .001$; $b_{\text{ins-sat}} = .96, SE = .16, p < .001$), which, in turn, positively affects customer loyalty intentions ($b = .73, SE = 0.04, p < .001$). The indirect effect of FLE inspiration on customer loyalty, mediated by customer inspiration, was significant for both dummy variables (inspired FLE vs. neutral FLE: $b_{\text{ins-neu}} = 2.29$; $BootSE = 0.18$; 95% [CI] = [1.92, 2.65]; inspired FLE vs. satisfied FLE: $b_{\text{ins-sat}} = .70$; $BootSE = 0.12$; 95% confidence interval [CI] = [.464, .953]). The data supported customer inspiration as a mediator (H13d), as the 95% confidence intervals excluded zero (Iacobucci et al., 2007). The direct effects of FLE inspiration ($D_{\text{ins-neu}}$; $D_{\text{ins-sat}}$) on customer loyalty intentions were not statistically significant ($p > .20$). These results indicated full mediation because the path from FLE inspiration to customer loyalty intentions was insignificant, while the indirect path through customer inspiration was significant (Baron & Kenny, 1986), confirming H13d.

H14: Frontline Employee Inspiration → Quality of Customer Interaction. FLE inspiration had a positive direct effect on customer interaction quality ($D_{\text{ins-neu}}$: $b_{\text{ins-neu}} = .82, SE = 0.16, p < .001$; 95% [CI] = [.500, 1.137]; $D_{\text{ins-sat}}$: $b_{\text{ins-sat}} = .32, SE = 0.12, p < .05$; 95% [CI] = [.086, .547]), confirming H14. Although not formally hypothesized, further analysis revealed an indirect effect of frontline employee inspiration on the quality of customer interaction, mediated by customer inspiration ($b_{\text{ins-neu}} = 2.29$; $BootSE = 0.18$; 95% [CI] = [1.92, 2.65]); inspired employee vs. satisfied employee: $b_{\text{ins-neu}} = .63$; $BootSE = 0.13$; 95% confidence interval [CI] = [.406, .860]). These results indicated partial mediation because both the indirect effect through customer inspiration and the direct effect were significant (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Table 5-3 summarizes all estimated path coefficients for direct and indirect effects for both dummy variables.

Table 5-3:
Estimated Path Coefficients (Unstandardized)

Direct Effects	Tested Hypothesis	Path Coefficient
$D_{ins-neu} \rightarrow$ customer inspiration		3.13***
$D_{ins-sat} \rightarrow$ customer inspiration	H11: ✓	.96***
$D_{ins-neu} \rightarrow$ impulsive buying		-.31
$D_{ins-sat} \rightarrow$ impulsive buying		-.02
$D_{ins-neu} \rightarrow$ customer purchase intentions		-.13*
$D_{ins-sat} \rightarrow$ customer purchase intentions		-.10*
$D_{ins-neu} \rightarrow$ customer service satisfaction		.74***
$D_{ins-sat} \rightarrow$ customer service satisfaction		.09
$D_{ins-neu} \rightarrow$ customer loyalty intentions		.04
$D_{ins-sat} \rightarrow$ customer loyalty intentions		.02
$D_{ins-neu} \rightarrow$ quality of customer interaction		.82***
$D_{ins-sat} \rightarrow$ quality of customer interaction	H14: ✓	.32***
Customer inspiration $\rightarrow$ customer impulsive buying		.60***
Customer inspiration $\rightarrow$ customer purchase intentions		.07***
Customer inspiration $\rightarrow$ customer service satisfaction		.77***
Customer inspiration $\rightarrow$ customer loyalty intentions		.73***
Customer inspiration $\rightarrow$ quality of customer interaction		.65***
Indirect Effects		
$D_{ins-neu} \rightarrow$ customer inspiration $\rightarrow$ customer impulsive buying		1.89***
$D_{ins-sat} \rightarrow$ customer inspiration $\rightarrow$ customer impulsive buying	H13a: ✓	.58***
$D_{ins-neu} \rightarrow$ customer inspiration $\rightarrow$ customer purchase intentions		.23***
$D_{ins-sat} \rightarrow$ customer inspiration $\rightarrow$ customer purchase intentions	H13b: ✓	.07***
$D_{ins-neu} \rightarrow$ customer inspiration $\rightarrow$ customer service satisfaction		2.41***
$D_{ins-sat} \rightarrow$ customer inspiration $\rightarrow$ customer service satisfaction	H13c: ✓	.74***
$D_{ins-neu} \rightarrow$ customer inspiration $\rightarrow$ customer loyalty intentions		2.29***
$D_{ins-sat} \rightarrow$ customer inspiration $\rightarrow$ customer loyalty intentions	H13d: ✓	.70***
$D_{ins-neu} \rightarrow$ customer inspiration $\rightarrow$ quality of customer interaction		2.29***
$D_{ins-sat} \rightarrow$ customer inspiration $\rightarrow$ quality of customer interaction		.63***
Moderating Effects		
Customer idea shopping motivation x $D_{ins-neu} \rightarrow$ customer inspiration		-.02
Customer idea shopping motivation x $D_{ins-sat} \rightarrow$ customer inspiration	H2: not supported	.03

Source: Author's illustration. Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

5.6 Discussion and Implications

5.6.1 Theoretical Implications

The retail industry has shifted its focus from product to customer experience as the main source of competitive advantage, providing a strong reason for investigating FLE inspiration in service interactions. The objective of Study 8 was to examine whether and how FLE inspiration affects customer outcomes during service interactions using a scenario-based experiment. Although numerous prior investigations have demonstrated

the link between FLE satisfaction and customer satisfaction (e.g., Evanschitzky, Sharma et al., 2012; Homburg & Stock, 2004), the existing studies have neglected to consider the existence of a potential link between FLE inspiration and customer inspiration. Therefore, one of the core objectives was to show whether FLE inspiration predicts desirable customer outcomes beyond the predictive power of FLE satisfaction or “neutral” FLE behavior. Overall, this study demonstrated that FLE inspiration has an important influence on customer inspiration and downstream customer-level outcomes. First, FLE inspiration indirectly affected customer loyalty intentions, customer purchase intentions, customer impulsive buying, quality of customer interaction, and service satisfaction through the mediating construct of customer inspiration. Second, FLE inspiration had a direct, positive effect on the quality of customer interaction and customer service satisfaction, and a direct negative effect on customer purchase intentions.

The results support the hypothesized employee–customer inspiration linkage. Customers interacting with an inspired FLE exhibited higher levels of customer inspiration compared to customers who interacted with merely satisfied or emotionally neutral FLE. Participants exposed to an inspired FLE scored on average 3.13 units higher on the customer inspiration scale compared to those in the neutral FLE condition and .96 units higher compared to those in the satisfied FLE condition. The results do not offer empirical support for the hypothesized moderation effect of customer idea shopping motivation on the relationship between FLE inspiration and customer inspiration (H12). This result implies that customer idea shopping motivation did not amplify the effect of inspired FLEs on customer inspiration. Customers in the low idea shopping motivation condition were just as likely to become inspired by an inspired FLE as those in the high idea shopping motivation condition. These results are inconsistent with past research on customer inspiration that reported a marginally significant moderating effect ($p = .08$) of customer idea shopping motivation on the link between the source of inspiration customer inspiration (Böttger et al., 2017). One reason for this inconsistency may be that Study 8 investigated inspiration contagion between FLEs and customers during service interactions, whereas Böttger et al. (2017) studied the effects of an inspiring source (recipes) on customer inspiration in an online grocery shop setting. It appears that even though customers high in idea shopping may be more open to inspirational content (Böttger et al., 2017), this hypothesis may not hold for inspiration contagion from FLEs to customers. Therefore, future research needs to investigate additional variables that may influence the effect of FLE inspiration on customer inspiration, such as customer empathy (i.e., customers’ ability to take the employee’s perspective, see Wieseke, Geigenmüller et al., 2012) or customers’ liking of the FLE (Nicholson et al., 2001).

Furthermore, customer inspiration mediated the effect of FLE inspiration on impulsive buying, customer purchase intentions, customer loyalty intentions, service satisfaction, and service interaction quality. This finding verified customer inspiration as an important underlying psychological mechanism linking FLE inspiration to customer outcomes. A further implication is that FLE inspiration effectively enhances customer outcomes if the customer becomes inspired and cognitively processes the inspiring service experience. In other words, a source in one's environment may inspire an FLE; however, the FLE's inspiring effect on customer outcomes depends on the FLE's ability to transmit her/his consumption-related idea to the customer during a service interaction. From a theoretical perspective, these findings contribute to service research by establishing FLE inspiration as an important antecedent of successful service interactions and customer outcomes.

This interpretation is further supported by a negative direct effect of FLE inspiration on customer purchase intentions and a positive indirect effect of FLE inspiration on customer purchase intentions via customer inspiration (inconsistent mediation) found in this study. If an inspired FLE tries to inspire a customer during service interaction with a consumption-related idea but does not effectively "reach" the customer, the customer may feel overwhelmed by the FLE's product suggestions and discouraged to buy products. This finding should be discussed against the background of prior findings on writer–reader inspiration contagion (Thrash et al., 2017). Thrash et al. (2017) showed that writer inspiration has both positive and negative indirect effects on reader inspiration, indicating inconsistent mediation. Precisely, the authors found that writer inspiration positively predicted four poem characteristics, insightfulness, pleasantness, originality, and sublimity (see writer–reader inspiration contagion model in Chapter 5; Section 5.3). Insightfulness and pleasantness of poems, in turn, positively predicted reader inspiration. However, original and sublime poems had a negative effect on reader inspiration. Thrash et al. (2017) argued that original and sublime texts suppress writer–reader inspiration contagion because they may overwhelm the reader, elude her/his comprehension, and produce discomfort. Therefore, the reader may not internalize the new ideas that the writer seeks to transmit through the poem. The authors concluded that "inspiration is infectious due to the insightfulness and not the originality of inspired writing; indeed, the originality of inspired writing suppressed contagion" (Thrash et al., 2017; p. 475). Considering these prior findings, it is plausible to assume that the effect of FLE inspiration on customer inspiration and customer-related outcomes depends on FLE characteristics, including customer-perceived FLE competence (Rapp et al., 2016) and FLE authenticity (Mattila & Enz, 2002), as perceived by the customer. In other words,

although an inspired FLE may present new service solutions to customers to ideally inspire them, these solutions may also confuse customers with certain preconceived beliefs that are inconsistent with new solutions and thereby cause discomfort. Further service research is needed to identify customer-perceived FLE characteristics that may enhance the positive effects of FLE inspiration on customers' spending behavior.

5.6.2 Managerial Implications

The findings presented in this chapter have important managerial implications, especially for so-called channel retailers, which seek strategic positioning via service (Rudolph, 2000). FLEs play a crucial role in boosting channel retailers' promise to deliver a high-quality service to customers. If channel retailers manage to inspire their FLEs instead of merely satisfying them, they will build long-term customer–employee relationships because FLE inspiration contributes to customer loyalty intentions and enhances customers' perceptions of the FLE as customer-oriented (Hennig-Thurau & Hansen, 2000). More specifically, the results indicate that inspired FLEs are perceived as customer-oriented, flexible, open to customer suggestions during service interaction and, thereby, contribute to customers' perceived service quality. FLE inspiration may substantially contribute to building and maintaining (channel) retailers' competitive advantage by enhancing service interaction quality.

The results show that customer inspiration mediated the effect of FLE inspiration on customer outcomes. Concerning customer purchase intentions, I found a negative direct effect of FLE inspiration on customer purchase intentions and an indirect positive effect of FLE inspiration on customer purchase intentions via customer inspiration. Practitioners need to realize that it is not enough to inspire FLEs. If an inspired FLE tries to inspire a customer during service interaction with a consumption-related idea but does not effectively “reach” the customer, the customer may feel overwhelmed by the FLE's product suggestions and avoid buying products. Instead, practitioners need to enable FLEs to transmit their inspiration to customers. Firms may, for example, provide FLEs with training to sensitize them to customer needs, enhance their ability to read their customers' needs and provide the exact service the customer wants (Delcourt et al., 2016; Lages & Piercy, 2012). Wieseke, Geigenmüller et al. (2012) stress the importance of providing training opportunities to help FLEs develop skills to sense customer needs. Such training may enable FLEs to identify situations when customers are open to new ideas and react favorably to inspiring ideas from FLEs.

Furthermore, the findings imply that retail and service managers should invest in inspiring their FLEs rather than merely satisfying them. Inspired FLEs, in comparison

to satisfied ones, can elicit higher levels of customer inspiration, which, in turn, leads to higher impulsive buying, customer purchase intentions, customer service satisfaction, and customer loyalty intentions. For managers, this finding implies that FLE inspiration is an important lever to increase customer inspiration and important customer variables (e.g., loyalty intentions and purchase intentions). An important implication is that focusing marketing efforts directly on customers is insufficient to influence customer outcomes positively. This dissertation highlights the importance of extending the focus of inspiration measures beyond the customer perspective. Traditionally, firms' marketing departments deal with customer communication campaigns. However, this dissertation emphasizes the close relationship between marketing and human resource management of retail firms. If retailers want to leverage their full potential to inspire customers, they should not view customer inspiration in isolation from FLE inspiration; rather, they need to view FLE inspiration as an essential determinant of customer outcomes at the point of sale.

6 Synthesis and Contributions

6.1 Summary of Research Questions and Findings

The results of the different studies respond to the five research questions. The findings contribute to the existing research on frontline employees (FLEs), service research, and employee–customer linkage research.

Research Question 1:

How can frontline employee inspiration be conceptualized?

From a broader perspective, frontline employee (FLE) inspiration is a psychological mechanism, which explains how inspiring stimuli in the FLE's environment affect the FLEs' behaviors and attitudes. From a narrower perspective, FLE inspiration is conceptualized as a temporary, intrinsic motivational state during which FLEs spontaneously gain new, epistemic insights (directly or through intrapsychic processes) from within (e.g., a customer, the company's products) or outside the workplace (e.g., a friend's idea) (i.e., inspired-by) and feel compelled to actualize or express these epistemic insights at work (inspired-to). Epistemic insights/ideas provide illuminating, compelling, and eye-opening content to FLEs, and may thus trigger the inspired-by state. FLEs experience inspiration with all of its three core characteristics (evocation, transcendence, and approach motivation), which is consistent with the tripartite conceptualization of inspiration in social psychology (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). In line with the process model of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2004), I found that FLE inspiration comprises two processes: an inspired-by process which describes the FLE's process of receiving a new insight from a source and an inspired-to process which describes the motivation to actualize this new insight in the workplace in a way that contributes to the organization's success. Commensurate with this conceptualization is that FLE inspiration motivates the pursuit of work-related goals, which is in contrast with customer inspiration that motivates the pursuit of consumption-related goals (Böttger et al., 2017) and inspiration in daily life that is concerned mostly with pursuing personal goals, such as personal achievement or creativity (Thrash & Elliot, 2004).

While FLE inspiration is conceptualized as a temporary state, which may vary across time, it has the power to influence FLEs' long-term intrinsic motivation, work-related attitudes (e.g., satisfaction), and work-related behaviors (e.g., creativity). Being

a two-dimensional epistemic-motivational state, FLE inspiration conceptually differs from FLE personality traits (curiosity, openness), FLE attitudes (satisfaction), FLE behaviors (proactivity, creativity), and other motivational states experienced by the FLE (psychological empowerment, engagement). Importantly, FLE inspiration conceptually differs from intrinsic motivation, which is a rather permanent drive that guides behavior and depends on the FLE's willpower (Study 1).

The conceptual framework (Study 1) identified three factors that play a crucial role in influencing the occurrence of FLE inspiration: the presence of an inspiring source (e.g., interacting with other members of the workforce; see Chapter 4, Research Question 4), employee characteristics (e.g., FLE openness to experience, FLE curiosity; see Chapter 3, Research Question 3), and, workplace characteristics (team climate, autonomy, task variety, and time pressure; Chapter 2).³³ Concerning the latter, the findings indicated that FLEs who feel overwhelmed with work and perceive high time pressure are less receptive to inspiring sources. FLEs who engage in a wide range of tasks (task variety), rather than routine jobs, and are exposed to multiple sources are more likely to become inspired-by. In the same way, a positive and innovative team climate characterized by exchanging ideas, team cohesion, and purposeful communication provides a nutritious soil for inspiration. Finally, FLEs' perceived autonomy is believed to influence the occurrence of inspiration at work. Heightened levels of autonomy may allow FLEs to try out new ideas and work methods and therefore increase exposure to potentially inspiring sources (Study 1). While inspiration research has not yet investigated situational factors, i.e., contexts that facilitate or hinder the emergence of inspiration (Oleynick et al., 2014), the findings hint at the importance of understanding workplace factors that facilitate or impede FLE inspiration.

In line with previous inspiration research (Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010), the qualitative findings indicate that FLE inspiration assumes an important transmission function. Transmission needs to be understood in mediational terms in that a source (i.e., trigger object) may elicit FLE inspiration (i.e., mediator) which, in turn, motivates transmission of the qualities of the source to a new target object. While sources off- or on-the-job may trigger FLE inspiration, the target objects of the transmission process are tightly bound to the workplace. Although the type of source (e.g., a coworker, a competitor's product, an unactualized idea for service improvement) and the target object (e.g., FLE future self, FLE service interaction, FLE workplace behavior) may vary, all

³³ Note that the workplace characteristics were not addressed in a separate Research Question but were covered as part of Research Question 1.

instances of FLE inspiration involve motivation to extend an intrinsic value found in a source to a *work-related* target object.

Finding 1: FLE inspiration is a spontaneous and subjectively perceived work experience.

Finding 2: FLE inspiration is conceptualized as an epistemic-motivational state, consisting of two processes (inspired-by and inspired-to). The state of FLE inspiration is characterized by three core features, transcendence, evocation, and motivation. These characteristics distinguish FLE inspiration from established work-related constructs (FLE intrinsic motivation, FLE satisfaction, FLE engagement, FLE curiosity, FLE proactivity, and FLE creativity).

Finding 3: An epistemic work-relevant idea (i.e., source) triggers FLE inspiration that leads to the pursuit of a work-related goal. FLE inspiration motivates the transmission (i.e., expression, actualization, or extension) of qualities found in a source to a work-related target object (i.e., FLE future self, future FLE work behavior, FLE service interaction).

Research Question 2:

How can frontline employee inspiration be measured?

FLE inspiration should be measured as a latent second-order construct consisting of two subscales: inspired-by (3 items) and inspired-to (3 items). The inspired-by subscale assesses the FLEs' experience of becoming inspired by a work-relevant source; when inspired-by, the FLE gains awareness of a new insight or idea and cognitively processes it. The inspired-to subscale measures the FLE's impetus to act upon the newly acquired insight or idea by doing her/his job in a new or better way (Studies 2 to 4). The scale builds on the conceptualization of FLE inspiration as consisting of two processes, inspired-by and inspired-to, covered in Chapter 2, and is in line with the general inspiration literature (Böttger et al., 2017; Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004).

