

[DOI: 10.20472/BMC.2019.010.009](https://doi.org/10.20472/BMC.2019.010.009)

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## **WHEN SERVICE RECOVERY GOES WRONG - THE HARMFUL EFFECT ON TRUST**

### **Abstract:**

Given the unique characteristics of the service act, service failure occurs frequently. Once a service failure occurs, it is important to rectify this mistake, because customer satisfaction is often negatively affected by these failures. Ultimately, a service failure might result in a customer defecting to an alternative competitive service provider. Therefore, service providers generally seize the opportunity to recover from service failures. However, not all service providers are capable of recovering appropriately, which results in a situation where the recovery is a failure as well. This twofold service failure is referred to as a 'double deviation' in the literature.

This paper investigates the influence of a double deviation on a customer's trust towards a service provider. The research question becomes particularly interesting when considering the fact that trust has proved to be one of the most important dimensions of a successful long-term customer relationship. The focus of the study was the airline industry, and respondents' trust was measured on two levels: firstly, after an initial service failure, and secondly, after a failed service recovery. The study made use of a 2x2 within subjects experiment using a non-interactive self-administered questionnaire.

The data were analysed by means of one-way Anova tests, which found significant differences in trust, based on the two levels of service failure. The two types of trust, namely affective and cognitive trust, both eroded from the first service failure to the failed service recovery. The levels of cognitive trust decreased more than those of affective trust, which indicates that service recoveries should first and foremost concentrate on restoring cognitive trust. These findings support the existing literature that customers tend to suppress their emotions to safe guard their relationship with a service provider. This finding also reiterates the importance of maintaining long-term relationships with customers. On a practical level, service providers are strongly advised to invest in the training of frontline employees, as these employees are in the best position to deal with service failures.

### **Keywords:**

Double deviation; cognitive trust; affective trust

**JEL Classification:** M31

## **Introduction**

In a perfect realm, service providers would be able to achieve a zero-defect culture, and mistakes could be prevented. The reality is, however, that service failures are part-and-parcel of service providers' everyday lives, and that service recovery is frequently required. Although the aim of service recovery is to rectify a service failure, not all service providers succeed in their efforts to do so. In some cases, an initial service failure is followed by another service failure, rather than a successful service recovery. This unfortunate situation is known as a 'double deviation' in the literature. Double deviation has a significant negative influence on a customer's perception of a service provider.

Almost overwhelming evidence is found in the literature for the importance of trust as a building block of a long-term customer relationship. Furthermore, ample evidence exists that service failures have a negative effect on customers' levels of trust in the service providers concerned. It should also be kept in mind that once trust levels are negatively influenced, it has a knock-on effect on the remainder of the long-term relationship. If proper service recovery does not take place, the trust concern escalates.

It is against this background that this study investigates the effect of a double deviation on trust in a long-term customer relationship. More specifically, the study compares the level of trust after a failed service recovery, as opposed to the trust level after the first service failure.

## **Service failure**

Since services are characterised by simultaneous production and consumption, they are prone to service failures (Siu, Zhang & Yau, 2013). In addition, as customers are often required to contribute to the service process, these customers' actions per se could contribute to service failure (Licata, Chakraborty & Krishnan, 2008). Chuang, Cheng, Chang and Yang (2012:258) define a service failure as the "inability to meet the customer's expectations". According to Lee and Park (2010), a service failure has the potential to damage a service provider's long-term profitability. In fact, the negative impact of a service failure becomes clear when realising that service failures may trigger

customer reactions such as anger, switching behaviour or even a desire for revenge (Pacheco, Pizzutti, Basso & Van Vaerenbergh, 2019).

These service failures often occur when customers have high demands, and when human involvement in delivering and producing the service is also high (Basso & Pizzutti, 2016). Chuang *et al.* (2012) found that service failures can either be outcome-related or process-related. Outcome-related service failure refers to a situation where the final outcome of the service is below the expectation, whereas process-related failure relates to the way in which the service has been delivered (Chuang *et al.*, 2012). Once a service failure occurs, it is a service provider's responsibility to recover from these service failures.

According to Johnston and Fern (1999: 71), service recovery refers to a situation where service providers "seek out and deal with service failures". Therefore, it can be argued that service recovery is an attempt to retain existing customers by restoring their level of satisfaction (Raikkonen & Honkanen, 2016). In fact, service recovery is so important for both service providers and customers, that Sabharwal, Soch and Kaur (2010) believe that service recovery is a decisive moment in a customer relationship. As most service recipients have a certain level of tolerance, which means that they are willing to accept a certain level of variance in the service they receive, service providers have the unique opportunity to tap into service recovery practices, or benefit from service recovery (Yap & Sweeney, 2007).