The new scale does not specify sources of or outcomes of FLE inspiration; yet, it focuses tightly on the actual state of FLE inspiration. It is relevant to all its manifestations, including the emulation of coworkers or supervisors (i.e., extension), implementation of a new idea about service improvement (i.e., actualization), or state of flow when decorating a shop window (i.e., expression; see section 2.1). By capturing the experience of inspiration across its various manifestations, sources, and outcomes, this scale over-

comes the limitations of the existing scales that have thus far referred to leaders or mission statements as sole sources of inspiration, included only specific outcomes, and/or measured inspiration only as one as part of a larger multi-item scale. The new scale satisfies all criteria for newly developed construct measures—reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and nomological validity (Churchill, 1979). The new domain-specific (i.e., contextualized) FLE inspiration improved predictions of work behaviors (e.g., FLE proactivity and creativity) more than did the domain-general inspiration scale (Thrash & Elliot, 2003) (Study 5). The implication is that the domain-specific FLE inspiration can predict relevant FLE attitudes and behaviors, beyond the predictive power of the domain-general inspiration scale. With only six items, practitioners and academics can use this parsimonious and standardized scale to understand and measure FLE inspiration.

Finding 4: The new FLE inspiration scale is a latent second-order construct with two subscales (inspired-by and inspired-to). It explains variance in FLE proactivity and creativity beyond the predictive power of the domain-general inspiration scale and satisfies all criteria for newly developed construct measures (reliability, construct validity, and nomological validity).

Research Question 3:

How does frontline employee inspiration relate to established employee-centric constructs (FLE traits, behaviors, and attitudes)?

FLE inspiration is embedded in a meaningful network of related antecedents and outcomes. The exploration of the nomological network showed that FLE inspiration mediates the relationship of relevant sources and FLE traits (antecedents) with FLE behavior and job-related attitudes (outcomes). Concerning FLE traits, one finding was that work-related curiosity predicts FLE inspiration. Unlike hypothesized, FLE openness to change was not a significant antecedent of FLE inspiration (Study 5). Concerning outcomes, FLE inspiration was found to predict intrinsic motivation, creativity, satisfaction, engagement, psychological empowerment, and proactivity among FLEs (see Chapter 3, Section 3.6.1, p. 105).

According to Study 5, FLE inspiration explains variance in FLE proactivity and FLE creativity—two highly relevant FLE behaviors in a dynamic market environment—beyond traditional FLE measures, such as FLE satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, psychological empowerment, engagement, and curiosity. Neither FLE satisfaction nor FLE engagement significantly predicted FLE proactivity and creativity (section 3.5.2). FLE

inspiration was significantly related to FLE proactivity and FLE creativity, while FLE satisfaction and FLE engagement were not. This speaks for the relevance of FLE inspiration instead of FLE satisfaction or engagement to elicit FLEs' support for organizational change initiatives.

Finding 5: Work-related curiosity predicted FLE inspiration.

Finding 6: Openness to change did not predict FLE inspiration.

Finding 7: FLE inspiration predicted psychological empowerment, FLE satisfaction, FLE engagement, FLE intrinsic motivation, FLE proactivity, and FLE creativity.

Research Question 4:

What are the sources of frontline employee inspiration?

Within the qualitative research, the sources of FLE inspiration were classified into two categories: non-work-related sources (e.g., friends, social media) and work-related sources (e.g., physical store environment) (Study 1). Concerning work-related sources, four subcategories were identified: customer-related sources (e.g., customer needs, customer ideas), sources related to the physical store (e.g., store atmospherics, product displays), company-related sources (e.g., the products, the brand, company success), and sources related to interacting with other members from the workforce (e.g., coworkers, superiors). Nonwork-related sources are not encountered in the FLE's immediate work environment but are highly relevant to achieving her/his work-related goals (e.g., seeing an inspiring product presentation when browsing on social media in one's spare time). The important finding is that the stimulus milieu of relevant sources is not limited to the FLE's direct work environment but may also emerge from the FLE's private environment. Although these ideas originated from the FLE's off-job experience, they are used to benefit the retailer. Both work-related and non-work-related sources coincide in that they reveal new possibilities to the FLE on how to contribute to organizational goals constructively.

The quantitative analysis corroborated these qualitative findings (Chapter 4). Study 6 revealed six main categories of sources that inspire retail FLEs, including brand- and company-related factors (i.e., company success; company training; products); interpersonal contact with coworkers, supervisors, or leaders; influences from private life (i.e., social media, role models); the FLEs' physical work environment; personal/individual values; and customers. In line with the qualitative findings (Study 1), both quantitative studies emphasized FLEs' personal values as a source of FLE inspiration. The

inspirational effect of personal values was significantly stronger for older FLEs than for younger employees (Studies 6 and 7). FLEs with managerial responsibility, compared to those without managerial responsibility, became more easily inspired by various sources in their environment (Studies 6 and 7). Personal values, the workforce, company-related factors (e.g., the brand, mission statement), and the physical workplace significantly inspired FLEs to implement new ideas at work (inspired-to; Study 7). Furthermore, customers triggered FLE inspiration (inspired-by) but did not significantly affect inspired-to, highlighting the importance of conceptualizing and measuring FLE inspiration as a state consisting of two processes, inspired-by and inspired-to (Study 7). Conceptualizing and measuring FLE inspiration with two subscales allows to identify possible discrepancies between FLEs' inspired-by and inspired-to scores. FLEs who provide more customized services were more strongly inspired by their values and the company's products, services, and mission statement, unlike FLEs who provide more standardized services. Overall, these findings suggest that FLEs perceive the sources of inspiration differently, depending on whether they assume managerial responsibility (Studies 6 and 7), the kind of service they provide (i.e., standardized or customized; Study 7), age (Study 6), and level of customer contact (Studies 6 and 7).

While FLE inspiration may emanate from various sources in the FLE's environment (Studies 6 and 7), the various sources share two important source characteristics (Studies 1 and 5). First, an inspiring source should offer surprising content, disrupting the FLE's previous mental scheme and providing a new perspective. Second, the idea that these sources provide needs to be relevant to FLE goals, providing a novel solution to reaching a goal or solving a problem (Studies 1 and 5).

Finding 8: Work-related sources (e.g., the company's products, the brand, one's coworkers) or non-work-related sources (e.g., personal values, family) may trigger FLE inspiration.

Finding 9: The emergence of FLE inspiration depends on two source characteristics, the surprising content of an idea and its relevance to FLE goals. The more surprising and relevant an idea is for an FLE, the higher the level of FLE inspiration.

Research Question 5:

How does frontline employee inspiration affect customer responses during service interactions?

One of the key objectives of this dissertation was to provide empirical evidence for the proposed employee–customer inspiration linkage. The qualitative findings indicate that FLE inspiration might have positive emotional and inspirational outcomes for customers during service interaction (Study 1). According to Study 1, FLE inspiration may translate into favorable customer outcomes in that FLEs’ inspirational mindset can be contagious and affect how FLEs treat and service customers during service interactions. As FLEs become more inspired, they find their work more meaningful and self-fulfilling and, accordingly, become more dedicated, focused, and engrossed in their jobs. This positive and highly motivated state has the power to carry over to customers who may, in turn, experience positive emotions and be more satisfied with the service experience. Moreover, inspired FLEs may come up with creative ideas, which in turn inspire customers. This inspiration contagion process was quantitatively validated in Chapter 5.

The results from Study 8 show that FLE inspiration has an important effect on service interactions with customers. Inspired FLEs inspire customers significantly more compared to satisfied or emotionally neutral FLEs. Customer inspiration mediates the effect of FLE inspiration on impulsive buying, customer purchase intentions, customer service satisfaction, customer loyalty intentions, and quality of customer interaction (Chapter 5). Customer satisfaction partially mediated the effect of FLE inspiration on customer service satisfaction and on quality of customer interaction. Customer inspiration fully mediated the effect of FLE inspiration on customer impulsive buying and customer loyalty intentions. These findings establish customer inspiration as an important psychological mechanism linking FLE inspiration to customer outcomes. To influence customer outcomes positively, inspired FLEs first need to be able to “reach” customers and successfully inspire them. Chapter 5 (Section 5.6.1) discussed that FLE inspiration had a significant negative direct effect on customer purchase intentions and an indirect positive effect on customer purchase intentions via customer inspiration (inconsistent mediation). If inspired FLEs cannot transport their ideas to customers and awaken their customers’ inspiration, they could appear as overeager during service interactions and eventually demotivate customers from buying items. Chapter 6 (Section 6.3) explores the important practical implications of this finding for practitioners.

Furthermore, inspired FLEs, more so than satisfied or emotionally neutral FLEs, enhance customers' perception of service quality—the degree to which customers perceive the service interaction as open, flexible, and customer-oriented. In other words, customers perceive service interactions with inspired FLEs to be of superior quality compared to service interactions with satisfied or neutral FLEs because inspired FLEs are more open to suggestions from customers, have a high degree of customer orientation, and deal more flexibly with diverse customer needs. Study 8 could not provide evidence for the hypothesized moderating effect of customer idea shopping motivation on the positive relationship between FLE inspiration and customer inspiration (Chapter 5). Overall, the findings pertaining to Research Question 5 indicate that FLE inspiration might affect customer responses in two different ways: indirectly (through the process of inspiration contagion; H13a – H13d) and directly, such that inspired FLEs appear more open, flexible, and customer-oriented and therefore customers perceive the quality of customer interaction to be higher (H14).

Finding 10: FLE inspiration emerged as an important antecedent of customer inspiration.

Finding 11: Customer idea shopping motivation did not significantly moderate the effect of FLE inspiration on customer inspiration.

Finding 12: Compared to satisfied FLEs or neutral FLEs, inspired FLEs influenced customer inspiration, impulsive buying, purchase intentions, customer service satisfaction, and loyalty intentions more strongly.

Finding 13: FLE inspiration directly influenced customers' perceived quality of service interaction.

6.2 Contribution to Research Streams

6.2.1 Contribution to Frontline Employee Literature and Service Research

This dissertation extends the study of inspiration to the FLE context and thereby addresses the call for further research on the understudied topic of FLEs, their behaviors, motivations, and attitudes (Singh et al., 2017). One important contribution of this dissertation to the FLE research and service research is that it theoretically refined the conceptualization of FLE inspiration and empirically validated this measure. Across multiple studies, this dissertation provided evidence for the two-dimensional, second-order construct of FLE inspiration consisting of two first-order constructs, inspired-by and inspired-to. By testing the nomological network of related constructs, this dissertation

establishes FLE inspiration as an important antecedent of various employee variables, e.g., employee engagement (Auh et al., 2014), proactive service behaviors (Wilder et al., 2014), and employee creativity (Coelho & Augusto, 2010), which have commonly been studied in the service literature and FLE-related research.

FLE inspiration is conceptualized as an epistemic-motivational construct, which emerges as a response to epistemic cues and leads to attitudinal and behavioral changes in FLEs. As a new motivational construct, FLE inspiration provides service research with an additional psychological mechanism that explains how FLEs react to new, compelling impulses in their environment. My analysis shows that FLE inspiration uniquely explains variance in FLE behaviors (e.g., creativity, proactivity) beyond the predictive power of various other constructs (psychological empowerment, intrinsic motivation, satisfaction, engagement, and work-related curiosity) that have traditionally been used to explain FLE behaviors. For example, service researchers have tended to focus on FLE intrinsic motivation (Coelho et al., 2011; Shalley et al., 2004), FLE psychological empowerment (Wilder et al., 2014), and contextual factors, such as leader-member exchange (Auh et al., 2019), as antecedents of FLE behaviors. The implication is that future research in this field may draw on FLE inspiration as another motivational variable to explain additional variance in relevant FLE behaviors (Shalley et al., 2004). Thereby, this dissertation contributes to FLE-related research by providing a new epistemic-motivational construct that advances researchers' understanding of how FLEs cognitively process stimuli in their environment. This contribution is important because prior FLE research has focused mainly on FLEs' affective-motivational experiences at work, including positive affect and emotions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006), FLE satisfaction (S. Brown & Lam, 2008), FLE engagement (Menguc et al., 2013) and FLEs behavior (Coelho & Augusto, 2010), that cannot explain how FLEs process a new cue in their environment, shift their mind to new possibilities, and become inspired-by.

Furthermore, this dissertation contributes to the emergent field of transformative service research (L. Anderson & Ostrom, 2015), which centers on creating uplifting changes in the hedonic (i.e., pleasure-oriented) and eudaimonic (i.e., growth-oriented) well-being of FLEs and their customers (L. Anderson et al., 2013). FLEs' well-being is increasingly considered a crucial topic for service researchers and practitioners because enhanced well-being is associated with higher productivity and superior service interactions (Mirabito & Berry, 2015). FLE inspiration uniquely contributes to understanding FLEs' well-being from a eudaimonic perspective because it is inextricably linked to meaning and growth. It provides insight into the process by which FLEs gain self-trans-

cent insights and, in the pursuit of actualizing them, surpass themselves. By introducing FLE inspiration, I also address the call from organizational researchers for constructs that tap onto employees' eudaimonic work experiences. More specifically, organizational researchers have criticized extant employee-related research for its narrow focus on hedonic employee metrics while overlooking the eudaimonic perspective on employees' work experiences. In this vein, Spreitzer et al. (2005) asserted that "the majority of existing research on subjective experiences at work focuses on job satisfaction, which represents a hedonic, or pleasure-based, approach to understanding subjective experience. The focus has been on the experience of pleasure and the absence of pain" (p. 546). Less research, however, has drawn on a eudaimonic approach to understanding FLEs' work experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Spreitzer, 1995). By conceptualizing and empirically investigating FLE inspiration, I clarify how scholars can theorize FLEs' subjective and growth-oriented experiences and substantively contribute to our understanding of why and how FLEs engage in changes.

6.2.2 Contribution to Research on Frontline Employee Motivation

In the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, FLEs are exposed to an even more challenging work situation. Some of them, working in the non-food segment, may have been forced back into the job market. Other FLEs, working in the food and essentials segment, may encounter an even more challenging work environment (e.g., mask requirements, social distancing, exposure to the virus) (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020; Voorhees et al., 2020). This difficult situation has recently led researchers to spotlight FLE motivation as an important research issue to address. Grewal et al. (2021) suggested two pressing questions, "Can retailers motivate frontline employees in a time of crisis? What rewards and forms of recognition should they use?" (p. 11). By establishing FLE inspiration as a new motivational construct, this dissertation contributes to motivation research in marketing and FLE-related research.

FLE inspiration provides a deeper and more complex view of the psychological, motivational mechanisms that drive FLE behaviors and attitudes, which can be found in service research to date. In motivation theory, FLE inspiration offers a complementary approach to understanding the underlying mechanisms that drive FLE behavior, as it expands the focus of motivational researchers beyond pure willpower, effort, and self-determined action (Thrash, 2020). Thus far, most FLE motivation research has focused on self-determination (Cadwallader et al., 2010; Hohenberg & Homburg, 2016) and goal-setting theory (T. Arnold et al., 2009; Fang et al., 2004) as theoretical approaches to explaining FLE motivation. These motivation theories support the idea of personal agency in which FLEs engage in willful action in pursuit of desired incentives, goals,

and outcomes. While self-determination theory and goal-setting theory are built on the premise that FLE behavior depends on being self-determined and actively striving towards goals, they cannot explain how an epistemic idea or insight can inspire FLEs and cause them to see possibilities of which they were previously unaware (Thrash & Elliot, 2004).

FLE inspiration uniquely contributes to researchers' understanding of *how* FLEs come to see a new goal worth achieving and *why* they engage in new workplace behaviors that bring them closer to this goal (Locke & Latham, 1990). Additionally, FLE inspiration expands current self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) by explaining the antecedent process that leads to self-determined action. The inspired-by process explains *why* and *how* FLEs gain awareness of new possibilities that can be pursued through self-determined action. Self-determination may explain why FLEs are intrinsically motivated to act upon newly acquired ideas, but inspiration explains the process through which FLEs gain awareness of new ideas worth pursuing.

6.2.3 Contribution to Employee–Customer Linkage Literature

Service and marketing literature has extensively studied the linkage between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction (Homburg & Stock, 2004; Wangenheim et al., 2007), employee engagement and customer engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2016), and employee affect and customer affect (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006). Empirical research has yet to investigate the link between FLE inspiration, customer inspiration, and further customer-level outcomes (e.g., loyalty). By studying the employee–customer inspiration linkage, this dissertation answers the call in the service research, marketing literature, and service–profit chain literature for testing additional employee-centric and customer-centric constructs (S. Brown & Lam, 2008; Homburg et al., 2009).

As shown in Study 8, FLE inspiration predicts relevant customer-level outcomes beyond the effects of FLE satisfaction. Specifically, the results show a positive indirect effect of FLE inspiration on customer-level outcomes (i.e., purchase intentions, loyalty intentions, service satisfaction) through the mediating construct of customer inspiration. Furthermore, the results reveal a positive direct effect of FLE inspiration on customers' perceived quality of service interaction. Overall, this dissertation makes an important contribution to marketing research and service theory and research because it is the first to empirically demonstrate a positive role of the FLE inspiration construct in inducing customer inspiration, which, in turn, leads to positive customer outcomes. Thus, FLE inspiration, more so than FLE satisfaction, provides an important avenue for enhancing customer outcomes and therefore deserves more attention in future marketing research.

Previous employee–customer linkage literature has focused on motivational constructs (e.g., employee engagement and customer engagement; Kumar & Pansari, 2016), attitudinal constructs (e.g., employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction; Homburg & Stock, 2004), and emotional constructs (e.g., employee affect and customer affect; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006). Thereby, previous literature has neglected the transfer of new, epistemic insights or ideas, for example, service solutions, from FLEs to customers. I contribute to filling this gap by introducing the employee–customer inspiration linkage as an important governing mechanism during service interactions which needs to be considered in future research. It seems clear that the service–profit chain framework (Evanschitzky, Wangenheim et al., 2012) and the emotional contagion framework (S. D. Pugh, 2001), which have been favored in the marketing and service literature thus far, do not sufficiently explain the employee–customer inspiration dyad. In this context, I contribute to the extant theory and research by applying the inspiration contagion model to service interactions, and thereby I explain inspiration spillover from FLEs to customers. The inspiration model is a helpful theoretical extension, which may be used in future studies to explain inspiration contagion between customers and FLEs or between leaders and FLEs.

6.3 Practical Contribution and Step-By-Step Guide

The previous chapter discussed the contributions of this dissertation to the existing research and specific research questions. This chapter synthesizes the findings of this dissertation from a managerial perspective (Section 6.3.1) and provides a step-to-step guide for implementing inspiration measures in companies (Section 6.3.2).

6.3.1 *Implications for Practitioners*

The results of this dissertation have far-reaching implications for retailers and service firms. First, companies should introduce and focus on FLE inspiration as a key metric to leverage FLE performance, support organizational change initiatives, and provide superior service quality to customers. Human resource strategies should aim to inspire FLEs rather than merely satisfy or engage them because investing in FLE inspiration may eventually enhance customer loyalty, service satisfaction, and customer purchase intentions. From a long-term perspective, an increased focus on FLE inspiration contributes to successful long-term service relationships built via inspiration contagion from FLEs to customers. Successfully managing FLE inspiration will thus help retailers enhance the quality of service interactions, eventually contributing to building an inim-

itable competitive advantage (Kumar & Pansari, 2014). Considering that customers' interpersonal relationships with FLEs have a stronger and more enduring effect on customers than a firm's marketing efforts (e.g., social media campaigns) (Palmatier et al., 2007), retailers are well-advised to apply their inspiration measures to not only customers (Böttger et al., 2017) but also FLEs.

Apart from positive outcomes for customers, FLE inspiration uniquely predicted two desirable FLE behaviors, FLE proactivity and FLE creativity. Precisely, FLE inspiration predicted FLE proactivity and creativity beyond the explanatory power of traditional constructs, such as FLE satisfaction or FLE engagement. Proactive and creative FLEs are highly desirable for retailers. The nature of their work allows FLEs to express creativity in many different aspects of their jobs. For example, an inspired FLE in a grocery store can offer useful solutions to address distinct customer needs (such as help customers with dietary problems) or can make creative suggestions to improve the appearance of the shop itself, such as the display of products (Madjar & Ortiz-Walters, 2008). Additionally, proactive FLEs are highly desirable in service and retail companies because they can anticipate problems before customers articulate them and often think of and offer more diverse solutions to address the potential customer needs through service interactions (Wilder et al., 2014). Given the positive outcomes for FLEs and customers, retailers should actively manage FLE inspiration.

Second, the dissertation shows that instead of strengthening leaders' inspirational skills, as commonly advocated by leadership researchers (Bass, 1985), inspiration initiatives should be directed at FLEs to enhance customer outcomes. FLEs draw inspiration from various sources in their immediate work environment, including customers, products, coworkers, and sources in their private environment. This finding implies that retailers need to create a work environment that goes beyond leaders as the primary source of inspiration and instead nourishes a culture of inspiration throughout the company. Influencing FLE inspiration, therefore, requires a largely distinct approach compared with influencing FLE satisfaction. Firms that want to increase FLE satisfaction may follow the widely accepted job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1975) and work on skill variety, task identity, and autonomy. In contrast, strategies aimed at leveraging inspiration need to provide meaningful (i.e., surprising, relevant) sources of inspiration to FLEs to trigger the inspired-by process. Since the results also hint at the possibility that sources encountered off-the-job trigger FLE inspiration (e.g., receiving work-relevant ideas from friends), retailers should create feedback channels or internal platforms through which FLEs can relay their ideas or exchange them with coworkers. Therefore, retailers who seek to inspire their FLEs need to follow a holistic approach to human

resources management, viewing FLEs as individuals who interact with others off and on the job and become inspired by a myriad of objects and persons.

Third, the findings of this dissertation emphasize the importance of personal values in managing FLE inspiration. FLEs' personal values, much more than the company's values and mission statement, play a key role in triggering FLE inspiration (inspired-by) and motivating FLEs to act upon this motivation (inspired-to) (Studies 6 and 7). Two implications can be derived. (1) To build a culture of inspiration, companies should select their job applicants according to their fit with the company values. Since individuals' values are relatively permanent (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998), the value fit assessment should be done during recruitment. Therefore, applicants should be recruited based on the congruence of their values with the corporate values rather than solely on their skills. Indeed, researchers have shown that employees whose values are in line with their company's values are more likely to stay with the company and are more committed in the long term (Moynihan & Pandey, 2008). (2) Companies have yet to capitalize on the large potential of their corporate values to inspire FLEs. To spark inspiration at the company and motivate FLEs to perform beyond their role requirements, companies need to refine and communicate their corporate values to FLEs. Unique, clear, and well-communicated corporate values are extremely important for organizational success in turbulent times because they help employees prioritize objectives, projects, and tasks (Rudolph & Schweizer, 2019; Wilhelm, 1992). Rudolph and Schweizer (2019) highlighted that a company's value proposition, which engrains the company values, needs to be meaningful (i.e., it needs to point out benefits to employees, the customers, and the society at large), unique (i.e., different from that of competitors), focused on clear objectives, understandable to employees, known among employees, and attainable. For example, driven by Amazon's corporate value of "customer obsession" (www.amazon.com), Amazon's support service workers are very customer-oriented. When customer complains about a defective product, they do not hesitate to fully refund their money (Wall, 2019). Thereby, Rudolph and Schweizer's (2019) approach may provide retailers with an initial starting point for designing inspiring company values. Companies need to refine their company values to inspire employees even more in the current COVID-19 pandemic. Amid COVID-19, companies are required to not only respond to their customers' changing preferences, e.g., increased demand for eco-friendly and sustainable products (Statista, 2021) but also understand that their employees are more sensitized to topics such as sustainability, expecting companies to assume more corporate social responsibility

(Korschun et al., 2014). Therefore, companies should consider incorporating (or, if already present, strengthening) the increasingly important corporate social responsibility issues and sustainability into their corporate values.

Fourth, the findings are especially relevant for retailers and service firms to attract and keep committed workers. Millennials, also referred to as Generation Y (born between 1980 and late 1990s), and Generation Z individuals (born after 2000) make up an increasing part of the workforce. Researchers and practitioners alike have argued for a generational gap in work attitudes between these younger workers and older generations (e.g., baby boomers). Related studies have shown that workers from younger generations place less emphasis on work compared to earlier generations and search for more meaning in their working lives (Twenge & Kasser, 2013). Retailers' increased focus on FLE inspiration is uniquely suited to bind workers from the millennial generation to the company and ignite their full commitment to the company because it provides them with a sense of meaning. While competing firms can easily imitate workplace amenities created to satisfy FLEs (e.g., a fair salary, adequate training), they might not be able to imitate an inspiring company culture. In other words, inspiring brand, mission statement, or coworkers play a crucial role in attracting talent, binding FLEs to the company in the long term, and motivating them to invest their energies into their work role. Therefore, companies that instill a sense of purpose in employees and inspire their employees will benefit in the long run.

Fifth, given that FLE inspiration significantly affects customer outcomes, firms should permanently monitor FLE inspiration and fluctuations. The new 6-item scale is a parsimonious measurement tool for managers who wish to assess and improve FLE inspiration. Managers who implement the new scale can capture both the inspired-by and inspired-to states. The precise diagnosis of FLE inspiration at the dimensional level (inspired-by, inspired-to) is necessary to help managers make appropriate decisions about FLE development and training. FLEs, for example, may score high on one dimension (e.g., they feel highly inspired-by) but low on the other (e.g., barely inspired to do their best when interacting with customers), implying that service managers should provide FLEs with an adequate work environment which allows them to act on their inspiring ideas.

Overall, by conceptualizing FLE inspiration, developing a sound measurement scale, and testing antecedents of FLE-level and employee-level and customer-level outcomes, this dissertation is the first step towards firmly embedding "FLE inspiration" into managerial practice. The following step-by-step guide elaborates on the implications of

these findings for retailers and provides several examples to show the applicability of FLE inspiration in retail and service companies.

6.3.2 Implementation of Frontline Employee Inspiration: Step-By-Step Guide

This dissertation provides practical guidance targeted at managers of retail companies and service companies on how to measure, analyze, and leverage FLE inspiration.³⁴ Since customers and FLEs co-create service experiences (Kumar & Pansari, 2014), FLE inspiration and customer inspiration should not be viewed in isolation. Therefore, the following guide integrates the empirical findings from this dissertation with prior research on customer inspiration.

Introduction and Managerial Focus

If retailers and service firms want to differentiate themselves by providing their customers with a superior service experience, they need to focus their inspiration measures on *frontline employees* who interact with customers at the point of sale. Existing guides based on inspirational leadership offer limited guidance on FLE inspiration. First, due to their focus on leaders, the existing guides cannot offer concrete guidance on inspiring the specific group of FLEs. The Bain Inspirational Leadership System (Gar-ton, 2017), for example, identifies 33 inspirational behaviors (e.g., one's desire to understand different world views) that leaders can work on to inspire employees in the organization while disregarding FLE inspiration. Second, the existing guides measure a leader's inspirational skills by asking her/his followers to rate the leader's inspirational influence on them, overlooking the possibility that various sources in the FLE's environment (e.g., physical store environment, interacting with coworkers) may trigger FLE inspiration. Third, the existing guides are not concerned with customer-level outcomes, particularly customer inspiration, despite its potential to positively affect firm performance (Böttger et al., 2017). In sum, researchers have not provided retail and service managers with empirically grounded guidance on FLE inspiration as a means to influence customer-related outcomes.

The step-by-step guide presented below addresses these shortcomings in three ways. First, it focuses on FLEs' experience of inspiration rather than managers' or leaders' inspirational skills. Second, it measures FLEs' personal experience of inspiration by drawing on the new FLE inspiration scale. Thereby, the guide acknowledges that

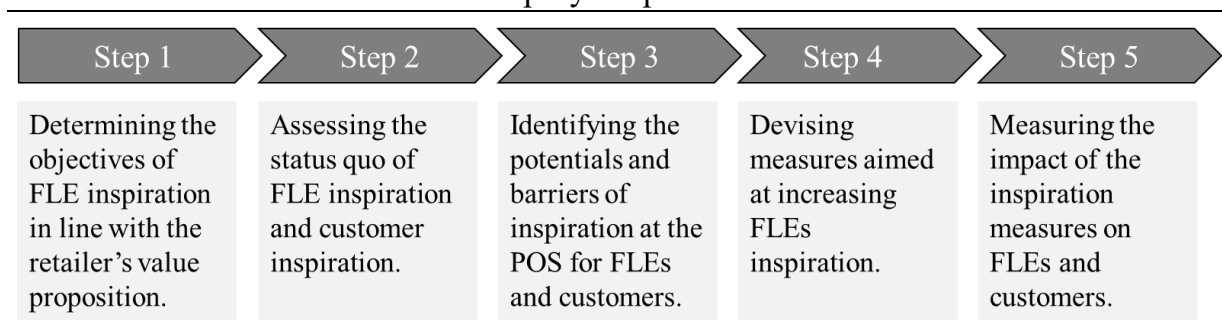
³⁴ An earlier version of this framework appeared in the *Marketing Review St. Gallen*: Rudolph, T., Neumüller, K., & Kleinlercher, K. (2021).

FLEs may well be inspired by other sources apart from their leaders and that FLE inspiration is a subjective work experience that may differ across situations, sources, and FLEs. Third, the guide accounts for the possibility that FLEs inspire customers and thereby considers the effect of FLE inspiration on customer outcomes.

This dissertation defines FLE as a temporary, intrinsic motivational state during which FLEs spontaneously gain epistemic insights (directly or through intrapsychic processes) from within or outside the workplace (inspired-by) and feel compelled and energized to actualize or express these epistemic insights at work (inspired-to). This definition suggests that FLE inspiration does not happen on purpose but rather spontaneously. Nevertheless, this does not mean that FLE inspiration is completely outside a manager's control. As described below, retailers can substantially increase the likelihood of FLE inspiration occurring in their organization. This means they can first assess their FLEs' level of inspiration, identify sources that trigger inspiration, use these sources to inspire their FLEs, and cultivate and institutionalize a culture of inspiration.

The following step-by-step guide draws on the empirical insights gained from this dissertation. The process consists of five individual steps to help managers determine the objectives of FLE inspiration in line with its value proposition (step 1), analyze the status quo of FLE inspiration in conjunction with customer inspiration (step 2), identify facilitators of and barriers to FLE inspiration (step 3), devise and implement measures aimed at enhancing FLE inspiration (step 4), and assess the effects of these measures on FLE performance and customer-level outcomes (step 5) (see Figure 6-1). This framework further enables retail managers to identify the most pressing areas of FLE inspiration and customer inspiration that require immediate attention and, accordingly, allocate their resources more effectively. Each of the five steps is discussed in detail in the subsequent sections.

Figure 6-1:
Step-by-Step Guide



Source: Author's illustration. POS = point of sale.

Step 1: Determining the Objectives of Frontline Employee Inspiration

Before implementing inspiration measures targeted at FLEs, managers need to decide whether FLE inspiration is a promising avenue to tackle their firm's most pressing problems. FLE inspiration is a motivational construct that may be applied to raise FLEs' motivation, proactivity, and creativity. A focus on FLE inspiration is especially advisable if FLEs feel emotionally disconnected from a company, are reluctant to support internal change efforts, or do not use their full potential to provide excellent customer service. Once retail managers have decided that FLE inspiration constitutes the adequate approach to overcome their challenges, they need to analyze the precise possibilities that FLE inspiration offers to them. The possibilities of FLE inspiration depend on a retailer's value proposition and business model.

Depending on their value proposition, retailers can benefit from inspiring FLEs in different ways and considering different inspiration measures. Rudolph's taxonomy for generic business models provides an adequate starting point for analyzing how retailers with different value propositions can use FLE inspiration measures. Based on the three most important drivers of customer value in retailing, price, product, and service, Rudolph (2000) distinguished three generic business models: 1) global discounters; (2) content retailers; and (3) channel retailers. In the following, I briefly outline how each type of retailer can benefit from FLE inspiration. Table 6-1 provides an overview of the generic retail business models and the application of FLE inspiration to each of them.

Global discounters (e.g., Aldi, Lidl, IKEA) focus on offering good value to customers. They strive to be the cost leader based on lean and efficient business processes and low prices. IKEA, for example, seeks "to offer a wide range of well-designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them" (www.ikea.com) and may, therefore, be classified as a global discounter. FLEs working at global discounters generally have to adhere to a standard routine that allows for efficient processes. Global discounters can benefit from FLE inspiration in various ways. Study 5 shows that inspiration is a psychological mechanism that drives FLEs to be proactive, engaged, and intrinsically motivated to fulfill the tasks at hand. Therefore, inspired FLEs invest their full energy into their work, thus enhancing their productivity and efficiency levels. In this case, FLE inspiration may help global retailers accelerate processes and routines while lowering personnel costs. Additionally, inspired FLEs may have creative ideas that enhance retailers' efficiency, as in the case of IKEA, where the idea for selling unassembled furniture originated from an FLE (Rudolph, 2021). Furthermore, inspired FLEs' increased levels of intrinsic motivation are

important for implementing organizational change initiatives since intrinsically motivated FLEs are more likely to adopt new service technologies (Wieseke et al., 2011) or customer-focused service strategies (Cadwallader et al., 2010).

Content retailers (e.g., Migros, Zara) focus on developing and/or selling innovative products and strive to be product leaders in their market by offering customers unique merchandise and product assortments. Zara, for example, seeks to “offer cutting-edge fashion at affordable prices” and constantly launches new product innovations, such as its jewelry and ski collections (www.inditex.com). Content retailers may benefit from inspired FLEs’ knowledge about market trends, product innovations, customers, and competitors. Interacting regularly with customers, FLEs have direct access to information (e.g., about evolving customer needs and possible product or service improvements) that is not readily available to others in a firm (Rapp et al., 2015). In fact, it has been suggested that FLEs possess as much as 90% of the intelligence needed by an organization (Caudron, 1994). FLE inspiration is a reaction to a new cue (e.g., a competitor’s new product launch or a customer’s suggestion) in one’s environment. When inspired, FLEs cognitively process this new information and act upon the newly acquired ideas. Content retailers can benefit from FLEs as an important source of market intelligence (Gebhardt et al., 2019) that provides them with valuable information about competitors, market trends, and customer needs. For example, a Starbucks’ FLE had the initial idea for the Starbucks Frappuccino when interacting with customers at the point of sale; this idea eventually gave rise to the first ice-cream coffee drink (Aufreiter et al., 2000). Therefore, working at the company’s point of sale, FLEs have the chance to collect first-hand information about new consumer needs and market trends. This information allows content retailers to advance product development and innovation and thereby differentiate their offerings more convincingly.

Channel retailers (e.g., Walmart, Nordstrom, Manor) focus on customer service and strive to become service leaders in their respective markets. To illustrate, Nordstrom’s value proposition is “to provide outstanding service every day, one customer at a time.” (www.nordstrom.com). FLEs assume a crucial role in influencing customers at the point of sale and are often responsible for the success of these customer interactions. FLE inspiration influences customer inspiration and other customer-related outcomes (e.g., loyalty, quality of service interaction; Study 8). Furthermore, FLE inspiration is a crucial psychological mechanism driving desirable FLE outcomes (Study 5). Specifically, inspiration leads FLEs to exhibit higher levels of creativity, intrinsic motivation, proactivity, and engagement, all of which are key ingredients in successful service interactions. Creative FLEs, for example, may develop creative service solutions

that have the power to “pleasantly surprise” customers (Y. Dong et al., 2015). Engaged employees are more friendly and attentive to customers’ problems (Menguc et al., 2013). Higher levels of intrinsic motivation may help FLEs cope with stress and handle difficult customers (Coelho et al., 2011). Thus, channel retailers’ increased focus on FLE inspiration may strengthen their competitive advantage by delivering superior service quality.

Table 6-1:
Generic Business Models and Applicability of Frontline Employee Inspiration

	Global Discounter	Content Retailer	Channel Retailer
Value Proposition	“Minimize cost”	“Foster innovation”	“Provide solutions”
Strategy	Price leadership	Product leadership	Customer relationship
Core Competencies	Efficient purchasing, logistics, and sales processes	Product development, innovation, and trend research	Service focus, relationship management
Contribution of FLE Inspiration	FLE inspiration strengthens a retailer’s promise of delivering good quality at low prices. Inspired FLEs are proactive and highly engaged in their tasks. They readily adjust their work behavior and support organizational change.	FLE inspiration strengthens a retailer’s promise of developing innovative products. Inspired FLEs are highly sensitized to new market trends and customer needs and transmit this information internally, which finally fosters product innovation.	FLE inspiration strengthens a retailer’s promise of becoming a service leader. Inspired FLEs have creative ideas and develop creative service solutions; this helps them offer superior customer service.
Objective of FLE Inspiration	Fostering FLE proactivity and task engagement to increase FLE’s willingness to support organizational change.	Strengthening FLEs’ ability to identify new cues from their environment and to transmit this information internally.	Enhancing customer inspiration, behaviors, and attitudes during service interactions by heightening FLE customer-oriented creativity and proactivity.

Source: Author’s illustration based on Rudolph (2000).

Since FLEs and customers co-create services (Kumar & Pansari, 2014), FLE inspiration and customer inspiration should not be viewed in isolation. Retailers need to understand and foster the inspiration of their internal stakeholders (FLEs) in conjunction with their external stakeholders (customers). While content retailers and global discounters may also use this practical guide to enhance their FLEs’ level of inspiration, it primarily targets channel retailers. The focus on channel retailers is motivated by the argument that channel retailers differentiate themselves through superior service quality, and FLE inspiration may play a crucial role in this market positioning. To provide managerial guidance on creating inspiring service interactions, step 2 of this guide shows how insights from customer inspiration and FLE inspiration may be integrated to enhance the inspiration level of both customers and FLEs.