When a service failure occurs the significance of relationship marketing is illustrated by two opposing effects, namely the "love-is-blind" effect and the "love-becomes-hate" effect. The "love-is-blind" effect implies that customers who are in a meaningful relationship with a service provider, are more reluctant to hurt a service provider that is seen as a valued exchange partner or to end such a relationship (Gregoire & Fisher, 2006). According to Casado-Diaz, Mas-Ruiz and Kasper (2007), these customers are more likely to forgive poor service incidents, including failed service recoveries. On the other hand, the rationale behind the "love-becomes-hate" effect is that, owing to the fact that service failure is seen as a contract between service expectations and service performance, customers with strong relationships with service providers tend to perceive

service failures as acts of betrayal (Gregoire, Tripp & Legoux, 2009). Therefore, these customers respond more severely to incidents of service failure.

Considering the type of service recovery that takes place, Raikkonen and Honkanen (2016) posit that service providers should first consider the customer's level of dissatisfaction before a decision is made on which service recovery strategy should be followed. Furthermore, tangible service recoveries are most relevant in the case of outcome-related service failures, whereas a psychological service recovery approach is preferred in the case of process-related service failures (Chuang *et al.*, 2012). Raikkonen and Honkanen (2016) point out that, irrespective of the type of service recovery chosen, service recovery strategies should always focus on timely responses, being accountable for the failure, and on personal engagement with a customer.

### **Double deviation**

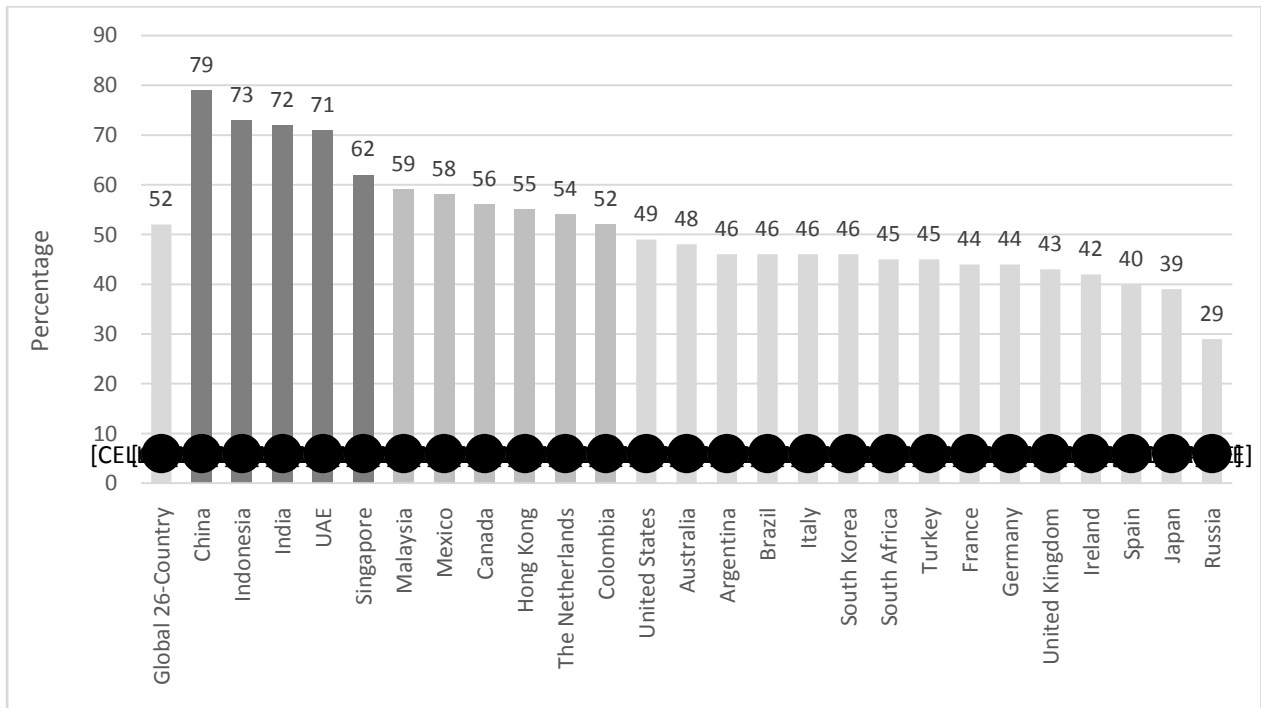
As explained earlier, a double deviation refers to a situation where a service provider attempts to recover from an initial service failure, but when these recovery efforts fail to meet the expectation of the service recipient (Basso & Pizzutti, 2016). In other words, the response of the service provider is viewed by the customer as being inadequate (Casado-Diaz *et al.*, 2007:292). It is therefore not surprising that a double service failure often results in extreme customer dissatisfaction (Raikkonen & Honkanen, 2016). A double deviation can thus severely harm a service provider's reputation and profitability (Johnston & Fern, 1999). A service provider might even permanently lose its customers as a result of a double deviation (Loo, Boo, & Khoo-Lattimore, 2013).