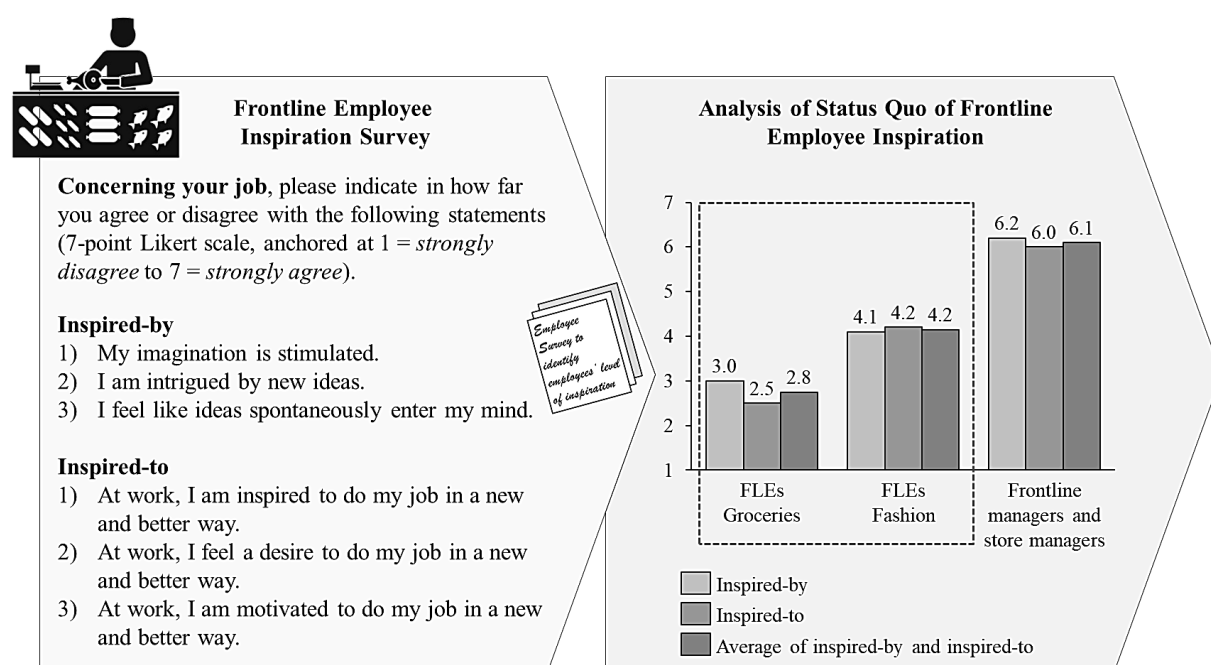
Step 2. Assessing the Status Quo of Inspiration

Retail managers need to understand the current state of FLE inspiration and customer inspiration to identify the need for improvement. To do so, the guide suggests three substeps: (1) assessing the level of FLEs' inspiration using a survey; (2) assessing the level of customer inspiration using a survey; and (3) juxtaposing the results from the FLE and customer survey. Channel retailers, in particular, are advised to follow all three substeps to enhance FLE inspiration and customer inspiration because of their focus on fostering service quality. In contrast, content retailers and global discounters should place particular emphasis on substep 1. In their case, substeps 2 and 3 would be optional because these steps are less focused on customer interactions to differentiate themselves from competitors. This process is further elaborated on in subsequent sections.

(1) Assessment of Status Quo of Employee Inspiration

The status quo of FLE inspiration needs to be analyzed using the newly developed 6-item FLE inspiration scale. Depending on the retailer's objectives, the scale may identify FLE inspiration scores at team, department, or store levels. The inspiration scores for each level can be calculated by averaging FLEs' scores.

Figure 6-2:
Analysis of Status Quo of FLE Inspiration Across the Company



Source: Author's illustration. Note: Figure depicts an example case.

Figure 6-2 illustrates a channel retailer with a fashion and a grocery department. It indicates the following inspiration scores (average of inspired-by and inspired-to): 2.8 out of 7 for FLEs working in the groceries department; 4.2 for FLEs working in the

fashion department; and 6.1 out of 7 for store managers and frontline managers who are FLEs with managerial responsibility. Following Kumar and Pansari (2014), I suggest that the FLE inspiration scores may be categorized into three levels of inspiration: a score between 1 and 3 is considered low; a score from 3 to 5 indicates moderate inspiration; and scores from 5 to 7 are considered high FLE inspiration. In this example, the inspiration score of FLEs working in the grocery department is considered low. The inspiration score of FLEs working in the fashion department is considered moderate, while frontline managers' score is considered high.

The results of the employee inspiration survey could be interpreted in multiple insightful ways. First, FLE inspiration scores across different teams, stores, and departments may be compared. If one team or store exhibits low FLE inspiration levels, subsequent measures should be targeted at this FLE group. In the example (Figure 6-2), the subsequent measures should be applied, especially among FLEs working in the grocery department, as their level of inspiration was the lowest. Managers must identify the exact target group of the inspiration measures because it influences subsequent measures. Furthermore, the status quo analysis may also hint at existing discrepancies in the level of inspiration between employees at different organizational tiers (e.g., FLEs vs. frontline managers). This approach may be useful for comparing FLEs and frontline managers' levels of inspiration, detecting possible disparities in the levels of inspiration across hierarchical levels, and identifying potential areas for improvement. Figure 6-2 illustrates that the inspiration scores at the frontline manager level are much higher compared with those at the FLE level. One possible reason for this result is that inspiration measures have been targeting frontline managers while ignoring FLEs.

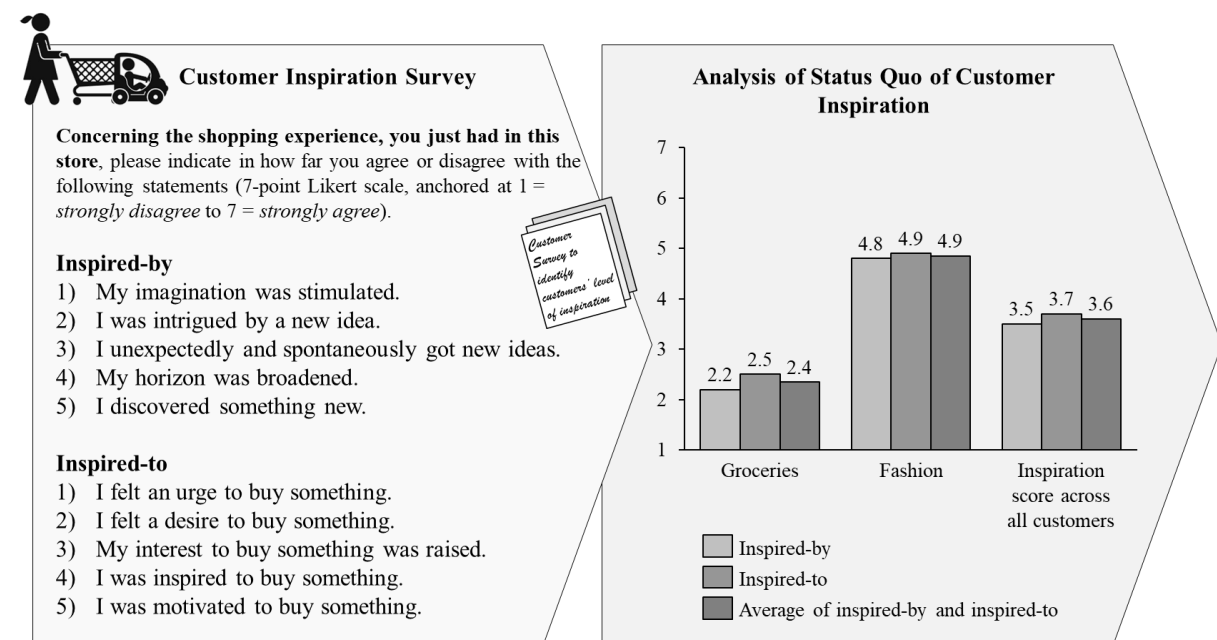
(2) Assessment of the Status Quo of Customer Inspiration

Analyzing the status quo of FLE inspiration in conjunction with customer inspiration is especially valuable for channel retailers because it provides them with new insights into how to improve service interactions, thereby strengthening competitive advantage. FLE inspiration crucially influences customers during service interactions beyond the effect of FLE satisfaction (see Chapter 5). Inspired FLEs may transfer their inspiration to customers during service interactions, thereby providing a superior, enriching customer experience. Therefore, if retailers seek competitive advantage through providing customers with superior service quality, they need to address both FLE inspiration and customer inspiration.

To connect the FLE inspiration scores with the customer inspiration scores, the status quo of customer inspiration at the organization needs to be assessed. Retailers and

service firms are advised to use the 10-item customer inspiration scale (Böttger et al., 2017). As with the analysis of FLEs' inspiration in different departments, customer inspiration may be analyzed according to the department where customers bought their products. To provide instantaneous feedback on customer inspiration, the retailer can install instant feedback terminals with push buttons at various locations in the store (e.g., one directly in the fashion department and one directly in the groceries department) to indicate their level of inspiration. Another option is to provide customers with a QR-Code to scan to indicate their level of customer inspiration and/or to embed the customer inspiration scale in the company's mobile app.

Figure 6-3:
Analysis of Status Quo of Customer Inspiration



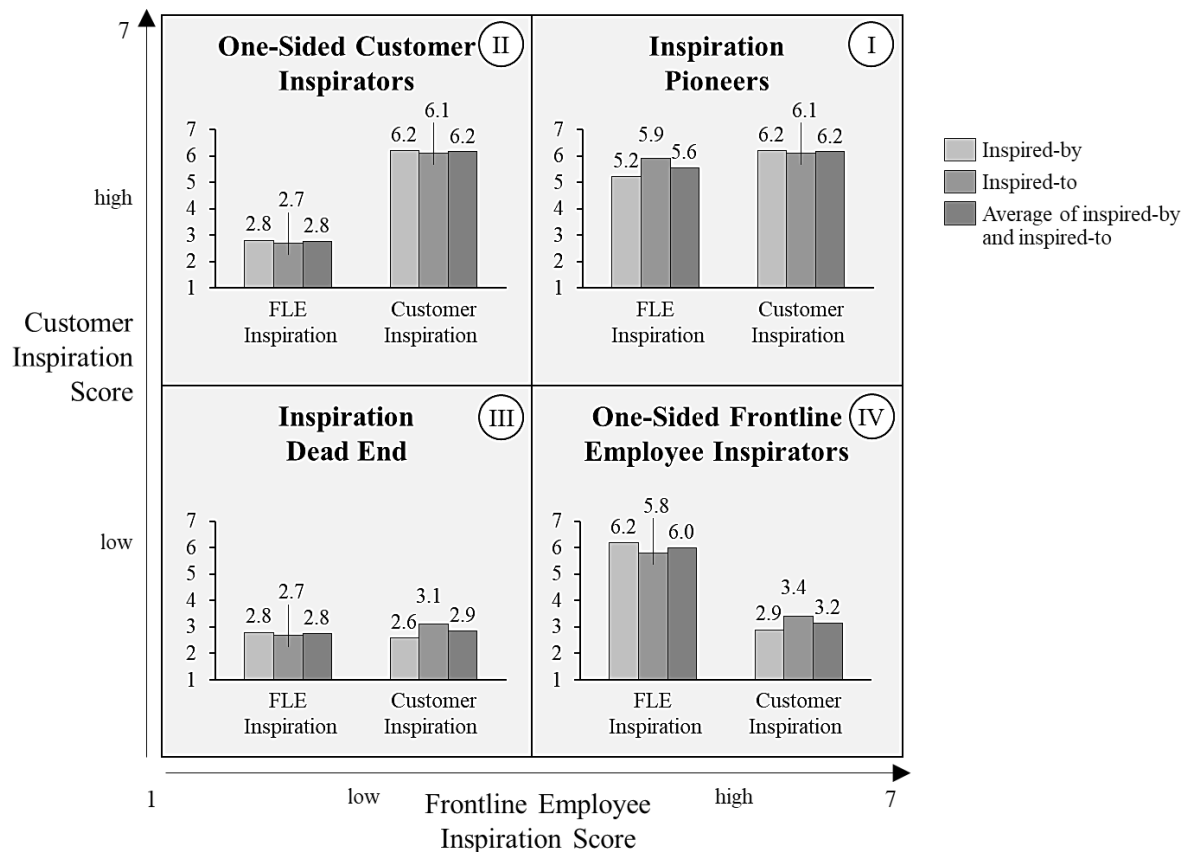
Source: Author's illustration. Note: Figure depicts an example case.

Figure 6-3 shows the total customer inspiration level of 3.6 across all departments (average of inspired-by and inspired-to). Customer inspiration in the grocery department is especially low (2.4 out of 7), whereas customers are more inspired by shopping in the fashion department (4.9 out of 7). Therefore, future measures may be targeted at leveraging customer inspiration at grocery departments. Retailers and service organizations can seek to influence customer inspiration directly, e.g., using branded videos, inspiring content on Instagram, or enticing physical store environment (Böttger et al., 2017; Chang, 2020). This step-by-step guide, in turn, shows that retailers may also influence their customers indirectly by inspiring their FLEs, who then transmit their inspiration to customers during service interactions. This makes it necessary to look at FLE inspiration and customer inspiration in conjunction, as detailed in the next paragraph.

(3) Integrating Frontline Employee Inspiration and Customer Inspiration

Retail managers should now juxtapose FLE inspiration and customer inspiration scores to identify potential areas of improvement to enhance employee–customer interactions. To do so, I suggest averaging FLE inspiration scores and customer inspiration scores (i.e., an average of inspired-by and inspired-to for both scales) to obtain a 2x2 matrix (Figure 6-4) merging both customer and FLE inspiration.

Figure 6-4:
FLE–Customer Inspiration Matrix



Source: Author's illustration. Note: Figure depicts an example case.

The level of customer and FLE inspiration can be high or low. Scores from 1 to 4 are considered low; scores from 4 to 7 are considered high.³⁵ I label each of the four cells as follows: (I) *Inspiration Pioneers* (high FLE inspiration and high customer inspiration); (II) *One-Sided Customer Inspirators* (low FLE inspiration and high customer inspiration); (III) *The Inspiration Dead End* (low FLE inspiration and low customer inspiration); and (IV) *One-Sided Frontline Employee Inspirators* (high FLE inspiration and

³⁵ To reduce complexity and ensure that retailers can apply the employee–customer inspiration matrix, I differentiate between two groups (high/low), which gives rise to a 2x2 matrix.

low customer inspiration). Depending on their position in the 2x2 matrix, retailers need to implement different inspiration measures.

(I) *Inspiration Pioneers*. Retailers should ideally strive to become Inspiration Pioneers (i.e., a score of 4 – 7 on both the customer inspiration and the FLE inspiration scales). These retailers may benefit from inspiring both FLEs and customers because inspired FLEs contribute to a firm's profits through reduced costs, increased efficiencies, and improved customer service, whereas inspired customers contribute to a firm's profits through (more) loyalty and increased spending. If FLEs are inspired, they contribute to firm performance directly by being more proactive, creative, and motivated and indirectly through positively influencing customer inspiration. Hence, Inspiration Pioneers have the opportunity to realize the highest levels of firm performance and differentiate themselves through superior service delivery. Their strategic focus should be on retaining their existing FLEs and customers to reap the long-term benefits of FLE and customer inspiration.

(II) *One-Sided Customer Inspirators*. A high customer inspiration score (4 – 7) accompanied by a low FLE inspiration score (1 – 4) implies that the company inspires customers; however, FLEs are not inspired at work. These retailers succeed in inspiring customers, for example, by providing marketing-induced stimuli to them through social media or digital signage in the store—but not or only seldom through interactions with FLEs. Although retailers in this category benefit from highly inspired customers who are loyal to the company, engage with the brand, and spend more money there than at other retailers, these retailers have not yet reached their FLE inspiration potential. To fully capitalize on FLE inspiration, these retailers must analyze the subscales (inspired-by, inspired-to) of the FLE inspiration scale. Managers may find that the inspired-by component of FLE inspiration is below the benchmark. In this case, FLEs may not be exposed to inspiring sources and/or are not stimulated by new ideas or cannot fully grasp them, although they would generally be willing to act upon their inspiration (inspired-to). As a result, managers should focus on providing FLEs with inspiring sources to trigger the inspired-by process. Another possibility is that the inspired-to component of FLE inspiration is particularly low. In this case, FLEs may be inspired by their environment but unable to transfer their inspiration to customers. One possible reason is that, for instance, strict service scripts prevent FLEs from implementing creative ideas during service interactions (for inspiration measures targeted at FLEs, see step 3).

(III) *The Inspiration Dead End*. Retailers that fall into this category need to focus on enhancing both customer inspiration and FLE inspiration. I suggest that retailers in this category should focus most of their available resources on maximizing customer

inspiration through marketing initiatives on social media. A smaller part of the available resources should be focused on maximizing FLE inspiration. Focusing on customer inspiration in the first place helps increase revenues and firm profitability because customer inspiration has a direct effect on customer spending and customer loyalty (Böttger et al., 2017). Subsequently, these firms may use the newly gained profits to invest in inspiring FLEs. While the focus on customer inspiration is important, as it directly affects customers' spending behavior, firms also need to pay attention to FLE inspiration and, therefore, spend one part of the budget on enhancing FLE inspiration. If firms initially focus too narrowly on customer inspiration and overlook FLE inspiration as an important organizational objective, this may be counterproductive. To illustrate, consider that social media content may well be inspiring to customers and lure them into the store, but interacting with a uninspired FLE might offset the positive inspiration effect of the social media campaign.

(IV) *One-Sided Frontline Employee Inspirators*. Typically, when firms focus on inspiring FLEs but overlook customer inspiration, they become one-sided FLE inspirators. If a firm keeps investing in FLEs' inspiration without inspiring customers, the firm does not harness the full potential of inspiration and loses revenues. For firms that belong to this category, managers should identify the focal areas of customer inspiration requiring immediate attention. The first step in analyzing the shortcomings in customer inspiration is to analyze the two subscales of customer inspiration and FLE inspiration (inspired-by and inspired-to). Managers may, for example, find that FLEs feel inspired-by but are not able to implement their inspiring ideas during service interactions spark their inspiration onto the customer (inspired-to), resulting in low customer inspiration scores. For example, inspired FLEs may express new product ideas to customers who may not be open to these new ideas, which they consider as too innovative or "out-of-the-box." As a consequence, the customer does not become inspired. In this case, managers need to focus on the actual face-to-face service encounters between FLEs and customers. On the one hand, managers should train FLEs to recognize and think of ways to meet customers' needs. On the other hand, managers may give FLEs authority to implement their inspiring ideas autonomously at the point of sale. Another possibility is that FLE inspiration scores may be high, and customers may feel inspired by the FLEs, but they may not be inspired to act upon the new idea received from the FLE (i.e., purchase a product). For example, an FLE at a fish counter may inspire a customer by pointing out the broad variety of fresh fish. The customer may be inspired by the FLE's idea of purchasing fish but refrains from doing so because she/he does not know how to prepare the fish. In this case, FLEs should be trained to read customers' needs and understand

their shopping motivations. One way to trigger the customer's inspired-to process is to strengthen the call for action (e.g., the FLE points out that fish is healthy) and lowering potential obstacles (e.g., the FLE gives precise instructions on preparing the fish).

Step 3: Identifying the Potential

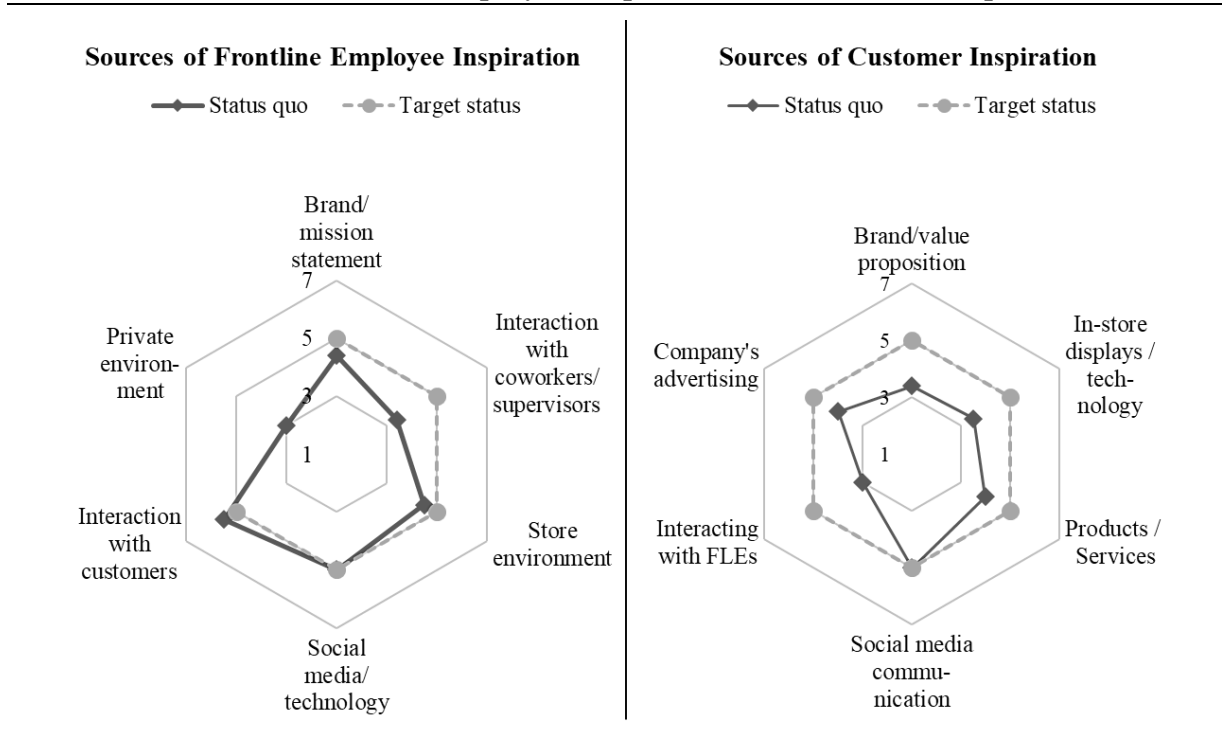
This step seeks to identify the most promising areas for future inspiration measures. After assessing the status quo of FLE inspiration and customer inspiration, managers should identify the reasons *why* FLEs and customers do not feel inspired. FLE inspiration depends on the presence of an inspiring source in the FLE's environment (Chapter 4). Furthermore, workplace characteristics, such as autonomy and team climate, facilitate the emergence of FLE inspiration, while high workload and time pressure may hinder its occurrence (Chapter 2). If retail managers find that their FLEs' inspired-by scores are considerably lower than inspired-to scores, they can focus on providing inspiring sources (e.g., an inspiring, meaningful, and unique value proposition and corporate values, see Rudolph & Schweizer, 2019). If retail managers conclude that their FLEs' inspired-to scores are particularly low, they should create workplace conditions (e.g., increasing FLEs' level of autonomy) that facilitate the implementation of the newly acquired idea. In the following sections, I address both possibilities.

(1) Identifying Relevant Sources of Frontline Employee Inspiration

Chapter 4 shows that various sources in an FLE's environment, such as a company's products and services, one's coworkers, personal values, and the physical store environment (e.g., window decoration), and private environment (e.g., personal values, family) may inspire FLEs, suggesting that a "one size fits all" approach to inspiring FLEs might not be the most effective. Rather, managers should find out what sources inspire their FLEs the most; again, this may be analyzed at a team, store, or even individual level. To determine which sources are the most important in inspiring FLEs, retail managers could administer a short questionnaire to both FLEs and customers or/and conduct short interviews with them. Retail managers can ask FLEs and customers to rate the most important sources of inspiration. Based on the empirical findings of this dissertation, retail managers should ask FLEs to rate the inspiring effect of six sources: company-related sources (e.g., the company's history and brand), interaction with coworkers/supervisors, the physical store environment, social media, interaction with consumers, and the private environment (Chapter 4). Similarly, retailers can ask customers via

a survey which sources inspire them the most. Potential sources include interaction with FLEs, social media campaigns, and in-store displays (Rudolph et al., 2012).³⁶

Figure 6-5:
Sources of Frontline Employee Inspiration and Customer Inspiration



Source: Author's illustration. Note: Example case.

This procedure allows managers to analyze the deviation from the target value (i.e., five on a scale ranging from 1 to 7) for FLEs' and customers' sources of inspiration. Figure 6-5 illustrates an example case and shows that FLEs draw a lot of inspiration from interacting with customers (the status quo value of 5.4 even exceeds the target value of 5). In contrast, the inspiring effect of brand/company success, interaction with coworkers and supervisors, and product services is below the target value of 5. Note that there is no target value for the inspiring influence of the private environment because these sources are not subject to the company's influence. Ideally, FLEs' inspiration from the private environment is lower than their inspiration from their work environment, providing managers with the possibility to enhance FLE inspiration through measures implemented at the workplace. The same procedure is repeated with customers. According to this example case, customers are barely inspired by interacting with FLEs. Other categories, as in-store displays and technology, evoke little inspiration in customers. Since

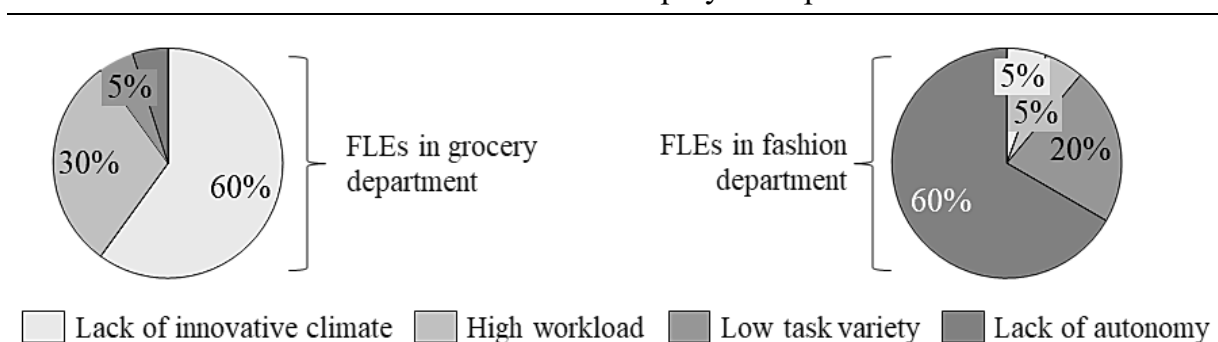
³⁶ Question for FLEs: On a scale from 1 – 7 (1 = *not at all inspired* to 7 = *very inspired*), how much does each of the following sources inspire you to do your job in a new and better way? Question for customers: On a scale from 1 – 7 (1 = *not at all inspired* to 7 = *very inspired*), how much does each of the following objects/persons inspire you during your shopping experience?

this step-by step guide aims at leveraging customer inspiration through FLE inspiration, the measures presented in step 4 are targeted at FLEs.

(2) Identifying Barriers to FLE Inspiration in the Work Environment

If managers want to increase FLE inspiration, they also need to investigate the potential barriers that prevent FLEs from acting upon their inspiration (inspired-to). Along with the sources of inspiration, the FLE survey should identify potential barriers to FLE inspiration. The qualitative findings hint at various potential barriers to inspiration, such as a lack of team climate, high workload, low task variety, and lack of autonomy (Chapter 2, Study 1). Accordingly, retail managers may include these barriers in the survey and ask FLEs to rate the most important factor that hinders their inspiration at the workplace. The barriers to FLE inspiration may be compared at team, department, or store level and/or across time. The example in Figure 6-6 compares the barriers faced by FLEs from the grocery department and FLEs from the fashion department. In the example, the FLEs in the grocery department lack inspiration mostly due to the low innovative climate and high workload. In contrast, the most important barrier to inspiration for FLEs in the fashion department is a lack of autonomy.

Figure 6-6:
Barriers to Frontline Employee Inspiration



Source: Author's illustration. Note: Figure depicts an example case. Question: What is the most important factor that hinders your inspiration at the workplace?

Step 4: Devising Inspiration Measures

In this step, FLE inspiration measures are developed in response to the shortcomings discovered in the previous step. The focus is not on devising measures to influence customer inspiration *directly*, which is an issue dealt with in previous research (Böttger et al., 2017; Chang, 2020). Instead, this guide goes one step further, suggesting that retailers can also leverage customer inspiration *indirectly* through inspiring their FLEs, who will transfer their inspiration to the customer during service interactions. Thus, the measures described below are aimed at raising FLE inspiration. As shown in Study 8,

inspired FLEs can positively influence the quality of customer interaction and customer inspiration, which, in turn, enhances customer loyalty, customer spending, customer service satisfaction, and customer impulsive buying (see Chapter 5, Section 5.5.2.3).

The empirical results from Study 1 show that various factors in the FLE's work environment may hinder or facilitate the emergence of FLE inspiration (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2.3). Important factors that may facilitate inspiration are, for example, an innovative team climate or perceived autonomy. For example, an FLE from a larger supermarket chain explained during the interview (Study 1; ID 14) that she was inspired by a five-minute briefing conducted each Monday morning with the entire store team. For her, this morning briefing was the ideal opportunity to exchange ideas between FLEs and share ideas acquired off the job (i.e., during the weekend). Such measures may foster an innovative climate to cultivate FLE inspiration. Furthermore, a frontline manager from a large furniture chain (ID 7) revealed during the interviews that the retailer where he works focuses on employee inspiration as an important performance metric. He stated that his employer company measures employee inspiration through internal employee surveys. According to him, establishing employee inspiration as a metric sensitizes both managers and FLEs to the importance of inspiration as a key ingredient of the company culture.

Other possible measures include the enhancement of autonomy. This may be achieved by allowing FLEs to design and implement certain product displays or window decorations at the point of sale. Besides, a company-internal communications platform (such as an FLE app) may spur inspiration between FLEs. On such a platform, FLEs may inspire FLEs at other stores, for example, by posting photos of their product displays or window decorations. Internal communication platforms may also be used to run FLE talent quests to encourage them to present ideas for business innovation (Lages & Piercy, 2012).

Further inspiration measures may be derived from the findings in Chapter 3, which showed that two important source characteristics, i.e., relevance to FLEs' goals and surprise, trigger FLEs' inspiration. This implies that retailers should offer FLEs novel experiences or even surprise. This may be achieved by, for instance, providing them with the possibility of working at another store for a short time. Another possibility is to encourage them to try out the company's new products. Other measures may be necessary, depending on the FLEs who need support and reasons for their low levels of inspiration. Table 6-2 offers an overview of potential measures.

Table 6-2:
Overview of Potential Measures of Frontline Employee Inspiration

Examples of Shortcomings / Potentials	Exemplary Measures
Although FLEs feel inspired, they are not able to transfer their high levels of inspiration to customers during service interactions	• Providing training to FLEs on the relevance of customer interaction for business success. • Promoting good relationships between customers and FLEs will motivate the latter to search for information on customer needs, which may spark inspiration.
FLEs are not inspired to share their ideas internally	• Encouraging internal feedback and new ideas from FLEs across all departments through running in-house FLE talent quests or institutionalized feedback channels. • Providing in-house feedback channels through which FLEs can relay their ideas they gained from interacting or observing customers.
Lack of task variety	• Broadening FLEs' duties and activities at the workplace.
Lack of innovative climate	• Introducing a morning briefing to give FLEs the chance to voice their ideas and use knowledge from peers as a catalyst to generate new ideas. • Fostering good relationships among FLEs at each store. • Fostering an environment that values inspiration and where those that advance new inspiring ideas are not punished.
Lacking freedom for implementation of ideas	• Giving FLEs autonomy by letting them implement product presentations. • Lowering bureaucratic constraints.
Lack of "surprise" (source characteristic of FLE inspiration)	• Giving FLEs the possibility to work at another store for a short amount of time. • Encouraging FLEs to try out the company's new products. • Providing them with free product samples and asking them for their feedback on the new products.
Lack of "relevance to FLE goals" (source characteristic of FLE inspiration)	• Refining the company values to reflect important societal values such as sustainability and corporate social responsibility. This may increase the employee-company value congruence, increasing FLEs' identification with the brand.
Low acceptance of FLE inspiration measures in the workforce	• Implementing FLE inspiration as a new metric (key performance indicator); putting this key performance indicator prominently on PowerPoint slides and/or internal pinboards. • Measuring FLE inspiration as part of the employee survey. • Including FLE inspiration in the company vision statement.

Source: Author's illustration.

Step 5: Measuring the Effects

Managers need to closely monitor the effects of their inspiration measures because they may inspire FLEs differently. For example, companies may seek to foster an inspiring work environment by increasing FLE autonomy in implementing product displays at the point of sale. As a result, FLEs feel highly inspired and proactively and creatively contribute to the organizational goals. On the one hand, this may communicate to some FLEs that the management wants to provide them with new inspiring opportunities for self-development and performance. On the other hand, some FLEs may

perceive increased autonomy as burdening and demanding because it forces them to make decisions independently and assume more responsibility. In this case, increased autonomy enhances the managements' expectations of FLE performance, which may, in turn, overwhelm FLEs and cause stress (Parish et al., 2008). For example, when given the autonomy to develop and implement product presentations at the point of sale, some FLEs may not develop the right ideas and feel frustrated instead of inspired. To avoid potential adverse effects of FLE inspiration measures, managers need to verify whether FLEs view the inspiration measures as positive and are inspired.

To quickly identify undesirable side-effects of FLE inspiration measures, managers should use the 6-item FLE inspiration scale to track changes in FLE inspiration reliably. In addition to checking FLE inspiration scores, retail managers need to continuously monitor the effects of FLE inspiration measures on customer outcomes, including customer inspiration (Böttger et al., 2017), customer spending, and perceived service quality (Homburg & Stock, 2004). Paying attention to changes in both FLE inspiration and customer inspiration is crucial because “customers are the key resource to a firm’s profit growth” (Kumar & Pansari, 2016, p. 498). A constant focus on changes in customer measures is especially important given that FLE inspiration is only effective in increasing customer purchase intentions if mediated by customer inspiration (Study 8). However, the direct effect of FLE inspiration on customer purchase intentions has been shown to be negative. FLE inspiration effectively enhances customer spending only when FLEs manage to transmit their inspiration to customers, thereby triggering customer inspiration (FLE inspiration → customer inspiration → customer purchase intentions). If FLEs are inspired to share their ideas with customers but cannot broaden customers’ horizons and “connect” with them (i.e., customers do not feel inspired *by* the FLE), the effect of FLE inspiration on customer spending is negative and may even discourage customers from purchasing products (FLE inspiration → customer purchase intentions). For firms, this finding implies that it may not be enough to provide FLEs with an inspiring work environment. Rather, firms may want to provide FLEs with additional training, thus enhancing FLEs’ ability to understand and cater to customers’ needs (see Chapter 5, Sections 5.5.2.3 and 5.6.1). Once retail managers measure the effectiveness of their FLE inspiration initiatives, they can choose to adapt their existing initiatives or plan new ones.

6.4 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The current research has several limitations that suggest potential avenues for further research.

6.4.1 *Methodological Approach*

This dissertation relies on several methodological approaches, including a qualitative, explorative approach (Study 1), cross-sectional survey studies (Studies 2 to 7), and a scenario-based experiment (Study 8). Based on 24 in-depth interviews, Study 1 provided the first qualitative insights into the nature of FLE inspiration and helps derive a conceptual framework for further analysis in this dissertation. Although providing rich data, this qualitative study was limited in that interview participants were not representative of the general population; therefore, the findings are open to subjective interpretation (Burns & Bush, 2000). Addressing this limitation, Studies 2 to 7 quantitatively validated the most important themes and relationships suggested by the conceptual framework. Studies 2 to 6 were cross-sectional surveys and thus could not provide evidence for causal relationships. Finally, Study 8 used a scenario-based experiment to strengthen internal validity and afford causal inference but cannot establish external validity. A further shortcoming of this experiment is that it did not measure FLE inspiration directly but manipulated it through a scenario aimed at customers. Thus, our knowledge of how inspired FLEs behave in service interactions and transmit their inspiration to customers in real-life settings remains limited.

Future studies could address these shortcomings by investigating FLE inspiration and customer inspiration in a dyadic field study, which I could not conduct due to social distancing constraints amid the COVID-19 pandemic. A dyadic study would help us to better understand the inspiration process during service encounters because it considers both actors in the encounter as a dyad and captures individual perspectives of FLEs and customers of each service interaction (Homburg & Stock, 2004; Kenny et al., 2006). Additional research on the employee–customer inspiration dyad also could collect and analyze data using hierarchical linear modeling (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). When customers are “nested” within FLEs (i.e., each FLE interacts with several customers), multilevel analyses are recommended (D. Hofmann et al., 2000). Future studies that test the inspiration spillover from FLEs to customers should also add control variables to account for the level of customer experience with the service, the extent of customer participation in the service delivery, and the length of the relationship with the FLE (Delcourt et al., 2016). Going one step further, future studies may also investigate FLE inspiration by collecting triadic data from FLEs, their managers, and their customers.

This would allow investigating the outcomes of FLE inspiration at employee, customer, and firm levels. Since the experiment conducted in this dissertation (Study 8) can only provide insights into loyalty and purchase intentions, future research should also try to collect objective sales data to validate the effect of FLE inspiration on firm outcomes.

6.4.2 Sampling

While Study 1 investigated the meaning of inspiration for FLEs and their front-line managers in Swiss retailing firms at an exploratory level, the subsequent quantitative studies (Studies 2 – 7) investigated inspiration among U.S. FLEs and U.S. consumers (Study 8). This focus on Swiss and U.S. FLEs raises the question about the generalizability of the findings across different cultures and national contexts, especially since culture shapes employees' work experiences (Aycan et al., 2000; Erez & Earley, 1987). Future research needs to validate the findings across different cultural and national settings. Furthermore, using online research panels (Studies 2 to 8) has certain limitations. While MTurk (B. Dong et al., 2015) and Prolific Academic (Aiello et al., 2020; Jörling et al., 2019) have been widely used to collect data in marketing and service research, they may be limited in data quality (Chandler et al., 2019). Participants are often aggressively recruited to participate in research, unmotivated, or biased by previous studies. Future studies need to verify the robustness of the effects in a field setting, ideally with FLEs from various retailers and/or service firms.

6.4.3 Antecedents and Outcomes of Frontline Employee Inspiration

In the scope of this dissertation, I could establish only some associations with certain constructs (i.e., work-related curiosity, FLE satisfaction, FLE engagement, FLE change-oriented OCB, FLE intrinsic motivation, FLE psychological empowerment). Therefore, the nomological net presented here must be gradually enlarged by future research to build an encompassing theory. There are likely other antecedents and outcomes of inspiration that deserve further exploration.

Antecedents. While this dissertation provides first qualitative insights into the importance of workplace factors (i.e., team climate, autonomy, task variety, workload; see Study 1) in influencing FLE inspiration, further quantitative research is needed to test the relationship between workplace factors and inspiration. Future studies can, for example, investigate how job resources (e.g., coaching, harmony, colleague support, supervisor support) and job demands (emotional demands, work-home conflict) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014) influence FLE inspiration. Future research should include additional employee-level variables that may affect FLE inspiration, such as FLE sales experience (Wieseke, Kraus et al., 2012) and employee–company identification (Homburg

et al., 2009). While I tested the hypothesized effect of FLE inspiration on various FLE outcome variables utilizing a cross-sectional study, future research may use longitudinal designs to investigate longitudinal changes in FLEs over time and compare desirable FLE attitudes and behaviors before and after inspiration interventions. Furthermore, future research could further investigate the source characteristics influencing the emergence of FLE inspiration. Study 5 hinted at the importance of two source characteristics, i.e., surprise and relevance to FLE goals. Further studies could explore the optimal stimulation level (Berlyne, 1970) under which inspiration is more likely to occur, posing a question of whether there can be too much (or too little) surprise that would hinder FLEs from becoming inspired.

Outcomes. While this dissertation identifies several key outcomes of FLE inspiration (e.g., FLE satisfaction, FLE engagement, and FLE proactivity), many more outcomes of FLE inspiration exist and deserve further exploration. By investigating further outcomes, future studies may expand the nomological network of FLE inspiration. For example, future service research may investigate the effect of FLE inspiration on several FLE variables, such as positive affect (S. D. Pugh, 2001), participation in service innovation implementation at the point of sale (Cadwallader et al., 2010), adaptive selling skills (Hughes et al., 2013), service adaptiveness (Gwinner et al., 2005), and FLEs' well-being (Mirabito & Berry, 2015). While I investigated inspiration contagion from FLEs to customers, future research may investigate the reverse effect of customer inspiration on FLE inspiration. In doing so, future research may provide evidence for the "inspiration mirror," analogous to the "satisfaction mirror," which posits a *reciprocal* causal relationship between FLE satisfaction and customer satisfaction (Frey et al., 2013). Thereby, future research could show that customer inspiration contributes to both market-related outcomes (e.g., customer spending; Böttger et al., 2017) and desirable employee-level outcomes (e.g., FLE inspiration), which could, in turn, boost FLE performance. Furthermore, inspiration contagion may be useful in explaining how several FLEs may inspire each other or how a supervisor may spark inspiration in her/his FLEs.

6.4.4 Potential Negative Effects of Frontline Employee Inspiration

This dissertation emphasized numerous positive outcomes of FLE inspiration for FLEs, customers, and firms. Nevertheless, FLE inspiration may also have negative effects. For example, if FLEs feel inspired but face a work environment that hinders the implementation of the newly acquired ideas, they may feel frustrated at their job. Some FLEs may potentially be "too inspired," meaning that they constantly develop new ideas that they try to implement at work, which could even put off customers and aversively affect firm results (Rudolph et al., 2021). Future research should expand on the potential

negative effects of FLE inspiration on FLE performance, customer responses, and firm outcomes. Specifically, academic attention should be paid to the conditions under which such negative effects emerge and provide insights into counteracting these effects.

6.4.5 Frontline Employee Inspiration in Times of COVID-19

One major limitation may be that the effect of FLE inspiration is limited during the global COVID-19 pandemic because FLEs and customers experience fewer face-to-face interactions. However, even in times of COVID-19, an increased focus on FLE inspiration is useful for retailers. A practitioner study conducted in the United States revealed that consumers are craving a human touch in customer service in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly 40% of their respondents indicated that having an “opportunity to speak to a human agent” is one of the three most important requirements for a satisfying customer service interaction (CGS, 2020). Furthermore, human beings have an innate preference for face-to-face interactions (as opposed to machine–human interaction) because humans can show empathy (Riedl et al., 2014). Additionally, a recent empirical study on the role of masks in customer service interactions showed that customers could correctly decode FLEs’ facial expressions even when FLEs wear a mask (V. Hofmann et al., 2021). Future research could investigate whether the employee–customer inspiration linkage holds if both FLEs and customers wear facial masks.

6.4.6 Focus on Frontline Employees and Industry Focus

This dissertation focused on inspiration experienced by FLEs who interact with customers directly because FLEs influence customer service quality and overall organizational success. However, the topic of inspiration is not limited to FLEs. Rather, FLE inspiration could be relevant to employees across all functions and positions, including administrative back-office staff, employees working in the storeroom, or middle managers. In this regard, future research may investigate whether the employee–customer inspiration link also holds for employees who seldom or never interact with customers directly (e.g., storeroom workers). Furthermore, this dissertation focused on FLE inspiration in the retail sector, one of the most rapidly changing sectors (Kahn et al., 2018). Future research may validate the newly developed scale with other employee groups without direct customer contact (e.g., administrative staff, storeroom workers) and extend the field of employee inspiration beyond the retail context, for example, by studying financial service employees’ inspiration. The employee–customer inspiration dyad during financial service interactions, when customers plan to buy high-involvement products, such as mortgage or investment products, would be an interesting topic for future research.

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Appendices

Appendix A Sample Characteristics (Study 1)

ID	Function	Industry	Gender	Tasks	Age group
1	FLE	Warehouse	F	Customer support and service at the point of sale.	30-40
2	FLM	Warehouse	F	Supervising the team of frontline employees, devising shift plans, has direct customer contact.	30-40
3	FLM	Food retail	M	Directing all operational aspects including customer service, human resources, and sales; supervises frontline employees directly interacts with customers at POS.	30-40
4	FLE	Food retail	F	Refilling shelves in the colonial goods department.	20-30
5	FLE	Food retail	F	Cheese counter: Customer service, devising shift plans for two other employees, ordering cheese.	40-50
6	FLE	Food retail	F	Refilling shelves in the colonial goods department	20-30
7	FLM	Furniture retail	M	Directing the sales operations of a branch; directly supervises frontline employees and interacts with customers at the POS.	30-40
8	HRM	Food retail	M	Directing the retailer's HR operations; recruits and coaches frontline employees.	30-40
9	FLE	Logistics	M	Customer service (mostly via telephone).	40-50
10	FLM	Logistics	M	Directs a team of about 200 frontline employees and is responsible for customer service and sales. Directly supervises and interacts with frontline employees.	30-40
11	FLE	Cosmetics	F	Advising customers and providing information on cosmetics product at the POS.	30-40
12	HRM	Cosmetics	M	Directing the retailer's human resources operations. Recruits, coaches, and supervises frontline employees.	30-40
13	FLE	Food retail	F	Cashier; occasionally refilling shelves with products.	30-40
14	FLE	Food retail	F	Working as a trainee; rotates jobs within various departments of the supermarket (e.g., cheese counter, meat counter).	< 20
15	FLE	Food retail	M	Meat counter; cutting up meat; customer service.	50-60
16	FLE	Furniture retail	F	Goods management: refilling shelves and products, customer service.	30-40
17	FLE	Food retail	F	Refilling shelves; customer service, working in the colonial goods department (providing advice on tea and coffee products).	30-40
18	FLE	Food retail	M	Directing all operational aspects including customer service, supervision of frontline employees and sales; directly interacts with frontline employees and customers at the POS.	50-60
19	FLE	Shoe apparel	F	Goods management, customer contact; refilling shelves; decorating shop windows; cleaning the store, direct customer contact;	20-30
20	FLM	Shoe apparel	M	Sales manager directing all sales operations for the region; directly supervises frontline employees at the stores.	30-40
21	FLE	Apparel	F	Refilling shelves; customer service; decorating shop windows; Ordering goods from the distribution hub; direct customer contact	20-30
22	FLM	Apparel	F	Directing all operational aspects, including customer service, supervision of frontline employees and sales; directly interacts with frontline employees and customers at the POS	30-40
23	FLE	Food retail	M	Goods management; refilling shelves; customer service at the point of sale	40-50
24	FLM	Food retail (Wholesale)	M	Directing all operational aspects, including customer service, supervision of frontline employees and sales; directly interacts with frontline employees and customers at the POS	40-50

Note: M=male; F=female; FLE = frontline employee; FLM= frontline manage

Appendix B Interview Guide (Study 1)

➤ Question Set 1: Demographics and Setting

Please describe briefly your current work situation.

- What are your tasks?
- For how long have you been working at your company?
- How big is your team/department?

➤ Question Set 2: Meaning of FLE Inspiration

- What does inspiration at work mean to you?
- What are inspiring moments at work for you?
- Could you please describe such moment?
- What is the opposite of inspiration at work to you?

➤ Question Set 3: Sources and Outcomes of FLE inspiration

- Have you ever experienced a moment of inspiration at work?
- What triggered your inspiration?
- What impact did this inspiration have on your work?

➤ Question Set 4: FLE characteristics

- Please think of two colleagues in your work environment. One of them seems inspired to you, whereas the other one is not inspired. How would you describe both?

➤ Question Set 5: Level of FLE inspiration

- On a scale from 1-7 (with 1 = *not inspired* and 7 = *very inspired*), how would you rate yourself in terms of inspiration?

➤ Question Set 6: Antecedents of FLE inspiration

- Is there anything that inspires how you work?
- Are you actively looking for sources of inspiration?
- Are you doing things to inspire yourself? If yes, what are your sources of inspiration?
- What are you doing to stay inspired at work?

➤ Question Set 7: Barriers and facilitating factors of FLE inspiration

How could your company make your daily work more inspiring? To you, what are the barriers of inspiration at work?

➤ Question Set 8: Importance of FLE inspiration

In what departments do you think is inspiration especially relevant?

➤ Question Set 9: Differences between FLE inspiration and related constructs

How does employee inspiration differ from employee satisfaction/ employee motivation?

Appendix C Coding Results (Study 1)

Aggregate-level categories	Abstract codes	Descriptive codes (examples)	Sample quotes
Conceptualization of employee inspiration	Passive Evocation, Transcendence and Motivation	A coworker provides a new and better possibility; novelty of idea beyond previous knowledge	We recently had a client that was looking for small bowls for Panna Cotta. I thought ‘No, we do not have small bowls.’ I really thought, he wanted small bowls. [...] I showed him the products we had, but he didn’t want any of them. Then my coworker walked by, saying ‘one could also use shot glasses. [...] I would not have had this idea by myself. I thought ‘Yes, she’s right’. Just because, she looked at it [the problem] from another angle. You happen to have these moments again and again. [...] I then I can pass [these ideas] on to customers. (ID 16)
	Employee inspiration as a temporary state	Temporary state that changes across situations;	[Inspiration] is rather a state. Sometimes, I am inspired. Sometimes, I am not inspired. This depends on how I feel and how I often I am online on social networks. If I don’t have time, I don’t access Instagram that much. Then I go home and sleep. When I have more leisure time, then I am outside a lot, I see things, then I become inspired more often. But this [becoming inspired] can happen more often or less often. (ID 21)
			Sure, there are some days, when I don’t become inspired as much. And then, there are days, when I become inspired a lot. (ID23)
Work-related sources (encountered in the FLE’s direct work environment)	Customer-related sources	Interacting with customers; customer needs;	[I become inspired] by interacting with customers and coworkers. I get much inspiration from talking to them, because it makes me understand what customers need and what our coworkers need, and we can be more successful in the future. These are the most inspiring things to me. (ID 7)
		Customer needs	“That [inspiration] happened spontaneously. Depending on what the customers want. I had a customer come in, who wanted a special make-up look that matched the dress she would wear at a wedding. I saw the dress and it is the dress that triggers inspiration. (ID 11)
	Interaction with work-force	Co-workers from other departments, store decoration, what coworkers wear	I become inspired by [...] our interior decoration which is always very beautiful. [...] I also like to adopt things from my coworkers who always dress well. That inspires me. It also inspires me what clothes customer wear. (ID 1)
		Learning about efficient work procedures from coworkers	Also, the team [inspires me]. My coworkers work efficiently. [...] You never stop learning. You can always learn from others. (ID 23)
	Company-related sources	Brand values	The company values are the common ground for those who work here. It’s the company vision and philosophy that inspires us. (ID 16)
		Suppliers and their new products	For example, our suppliers [inspire me]. We have meetings with three to four companies that I need to attend. [...] From these meetings, I get many inspirations, from new products that they [these suppliers] offer. (ID 23)
	Physical store environment	Inspiration product presentation	When going to another branch and seeing that they do things differently, for example, a different shelf, a different product presentation. (ID 4)
		Store layout	I get inspired by the store layout, the optical appearance. (ID 16) You get inspired by the store itself, by the store layout (ID 22).
Non-work-related sources (encountered in the FLE’s extended work environment)	Private environment	Personal values (honesty) triggering inspiration	It’s the value of honesty which is inspiring to me. When I am a customer myself, I prefer it that the salesperson is honest to me and tells me if it [a piece of clothing] looks good or not. That’s why I also seek to be honest when dealing with our customers (ID 16).
		Work-relevant ideas encountered while travelling	They [the other tea shop] had very special tea pots there to serve tea and very extravagant, small pots to serve milk. (ID 17)

and private environment)	Influences from (social) media	Media as source of inspiration; appealing image; pop song TV show;	I once saw this pop song TV show that is broadcasted on Saturday night. For this TV show they had arranged wooden houses. And then [later] I had this imagine in mind and thought that this looked good. And then, sometime later, this image emerged, it came to back to my memory, and I thought “Hey, we could design our Christmas decoration in that way [...]”. With these small, cute wooden houses we would have a wonderful atmosphere.” (ID 3)
		Instagram, blogs, webpages, going out	Instagram. I like experimenting. I follow many beauty blogs, many style homepages, also because of my job, to know, what items to combine with which items. But Instagram is extremely important. Or when going out on the weekend, or just when wandering around in the city. I see a lot of things and think ‘Aha, this is something new’. (ID 21)
Intrapsychic processes	Memory	Inspiration happens when commuting	Yes, there is inspiration at work. [...] But this idea does not necessarily come, when working. It may come when commuting to work, when driving the car, such that you suddenly think “Aha!” (ID 3)
		Becoming inspired from an idea entering awareness through memory	I once saw this pop song on a TV show that is broadcasted on Saturday night. In this TV show they had arranged wooden houses. And then [later, in a different situation], this image popped up in mind and thought that this [image] looked good. (ID3)
	Inspiration from within	Sudden ideas from within	I think, these [new ideas] come from within. You try out and experiment. [...] [Decorating a shop window] is like an artist, who has a picture in his mind and needs to bring it out on the canvas. (ID 2)
Source characteristics	Relevance to employee goals	Efficient processes as an important employee goal.	This makes the process faster, which is very important. We start working at 6:15, because the shop opens at 8 o’clock. Thus, we need to be fast. Velocity is important. (ID 6)
		Honesty and customer inspiration drive inspiration	I desire to be a salesperson about who the customer says ‘She is honest, she is an honest salesperson. She caters to my needs. This [being honest and customer-oriented] is important to me. (ID 11)
	Novelty and uniqueness of ideas	Different work processes	I become inspired by going to another branch and seeing that they do things differently, for example, a different shelfe.
Novelty of ideas; different opinions		To me, it is inspiring, when different opinions come together. The customer contact is the most inspiring thing at work. (ID 21)	
Employee characteristics	Organizational identification	Employee’s interest in innovation overlaps with company goals;	You should feel at least some affinity for food. It still works somehow [without this affinity], but it may become difficult. Especially in this [food] department. You need to have some knowledge at least or interest in products. Because otherwise you cannot answer customers’ questions. (ID 23)
		Loyalty towards the company; affective attachment to the company; employee identifies with company	I am very loyal to [name of company], and I think this is very important for my inspiration. That’s why I have been working here for nine years. (ID 1)
	Openness to experience	Open-mindedness; talking a look around us; open eyes; looking for inspiration;	An inspired employee is extremely open to everything new, walks through the world with open eyes, soaks up new innovations and topics like a sponge, is interested in everything that is new, is keen on everything new. Like an early adaptor. (ID 10).
	Curiosity	Curiosity, ability to reflect and scrutinize the status-quo, being exploratory	I think, you need to be curious [in order to become inspired]. You need to be able to reflect. And one needs to be able to analyze in relative terms one stands at the moment and where one wants to stand in one month. (ID 7)
	Intrinsic motivation	Motivation as a general drive that influences workplace behavior and attitudes	Motivation is rather a general drive that needs to be present. But you can be motivated without necessarily being inspired. I can also be motivated to work by the clock. A certain degree of motivation needs to be present. However, when being inspired, you have new ideas. (ID 9)

Workplace characteristics	Task variety	Being exposed to different tasks and stimuli.	When restocking items, it is always the same. It is a habit. (ID 14); Those who have to do repetitive work are less inspired. In the grocery departments with durable goods (e.g., coffee, tea, sugar), the system automatically orders for them). (ID 3)
	Team climate	Team climate; internal communication and exchange; sharing information; appreciation	I think it is very important [...] that you make experiences together as a team, that you communicate regularly, that is very, very important, that every team member is on the same knowledge level concerning internal communication. It is not about knowledge, but rather about everyone receiving the same important information without feeling excluded. [...], because then I feel more appreciated. (ID 17)
	Autonomy	Freedom to implement and try out ideas; Clear guidelines that give freedom to employees	What personally inspires me a lot is that I am in a position or in a company that gives me a lot freedom, where I can try a lot. It is not a prison for me. I have clear guidelines. But they are quite loose. I can move within these guidelines. And I can move with these guidelines and implement something. That means, that these guidelines are not so closely monitored that I cannot make a difference. (ID 24); Most things are predefined. You can bring yourself in only to a very small degree. (ID 6)
	Workload and time pressure	Taking time is a condition for becoming inspired.	To become inspired myself, I would need a competent leader who has time for me, who can inspire me. [...] If I need to become inspired myself, if I want to be open to inspiring sources, I need to take time for that. (ID 22)
Employee-level outcomes	Emotional outcomes	Feeling good, good mood, many ideas, openness, asking others for their opinion.	When I am inspired, then I feel good, then I am in a good mood. Then I have many ideas, I am open, and I ask others “Hey, what do you think about that?” When I am inspired, then it’s a good day for me, then things go well, and everything works out well. When I am not inspired, then things go ok, but I do not have as many ideas. That’s inspiration for me, to become inspired and to make something out of this inspiration. And sometimes I am not able to do that. (ID 21)
	Attitudinal outcomes	Feeling satisfied and at ease with one’s work.	I think job satisfaction results from inspired employees. If you are uninspired, you always look or wait for something that makes you more satisfied. This depends on your personality. If you have found a source of inspiration, then, in my opinion, you are a bit more satisfied). (ID 17) When being inspired, you are satisfied as well. Then, what you do is congruent [with your goals]. You become inspired by things that make you happy. (ID 24)
	Motivational outcomes	Inspiration may lead to motivation; motivation may develop from inspiration	I think inspiration leads to motivation. When you are inspired, you come up with something. To come up with new ideas, to see something from another angle than one’s usual daily routine, that is inspiration to me. You become inspired. And from this, motivation can develop. Intrinsic motivation also means that you implement things, by which you were inspired. (ID 10) An inspired [frontline] employee is more motivated, she or he stands behind the company. She or he lives the company. A [frontline] employee who is not inspired simply does her or his job. (ID3)
	Behavioral outcomes	Competence is an intrinsically valued quality in the stimulus object which inspires to expand one’s knowledge through training; increase motivation to learn;	There is another tea shop which inspires me a lot. He [the owner] is highly competent, he is very knowledgeable, which inspires me to expand my knowledge and continue my studies. Because of him, because I found talking to him so interesting, about coffee and tea, because of him I wanted to continue my trainings. This inspired me a lot, because I became aware that he knew a lot and I wanted to know a lot more as well. (ID 17) The weather inspires me in that I present the products in a way that appeals to the customers. Especially, meat skewers [for barbecuing] show great variety. (ID 15)
Customer-level outcomes	Emotional outcomes	Inspired employees radiate a positive atmosphere which customers may sense.	I think that [inspiration] has a big impact. A positive one. I think customers feel that strongly, because inspired employees are more open and cheerful. I think you can achieve more that way. I think you radiate that. Because it makes you kind of satisfied. (ID 17)
	Inspirational outcomes	Passing new ideas on to the customer; Customer inspiration;	Having a second part-time job gives me a new perspective. I tend to have new insights over and over again. In my second job, which is a catering service, I work a lot with themes and table decorations. This gives you a lot new ideas. You think “this is beautiful.”, “this looks good”. And then a customer in the furniture store tells me that, for their Christmas dinner they

		want to decorate their table in a special way. And then I can pass these ideas on. I think the customer feels more inspired that way.
Behavioral outcomes	Inspired FLEs may drive customer spending	Inspiration affects motivation. There is an immense difference between somebody who is inspired [and somebody who is not inspired], be it by the product, by a goal, this [inspired] frontline employee automatically is more motivated, has a special charisma, the customer feels that. And this automatically increases sales. (ID 12)

Appendix D Questionnaire for Study 3

Welcome!

Thank you for taking part in this study.

Participation will take approximately 10 minutes. You do not need any special expertise to participate in the study. **To answer the questions, please think of your current work situation.**

Completion of this survey signifies your voluntary consent to participate in this research. Your responses remain completely anonymous. There are no risks for you to participate in this study. You have the right to decline to participate and withdraw from the research now or at any time after the study has begun by closing your web browser.

A unique completion code will be provided to you after you have completed the study. You will need this information to receive payment for your participation.

Please click "Continue" to start.

---Next page---

➡ Question 1:

Please think about your current work. Please consider all spontaneous and sudden moments of inspiration (occurring inside or outside your workplace) impacting how you work.

Describe briefly such a moment of inspiration (1-2 sentences).

➡ Question 2:

Please think of your **most recent** spontaneous and sudden moment of inspiration impacting your behaviors, emotions, or attitudes **at work**.

With this inspiring situation in mind, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

(Randomized order)

	strongly disagree					strongly agree	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My imagination was stimulated.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I was intrigued by a new idea.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I unexpectedly and spontaneously got new ideas.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My horizon was broadened	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I discovered something new.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I felt like an idea spontaneously originated within me and suddenly entered my awareness.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I had a compelling idea.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I had a spontaneous aha-moment.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I had a brilliant idea of which I had not thought previously.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I was inspired to implement a new idea at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I felt a desire to implement a new idea at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My interest to implement a new idea at work was increased.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I was motivated to implement a new idea at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I felt an urge to implement a new idea at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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Control Variables

➡ Question 3: (Filter question)

At your work, do you interact with customers?

"Customer" refers to private end-users or consumers.

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

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➡ Question 4:

How often do you interact with customers at work?				
☐ Very seldom	☐ Several times a month.	☐ Several times a week	☐ Several times a day	☐ Several times an hour

➡ Question 5:
For how long have you been working at your company and in your current job position?
I have been working for _____ years in my current position.
I have been working for _____ years at my company.

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➡ Question 6:
Do you have managerial responsibility?
☐ Yes.
☐ No.

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➡ Question 7:					
What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?					
☐ Less than high school	☐ High school graduate	☐ Some college, no degree	☐ Associate's degree	☐ Bachelor's degree	☐ Graduate or professional degree

➡ Question 8:
I am _____ years old and ☐ female / ☐ male.

--- End of questionnaire ---

Appendix E Questionnaire for Study 4 (Chapter 3) / Study 7 (Chapter 4)

Welcome!

Thank you for taking part in this study. **To answer the questions, please think of your current work situation.**

With your answers, you're making an important contribution to my PhD thesis!

Please answer as honestly and as spontaneously as possible. There are no right or wrong answers! All of your answers will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous.

Please click "Continue" to start.

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➡ Question 1:

What is your current job title?

➡ Question 2:

Please think of your most recent moment of inspiration at work.

Please describe this moment of inspiration at work in 1-2 sentences (i.e., What exactly inspired you? Were you inspired to do at work? How did it feel like?)

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➡ Question 3:

You just described your **most recent** moment of inspiration at work: "*Answer from Question 2*"

Thinking back to this inspiring moment at work, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

	strongly disagree					strongly agree	
My imagination was stimulated.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I was intrigued by a new idea.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A new insight came to me spontaneously.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I learned of something new.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I discovered something new.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I felt like an idea spontaneously entered my mind.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I did not have a flash of insight.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I had an aha-moment.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I had an idea which I had not thought of previously.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
For this row, please tick strongly agree.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I was inspired to do my job in a new and better way.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I felt a desire to do my job in a new and better way.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My interest to do my job in a new and better way was increased.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I was motivated to do my job in a new and better way.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I felt an urge to do my job in a new and better way.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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➡ Question 4:

You just described your **most recent** moment of inspiration at work: "*Answer from Question 3*"

This moment of inspiration at work was triggered by ...

(please tick "strongly disagree" if your moment of inspiration at work was not triggered by this source.)

	strongly disagree					strongly agree	
observing, interacting or dealing with a customer.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
observing, interacting or dealing with my direct supervisor.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
observing, interacting or dealing with a coworker.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

somebody or something in my private life (a friend, a family member, something I encountered while travelling).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
something I encountered on social media.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
my personal values.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
my company's values.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
my physical workplace environment.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
my company's success.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
my company's products and services.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
a training that my company provided.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
my company's history.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
a charismatic leader of another company (e.g., Steve Jobs or Henry Ford).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
a charismatic leader, who is working at my company (e.g., the CEO of your company).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
the brand I am working for.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
my company's mission statement and its meaning.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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➤ Question 5:

With your current workplace in mind, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

	strongly disagree					strongly agree	
Most days I am enthusiastic about my work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel fairly satisfied with my present job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel enjoyment in my work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

➤ Question 6:

The following statements focus on how you feel and behave at work. With your current workplace in mind, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

	strongly disagree				strongly agree			
At my work, I feel bursting with energy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I am enthusiastic about my job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
My job inspires me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I'm happily engrossed in my work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

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➤ Question 7:

With your current workplace in mind, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

	strongly disagree				strongly agree			
I often have new and innovative ideas on how to improve my job performance.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I frequently come up with creative solutions to problems at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I regularly suggest new ways of performing work tasks.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I often exhibit creativity on the job when given the opportunity.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

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➤ Question 8:

Please indicate the degree to which each of the statements below characterizes your workplace behavior.

Please indicate the degree to which each of the statements below characterizes your workplace behavior.							
	strongly disagree				strongly agree		
I frequently come up with new ideas or new work methods to perform my task.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I often suggest work improvement ideas to others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

I often suggest changes to unproductive rules or policies.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I often change the way I work to improve efficiency.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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➤ Question 9:

Why are you motivated to work?

	strongly disagree				strongly agree		
Doing this job gives me pleasure.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If I started over, I would still choose to do the kind of work I am doing now.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My job is one of the parts of my life that gives me more satisfaction.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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➤ Question 10:

With your current workplace in mind, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

	strongly disagree				strongly agree			
The work I do is very important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
My job activities are personally meaningful to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
The work I do is meaningful to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I am confident about my ability to do my job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I am self-assured about my capabilities to perform my work activities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I have mastered the skills necessary for my job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
My impact on what happens in my department is large.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I have significant influence over what happens in my department.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

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➤ Question 11:

With your current workplace in mind, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

	strongly disagree				strongly agree			
At work, I enjoy exploring new ideas.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
At work, I enjoy learning about subjects that are unfamiliar to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
At work, I find it fascinating to learn new information.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
When I learn something new at work, I would like to find out more about it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I enjoy discussing abstract concepts at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Difficult conceptual work problems can keep me awake all night, thinking about solutions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I can spend hours on a single work-related problem because I just can't rest without knowing the answer.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I feel frustrated if I can't figure out the solution to a work-related problem, so I work even harder to solve it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I brood for a long time in an attempt to solve a work-related problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I work like a fiend at work-related problems that I feel must be solved.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

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➤ Question 12:

On average, what percentage of your daily work involves direct customer contact?

On average, ____% of my daily work involve direct customer contact (0-100%).

➤ Question 13:

What kind of services do you provide in your daily work?

The services I provide are ...	totally customized				Totally stand- ardized		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

➤ Question 14:

For how long have you been working at your company?

- ☐ One year or less.
☐ More than one year.

➤ Question 15:

Do you have managerial responsibility?

- ☐ Yes.
☐ No.

---Next page---

➤ Question 16:

What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

- ☐ Less than high school
☐ High school graduate (includes equivalency)
☐ Some college, no degree
☐ Associate's degree
☐ Bachelor's degree
☐ Graduate or professional degree

➤ Question 17:

What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

I am ____ years old and ☐ female / ☐ male.

--- End of questionnaire ---

Appendix F Measures, Construct Validity, Reliability Statistics (Study 4)

Constructs and Items	Factor loadings
Inspired-by ($\alpha = .84$, AVE = .64, CR = .84)	
My imagination was stimulated. (by1)	.81
I was intrigued by a new idea. (by2)	.87
I felt like an idea spontaneously entered my mind. (by 6)	.72
Inspired-to ($\alpha = .96$, AVE = .90, CR = .97)	
I was inspired to do my job in a new and better way. (to1)	.96
I felt a desire to do my job in a new and better way. (to2)	.96
I was motivated to do my job in a new and better way. (to4)	.93
Employee Engagement ($\alpha = .97$, AVE = .86, CR = .97)	
At my work, I feel bursting with energy.	.89
At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.	.91
I am enthusiastic about my job.	.96
My job inspires me.	.93
I'm happily engrossed in my work.	.95
Employee Creativity ($\alpha = .95$, AVE = .84, CR = .95)	
I often have new and innovative ideas on how to improve my job performance.	.91
I frequently come up with creative solutions to problems at work.	.95
I regularly suggest new ways of performing work tasks.	.89
I often exhibit creativity on the job when given the opportunity.	.92
Change-Oriented Organizational Citizenship ($\alpha = .93$, AVE = .76, CR = .93)	
I frequently come up with new ideas or new work methods to perform my task.	.91
I often suggest work improvement ideas to others.	.95
I often suggest changes to unproductive rules or policies.	.89
I often change the way I work to improve efficiency.	.92
Intrinsic Motivation ($\alpha = .92$, AVE = .79, CR = .92)	
Doing this job gives me pleasure.	.96
If I started over, I would still choose to do the kind of work I am doing now	.79
My job is one of the parts of my life that gives me more satisfaction.	.91
Diversive Curiosity ($\alpha = .95$, AVE = .81, CR = .95)	
At work, I enjoy exploring new idea.	.89
At work, I enjoy learning about subjects that are unfamiliar to me.	.95
At work, I find it fascinating to learn new information.	.95
When I learn something new at work, I would like to find out more about it.	.93
I enjoy discussing abstract concepts at work.	.75
Specific Curiosity ($\alpha = .94$, AVE = .94, CR = .94)	
Difficult conceptual work problems can keep me awake all night thinking about solutions.	.83
I can spend hours on a single work-related problem because I just can't rest without know-	.91
I feel frustrated if I can't figure out the solution to a work-related problem, so I work even	.85
I brood for a long time in an attempt to solve some work-related problem.	.89
I work like a fiend at work-related problems that I feel must be solved.	.85
Psychological Empowerment: Meaning ($\alpha = .97$, AVE = .92, CR = .97)	
The work I do is very important to me.	.94
My job activities are personally meaningful to me.	.98
The work I do is meaningful to me.	.97
Psychological Empowerment: Competence ($\alpha = .92$, AVE = ., CR = .93)	
I am confident about my ability to do my job.	.95
I am self-assured about my capabilities to perform my work activities.	.93
I have mastered the skills necessary for my job.	.82

Psychological Empowerment: Self-Determination ($\alpha = .95$, AVE = .87, CR = .95)	
I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.	.92
I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work.	.94
I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job.	.94
Psychological Empowerment : Impact ($\alpha = .95$, AVE = .87, CR = .95)	
My impact on what happens in my department is large.	.83
I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department.	.98
I have significant influence over what happens in my department.	.98
Employee satisfaction ($\alpha = .95$, AVE = .85, CR = .94)	
Most days I am enthusiastic about my work.	.95
I feel fairly satisfied with my present job.	.86
I feel enjoyment in my work.	.95

Appendix G Questionnaire for Study 5

Welcome!

Thank you for taking part in this study. **To answer the questions, please think of your current work situation.** With your answers, you're making an important contribution to my PhD thesis!

Please answer as honestly and as spontaneously as possible. There are no right or wrong answers! All of your answers will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous.

Please click "Continue" to start.

---Next page---

➤ Question 1:

What is your current job title?

---Next page---

Important Note:

Please read carefully through the following instructions and try to recall the work experience in your mind as clearly as possible.

Try to mentally create the thoughts and feelings you had when you were actually in this situation.

After you read the instructions, we will ask you questions about it, so please read it carefully.

☐ Yes, I have read the instructions.

---Next page---

➤ Question 2:

Please think of your most recent moment of inspiration at work.

Please describe this moment of inspiration at work in 1-2 sentences (i.e., What exactly inspired you? Were you inspired to do at work? How did it feel like?)

---Next page---

➤ Question 3:

You just described your **most recent** moment of inspiration at work:

Thinking back to this inspiring moment at work, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

	strongly disagree					strongly agree		
My imagination was stimulated.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I was intrigued by a new idea.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I felt like an idea spontaneously entered my mind.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I was inspired to do my job in a new and better way.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I felt a desire to do my job in a new and better way.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I was motivated to do my job in a new and better way.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

➤ Question 4:

You just described your **most recent** moment of inspiration at work. When you became inspired,

	never					very often		
The new idea you gained was ...	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	not at all					very deeply/strongly		
The new idea you gained was	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

➤ Question 5:

With your current workplace in mind, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

	strongly disagree						strongly agree	
Generally speaking, I am very satisfied with this job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I am generally satisfied with the work I do in this job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I am frequently thinking about quitting this job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

---Next page---

➤ Question 6:

The following statements focus on how you feel and behave at work.

With your current workplace in mind, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

	strongly disagree						strongly agree	
At my work, I feel bursting with energy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I am enthusiastic about my job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
My job inspires me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I'm happily engrossed in my work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

➤ Question 7:

With your current workplace in mind, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

	strongly disagree						strongly agree	
I try to be as creative as I can in my job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I experiment with new approaches in performing my job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
On the job I am inventive in overcoming barriers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

---Next page---

➤ Question 8:

Over the last month, how often have you ...

	very little						a great deal	
... made suggestions to improve the overall effectiveness of your company (e.g., by suggesting changes to administrative procedures)?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
... involved yourself in changes that are helping to improve the overall effectiveness of your company?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
... come up with ways of increasing efficiency within your company?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

➤ Question 9:

Why are you motivated to work?

	strongly disagree						strongly agree	
Because I enjoy the work itself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Because it's fun.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Because I find the work engaging.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Because I enjoy it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

---Next page---

➤ Question 10:

With your current workplace in mind, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

	strongly disagree						strongly agree	
The work I do is very important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
My job activities are personally meaningful to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
The work I do is meaningful to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I am confident about my ability to do my job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

I am self-assured about my capabilities to perform my work activities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have mastered the skills necessary for my job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My impact on what happens in my department is large.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have significant influence over what happens in my department.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

---Next page---

➤ **Question 11:**

With your current workplace in mind, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

	strongly disagree						strongly agree
At work, I enjoy exploring new ideas.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
At work, I enjoy learning about subjects that are unfamiliar to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
At work, I find it fascinating to learn new information.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
When I learn something new at work, I would like to find out more about it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I enjoy discussing abstract concepts at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Difficult conceptual work problems can keep me awake all night, thinking about solutions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I can spend hours on a single work-related problem because I just can't rest without knowing the answer.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel frustrated if I can't figure out the solution to a work-related problem, so I work even harder to solve it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I brood for a long time in an attempt to solve a work-related problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I work like a fiend at work-related problems that I feel must be solved.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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➤ **Question 12:**

For how long have you been working at your company?

- ☐ One year or less.
☐ More than one year.

➤ **Question 13:**

Do you have managerial responsibility?

- ☐ Yes.
☐ No.

➤ **Question 14:**

In what retail sector do you work?

- ☐ Building Material and Garden Equipment and Supplies Dealers (e.g., Home Centers)
☐ Clothing and clothing accessories stores (including shoes, jewelry)
☐ Electronics and Appliance Stores (including microwave, fridge, mobile phones).
☐ Food and Beverage Stores (including grocery stores, specialty food stores)
☐ Furniture and Home Furnishings Stores
☐ Gasoline stations
☐ General Merchandise Stores (including department stores, supercenters, warehouse clubs)
☐ Health and Personal Care Stores (including pharmacies, cosmetics stores, optical goods stores)
☐ Hospitality (including accommodation services, restaurants)
☐ Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers
☐ Sporting Goods, Hobby, Musical Instrument, and Book Stores
☐ Miscellaneous Store Retailers (florists, office suppliers, gift stores, pet suppliers)
☐ another: _____

➤ Question 15:

For how long have you been working at your company?

- ☐ One year or less.
☐ More than one year.

➤ Question 16:

Do you have managerial responsibility?

- ☐ Yes.
☐ No.

---Next page---

➤ Question 17:

What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

- ☐ Less than high school
☐ High school graduate (includes equivalency)
☐ Some college, no degree
☐ Associate's degree
☐ Bachelor's degree
☐ Graduate or professional degree

➤ Question 18:

What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

I am ____ years old and ☐ female / ☐ male.

--- End of questionnaire ---

Appendix H Construct Validity and Reliability Statistics (Study 5)

Constructs and Items	Factor loadings*
Inspired by ($\alpha = .84$, AVE=.66; CR=.85)	
My imagination was stimulated. (by1)	.75
I was intrigued by a new idea. (by2)	.87
I felt like an idea spontaneously entered my mind. (by 6)	.80
Inspired to ($\alpha = .97$, AVE = .97, CR=.90)	
I was inspired to do my job in a new and better way. (to1)	.94
I felt a desire to do my job in a new and better way. (to2)	.96
I was motivated to do my job in a new and better way. (to4)	.94
Employee Engagement ($\alpha = .94$, AVE=.82, CR=.96)	
At my work, I feel bursting with energy.	.86
At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.	.85
I am enthusiastic about my job.	.94
My job inspires me.	.94
I'm happily engrossed in my work.	.89
Intrinsic motivation ($\alpha = .92$, AVE=.86, CR=.96)	
Why are you motivated to do your work?	
Because I enjoy the work itself.	.93
Because it's fun.	.91
Because I find the work engaging.	.90
Because I enjoy it.	.95
Diversive Curiosity ($\alpha = .89$, AVE = .76, CR=.94)	
At work, I enjoy exploring new idea.	.80
At work, I enjoy learning about subjects that are unfamiliar to me.	.93
At work, I find it fascinating to learn new information.	.95
When I learn something new at work, I would like to find out more about it.	.90
I enjoy discussing abstract concepts at work.	.73
Specific Curiosity ($\alpha = .83$, AVE = .69, CR=.92)	
Difficult conceptual work problems can keep me awake all night thinking about solutions.	.77
I can spend hours on a single work-related problem because I just can't rest without knowing	.88
I feel frustrated if I can't figure out the solution to a work-related problem, so I work even	.83
I brood for a long time in an attempt to solve some work-related problem.	.82
I work like a fiend at work-related problems that I feel must be solved.	.84
Psychological Empowerment: Meaning ($\alpha = .94$, AVE = .92; CR = .97)	
The work I do is very important to me.	.939
My job activities are personally meaningful to me.	.96
The work I do is meaningful to me.	.98
Psychological Empowerment: Competence ($\alpha = .85$, AVE=.75, CR = .90)	
I am confident about my ability to do my job.	.92
I am self-assured about my capabilities to perform my work activities.	.95
I have mastered the skills necessary for my job.	.69
Psychological Empowerment: Self-Determination ($\alpha = .90$, AVE = .82, CR = .94)	
I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.	.87
I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work.	.95
I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job.	.90
Psychological Empowerment: Impact ($\alpha = .92$, AVE = .89, CR = .96)	
My impact on what happens in my department is large.	.87
I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department.	.98
I have significant influence over what happens in my department.	.97
Employee satisfaction ($\alpha = .86$, AVE = .72, CR = .88)	
Generally speaking, I am very satisfied with this job.	.93
I am generally satisfied with the work I do in this job.	.85
I am frequently thinking about quitting this job.	.73
Proactivity ($\alpha = .86$, AVE=.75, CR = .90)	
Over the last month, how often have you ...	

made suggestions to improve the way your company works (e.g., by suggesting changes to administrative procedures)?	.84
involved yourself in changes that are helping to improve the overall effectiveness of your com-	.86
come up with ways of increasing efficiency within your company?	.89

Appendix I Questionnaire for Study 2 (Chapter 3) and Study 6 (Chapter 4)

Welcome!

Thank you for taking part in this study.

Participation will take approximately 10 minutes. You do not need any special expertise to participate in the study. **To answer the questions, please think of your current work situation.**

Completion of this survey signifies your voluntary consent to participate in this research. Your responses remain completely anonymous. There are no risks for you to participate in this study. You have the right to decline to participate and withdraw from the research now or at any time after the study has begun by closing your web browser.

A unique completion code will be provided to you after you have completed the study. You will need this information to receive payment for your participation.

Please click "Continue" to start.

---Next page---

➤ Question 1:

Please think about your current work. Please consider all spontaneous and sudden moments of inspiration (occurring inside or outside your workplace) impacting how you work.

Describe briefly such a moment of inspiration (1-2 sentences).

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➤ Question 2:

In the following you will see a number of questions regarding what inspires you.

Please indicate how often and how strongly the following objects or persons inspire how you work. Please consider all spontaneous and sudden moments of inspiration (occurring inside or outside your workplace) impacting how you work. *(The following pages were randomized.)*

How I work is inspired **the training that my company provides.**

	never					very often		
How often does this happen?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	not at all					very deeply/strongly		
How deeply or strongly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

---Next page---

How I work is inspired **my company's history.**

	never					very often		
How often does this happen?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	not at all					very deeply/strongly		
How deeply or strongly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

---Next page---

How I work is inspired **by social media.**

	never					very often		
How often does this happen?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	not at all					very deeply/strongly		
How deeply or strongly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

---Next page---

How I work is inspired **by my company's values.**

	never					very often		
How often does this happen?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	not at all					very deeply/strongly		
How deeply or strongly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

---Next page---

How I work is inspired **by my co-workers.**

	never					very often		
How often does this happen?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

	not at all						very deeply/ strongly
How deeply or strongly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

---Next page---

How I work is inspired my private life (e.g. friends, family, travelling).							
	never						very often
How often does this happen?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	not at all						very deeply/ strongly
How deeply or strongly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

---Next page---

How I work is inspired by my direct superior (supervisor).							
	never						very often
How often does this happen?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	not at all						very deeply/ strongly
How deeply or strongly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

---Next page---

How I work is inspired by my customers.							
	never						very often
How often does this happen?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	not at all						very deeply/ strongly
How deeply or strongly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

---Next page---

How I work is inspired by my company's success.							
	never						very often
How often does this happen?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	not at all						very deeply/ strongly
How deeply or strongly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

---Next page---

How I work is inspired a charismatic leader, who is NOT working at my company.							
	never						very often
How often does this happen?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	not at all						very deeply/ strongly
How deeply or strongly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

---Next page---

How I work is inspired by the brand I am working for.							
	never						very often
How often does this happen?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	not at all						very deeply/ strongly
How deeply or strongly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

---Next page---

How I work is inspired by my physical workplace environment.							
	never						very often
How often does this happen?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	not at all						very deeply/ strongly
How deeply or strongly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

---Next page---

How I work is inspired by my personal values.							
	never						very often
How often does this happen?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	not at all						very deeply/ strongly
How deeply or strongly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

---Next page---

How I work is inspired by a charismatic leader, who is working at my company.							
	never						very often

How often does this happen?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	not at all			very deeply/ strongly			
How deeply or strongly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

---Next page---

➤ Question 3:

Please think of your **most recent** spontaneous and sudden moment of inspiration impacting your behaviors, emotions, or attitudes **at work**.

With this inspiring situation in mind, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

(Randomized order)

	strongly disagree				strongly agree			
My imagination was stimulated.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I was intrigued by a new idea.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I unexpectedly and spontaneously got new ideas.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
My horizon was broadened	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I discovered something new.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I felt like an idea spontaneously originated within me and suddenly entered my awareness.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I had a compelling idea.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I had a spontaneous aha-moment.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I saw things in a different light.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I had a brilliant idea of which I had not thought previously.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
For this row, please tick strongly agree.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I was inspired to implement a new idea at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I felt a desire to implement a new idea at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
My interest to implement a new idea at work was increased.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I was motivated to implement a new idea at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I felt an urge to implement a new idea at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I was motivated to express a new idea at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I was motivated to try a new idea out at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I was motivated to work intensively for long hours.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I was in a flow of doing things at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I was motivated to find creative solutions to work-related problems.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

---Next page---

Control Variables

➤ Question 4: (Filter question)

At your work, do you interact with customers?

"Customer" refers to private end-users or consumers.

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

---Next page---

➤ Question 5:

How often do you interact with customers at work?

☐ Very seldom ☐ Several times a month. ☐ Several times a week ☐ Several times a day ☐ Several times an hour

➤ Question 6:

For how long have you been working at your company and in your current job position?

I have been working for _____ years in my current position.

I have been working for _____ years at my company.

---Next page---

➤ Question 7:

Do you have managerial responsibility?

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

---Next page---

➡ Question 8:

What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

☐ Less than high school	☐ High school graduate	☐ Some college, no degree	☐ Associate's degree	☐ Bachelor's degree	☐ Graduate or professional degree
--	---	--	---	--	--

➡ Question 9:

I am years old and ☐ female / ☐ male.

--- End of questionnaire ---

Appendix J Mean Values According to Groups (Study 6)

	Physical Store environment		Company success		Products		Superior		Personal values		Training		Customer		History		Coworker		External role model		Private environment		Internal leader		Social media		Brand		Company values	
	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.
With managerial responsibility (N=160)	4.18	4.03	4.43	4.37	4.42	4.37	4.18	5.49	5.53	5.53	3.84	3.78	5	4.89	3.63	3.52	4.75	4.73	3.28	3.25	5.05	5.19	4.07	4.05	2.89	2.82	3.94	3.86	4.4	4.21
SD	1.78	1.86	1.81	1.8	1.75	1.87	1.86	1.56	1.55	1.55	2	2.04	1.63	1.83	1.85	1.89	1.55	3.93	1.9	2.85	1.64	1.72	1.85	1.95	1.84	1.84	1.95	1.95	1.83	1.87
Without managerial responsibility (N=130)	3.51	3.4	3.44	3.49	3.6	3.41	3.48	5.02	5.16	5.16	3.12	3.03	4.29	4.29	2.66	2.65	3.91	1.61	2.58	1.95	4.68	4.83	3.18	3.33	2.21	2.36	3.06	2.91	3.17	3.11
SD	1.85	1.86	1.83	1.86	1.9	1.85	1.91	1.8	1.71	1.71	1.91	1.91	1.82	1.95	1.7	1.72	1.68	1.76	1.61	1.84	1.72	1.77	1.86	1.93	1.49	1.69	1.87	1.76	1.77	1.71
p-value	*	*	***	***	***	***	*	*	.054	.054	*	*	*	*	*	*	***	***	*	*	.07	.08	***	*	*	*	***	***	***	***
Male (N = 132)	3.68	3.55	3.90	3.96	3.86	3.72	3.82	3.72	5.20	5.39	3.43	3.35	4.44	4.42	3.10	3.05	4.25	4.34	2.96	3.12	4.92	5.15	3.52	3.61	2.52	2.64	3.47	3.44	3.71	3.61
SD	1.90	1.83	1.87	1.87	1.83	1.82	1.84	1.86	1.67	1.54	1.97	1.97	1.75	1.83	1.81	1.81	1.63	1.68	1.76	1.91	1.54	1.61	1.78	1.89	1.56	1.74	1.92	1.85	1.82	1.81
Female (N=158)	4.04	3.91	4.06	3.99	4.22	4.12	3.90	3.80	5.34	5.34	3.59	3.52	4.89	4.80	3.27	3.20	4.47	4.40	2.97	3.03	4.86	4.92	3.79	3.83	2.64	2.59	3.61	3.43	3.96	3.80
SD	1.77	1.91	1.91	1.89	1.87	1.98	1.98	2.01	1.70	1.70	2.02	2.06	1.73	1.95	1.88	1.91	1.69	1.76	1.85	1.91	1.80	1.86	2.00	2.04	1.86	1.83	2.00	2.00	1.97	1.93
p-value	.10	.11	ns	ns	.10	.08	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	*	.09	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	Ns
Educational level (values 1 – 3; N=117)	4.01	3.83	3.81	3.81	4.01	3.84	4.03	3.90	5.37	5.38	3.56	3.47	4.63	4.60	3.23	3.16	4.39	4.35	2.79	2.89	4.72	4.96	3.56	3.74	2.56	2.62	3.50	3.37	3.72	3.62
SD	1.88	1.92	1.90	1.88	1.86	1.85	1.96	1.97	1.70	1.62	2.03	1.97	1.70	1.87	1.89	1.84	1.79	1.73	1.82	1.94	1.77	1.85	1.89	2.02	1.64	1.71	2.02	1.89	1.92	1.84
Educational level (values 4 and 5; N=173)	3.79	3.69	4.10	4.09	4.08	4.01	3.75	3.68	5.21	5.35	3.49	3.42	4.72	4.64	3.17	3.11	4.36	4.39	3.09	3.20	5.00	5.08	3.75	3.72	2.60	2.61	3.58	3.48	3.94	3.78
SD	1.81	1.85	1.87	1.87	1.86	1.96	1.87	1.92	1.68	1.64	1.97	2.05	1.79	1.93	1.82	1.88	1.58	1.72	1.79	1.88	1.62	1.68	1.92	1.94	1.78	1.85	1.93	1.95	1.90	1.90
p-value	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Customer Contact: several times a week (N=66)	3.42	3.39	3.77	3.82	3.79	3.83	3.79	3.59	5.03	5.27	3.39	3.30	4.36	4.38	3.02	2.97	4.00	3.91	2.74	3.03	4.56	4.82	3.39	3.61	2.76	2.85	3.29	3.27	3.47	3.47
SD	1.79	1.79	1.88	1.92	1.90	2.04	2.01	1.91	1.68	1.65	1.90	1.92	1.62	1.79	1.86	1.82	1.47	1.51	1.59	1.83	1.76	1.77	1.90	1.97	1.76	1.93	1.85	1.76	1.99	1.92
several times a day (N=177)	3.95	3.85	4.29	4.22	4.31	4.21	4.12	4.10	5.44	5.48	3.53	3.44	4.75	4.59	3.50	3.44	4.58	4.68	3.15	3.27	5.15	5.32	4.03	4.09	2.61	2.68	3.93	3.84	4.19	3.99

	Physical Store environment		Company success		Products		Superior		Personal values		Training		Customer		History		Coworker		External role model		Private environment		Internal leader		Social media		Brand		Company values	
	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.	Fre.	Int.
SD	1.83	1.93	1.91	1.86	1.77	1.84	1.82	1.92	1.59	1.47	1.97	2.00	1.74	1.88	1.91	1.94	1.56	1.62	1.86	1.94	1.54	1.61	1.83	1.88	1.67	1.74	1.95	1.91	1.85	1.83
several times an hour (N=107)	4.07	3.86	3.79	3.80	3.93	3.71	3.63	3.50	5.25	5.30	3.59	3.53	4.80	4.81	2.97	2.89	4.37	4.33	2.91	2.88	4.80	4.83	3.44	3.41	2.45	2.40	3.29	3.09	3.71	3.56
SD	1.84	1.87	1.84	1.86	1.91	1.90	1.93	1.94	1.79	1.78	2.08	2.10	1.83	2.00	1.74	1.77	1.85	1.89	1.87	1.91	1.76	1.85	1.94	2.02	1.78	1.74	1.99	1.97	1.86	1.88
p-value	.07	ns	.08	ns	ns	ns	*	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	.07	.07	.08	*	ns	ns	.06	.06	ns	*	*	ns	*	*	*	Ns
Age: 18-29 years; N=60	4.30	4.18	3.95	4.10	3.93	3.88	4.12	3.98	4.98	5.17	3.60	3.70	4.40	4.40	3.23	3.20	4.27	4.18	3.43	3.72	5.00	5.12	3.77	4.05	3.27	3.45	3.65	3.62	3.78	3.80
SD	1.95	2.00	2.02	1.98	1.82	1.98	2.02	2.05	1.76	1.64	1.89	2.04	1.92	2.06	1.81	1.80	1.74	1.84	1.82	1.82	1.73	1.82	1.91	1.98	1.92	1.95	2.02	2.01	1.85	1.78
30-39 years; N=115	3.62	3.46	3.78	3.71	3.84	3.66	3.63	3.63	5.10	5.14	3.28	3.10	4.45	4.27	2.96	2.90	4.17	4.15	2.98	2.99	4.96	4.97	3.54	3.60	2.66	2.69	3.47	3.24	3.56	3.41
SD	1.74	1.72	1.89	1.84	1.91	1.95	1.84	1.90	1.78	1.74	2.08	2.00	1.75	1.89	1.82	1.87	1.76	1.75	1.77	1.84	1.62	1.70	1.84	1.95	1.69	1.80	2.03	1.90	1.92	1.90
Age: 40-49; N=61	3.92	3.80	4.02	4.02	4.15	4.18	3.64	3.57	5.51	5.61	3.61	3.54	5.15	5.15	3.31	3.25	4.54	4.52	2.74	2.77	4.89	5.07	3.48	3.44	2.00	1.93	3.48	3.41	4.02	3.87
SD	1.92	2.02	1.77	1.78	1.73	1.71	1.83	1.88	1.49	1.49	1.93	2.05	1.47	1.60	1.88	1.83	1.47	1.59	1.77	1.95	1.72	1.75	1.78	1.82	1.34	1.33	1.83	1.90	1.80	1.82
Age: 50-59 (N=32)	3.69	3.56	4.25	4.19	4.16	3.97	4.16	3.88	5.41	5.44	3.41	3.37	4.63	4.75	3.44	3.25	4.56	4.72	2.59	2.78	4.69	5.03	4.31	4.09	2.28	2.22	3.31	3.25	4.06	3.75
SD	1.58	1.78	1.67	1.75	1.85	1.84	1.76	1.77	1.70	1.61	1.81	1.74	1.88	1.92	1.72	1.72	1.52	1.46	1.95	1.96	1.64	1.75	2.07	2.01	1.84	1.70	1.79	1.76	1.78	1.67
Age: 60 and older (N=22)	4.23	4.18	4.68	4.59	5.05	4.82	4.59	4.27	6.18	6.32	4.50	4.36	5.45	5.45	3.64	3.64	5.00	5.14	2.82	3.00	4.50	4.95	3.68	3.77	2.36	2.41	4.23	4.27	4.77	4.59
SD	2.00	1.94	2.08	2.15	1.81	2.09	2.22	2.19	1.05	.95	2.04	2.01	1.44	1.82	2.13	2.24	1.57	1.75	1.76	2.05	1.92	1.91	2.26	2.37	1.59	1.62	2.07	2.03	2.18	2.24
p-value	ns	ns	ns	ns	.08	.09	ns	ns	*	*	ns	.06	*	*	ns	ns	ns	.07	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	.05	**	***	ns	ns	.06	.08

Note: Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. ns = non-significant

Curriculum Vitae

PERSONAL DATA

Date and Place of birth Born on January 28, 1990, in Fuerstenfeldbruck (Germany)
Nationality German

WORK EXPERIENCE

Sep until today **University of St. Gallen (Institute of Retail Management)**
St. Gallen / Switzerland Postdoctoral Researcher and Project Manager

Jan 2017 – August 2021 **University of St. Gallen (Institute of Retail Management)**
St. Gallen / Switzerland Research Associate

Jan 2015 – November 2016 **Kampmann, Berg und Partner**, Consultant (100%)
Hamburg / Germany Strategy consultancy in the finance and banking sector

Jun 13 – Sep 2013 **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation**
Havana / Cuba Internship

Jul 12 – Sep 2012 **World Health Organization**
Nassau / The Bahamas Internship

Jun 2011 – Sep 2011 **Hanns-Seidel-Foundation**
Santiago de Chile / Chile Internship

Jun 2010 – Sep 2010 **Coguan AdShare**
Madrid / Spain Internship

EDUCATION

Jan 2017 – Feb 2022 **University of St. Gallen**
St. Gallen, Switzerland Ph.D. / Dr. oec. HSG in Marketing; GPA: 6.0 (6.0-1.0) | Summa cum laude

Oct 2013 – Jul 2014 **University of Cambridge, Pembroke College**
Cambridge, England M.Phil. Development Studies: 73.5 of 100 points | Magna cum laude

Sep 2009 – Jun 2013 **University of St Andrews**
St Andrews, Scotland M.A. (Honours). Management and Spanish | Summa cum laude

Sep 2011 – Jun 2012 **Universitat Pompeu Fabra**
Barcelona, Spain Exchange year abroad; top 10% of class | Summa cum laude

10/2005 – 07/2009 **Internat Schule Schloss Salem (Salem International College)**
Überlingen, Germany German Abitur; GPA: 1.0 (1.0 – 6.0) | Summa cum laude

SCHOLARSHIPS

GFF Project Funding of the Basic Research Fund; Merit scholarship of the **German National Academic Foundation** (2010 – 2014); Merit scholarship of the **Heinrich-Blendinger-Foundation** (2006-2009)

COMMITMENT

Summer 2016 / 2019 / 2021 **Camino de Santiago** (9 weeks)
Spain

Feb 2017 – Feb 2018 **Member of the Executive Board**
St. Gallen, Switzerland Responsible for Marketing

SKILLS & LANGUAGES

Languages **German** (native); **English** (full professional proficiency); **Spanish** (full professional proficiency); **French** (intermediate professional proficiency)

Computer skills **MS Office** (MS Word, MS PowerPoint, MS Excel, Ms Project, Think-Cell, Efficient Elements); **SPSS**;