Given the nature of the service act, frontline employees are often responsible for ensuring customer satisfaction (Edvardsson, Tronvoll & Hoykinpuro, 2011). Therefore, these employees might be in the best position to respond to a service failure (Mattila, 2001). However, frontline employees do not always have the skills and autonomy to respond to service failures (Edvardsson *et al.*, 2011; Casado-Diaz *et al.*, 2007). A lack of company policies and procedures could be a reason that frontline employees do not always feel equipped to deal with customer complaints (Chuang *et al.*, 2012). This, in turn, increases the potential for the occurrence of double deviations.

According to Casado-Diaz *et al.* (2007), double deviations elicit negative emotions that develop through cognitive evaluations as a result of unjustified perceptions. Stemming from a double deviation, these negative emotions motivate customers to engage in various forms of emotionally driven coping behaviours, such as negative word-of-mouth and exiting a relationship (DeWitt & Brady, 2003). Furthermore, as satisfaction is both emotional and cognitive in nature, the negative emotions that are caused by a double deviation may have a strong and direct impact on overall customer satisfaction (Casado-Diaz *et al.*, 2007). These negative emotions could ultimately encourage customers to engage in harmful behaviour, such as customers shifting their focus to the future and the continuation of the relationship (Basso & Pizzutti, 2016).

## **Trust**

The media often reports on the general deterioration in global trust levels amongst not only businesses, but also between members of the public. According to the literature, this deterioration in trust levels became especially evident after the 2007/08 global financial crisis (Lins, Servaes & Tamayo, 2017). One of the most reputable sources on global trust levels, is the Edelman Trust Barometer, an annual measurement of the trust levels in different industries worldwide. The Edelman Trust Barometer measures trust on different levels, such as trust in the health care industry, trust in NGO's, and CEO trust, to mention a few. Figure 1 specifically depicts the results of the 2018 survey in terms of global trust levels (across all industries).

**Figure 1: Global trust levels**

Source: Edelman Trust Barometer: Global Annual Study (2018)

According to Figure 1, the average global trust level stands at 52 per cent, a percentage that is classified by the Edelman Trust Barometer as nearing the category of distrust. More specifically, the trust levels of 15 of the 26 countries that were included in the study, already fall in the distrust category (distrust referring to less than 50%), whereas only five countries show trust levels of above 60 per cent. Furthermore, the black circles (with numbers) in Figure 1 deserve special attention. These circles illustrate the relative change in trust levels within a specific country from 2017 to 2018. According to these circles, the majority of the countries in the study experienced an increase in their trust levels from 2017 to 2018. However, it must be noted that the 2017 trust levels were at almost record low levels. Therefore, the 2017 levels should not necessarily be accepted as a true reflection of trust levels.

One of the implications of the low trust levels in Figure 1, is that service providers will have to expand their efforts to rebuild and manage trust among their customers. From an academic perspective, the marketing literature provides ample support for the importance of trust in any business relationship; in fact, Shumann, Wangenheim, Stringfellow, Yang, Praxmarer, Jimenez, Blazevic, Shannon, Shainesh and Komor

(2010:453) emphasise that trust is “the single most powerful relationship marketing tool available to a company”. According to Basso and Pizzutti (2016), trust refers to an expectation of dependability and reliability in fulfilling promises made to the customer, whereas Schumann et al. (2019) define trust as the willingness by both parties to be vulnerable given the customer’s positive expectations of the behaviour of the service provider.

It is well documented that trust is a multidimensional construct consisting of a cognitive and an affective component (Dowell, Morrison & Heffernan, 2015). Cognitive trust, which can also be described as the knowledge-driven aspect of trust (Johnson & Grayson, 2005), refers to the rational elements of trust (Sekhon, Roy, Sherfill & Pritchard, 2013), such as the competence and consistency of a service provider (Johnson & Grayson, 2005). Furthermore, cognitive trust is the result of conscious decisions made by customers to predict the likelihood of a service provider to keep its promises (Sekhon *et al.*, 2013). Sekhon *et al.* (2013) therefore argue that establishing cognitive trust is vital, and as soon as it is in place, the process of developing trust is quicker.

Whereas cognitive trust is the starting point of the process of developing trust, affective trust is responsible for developing intimacy in a relationship (La & Choi, 2012). Sekhon *et al.* (2013:78) contend that a sound relationship is primarily the result of affective trust. Although various factors can contribute to the establishment of affective trust, benevolence is a key component of affective trust (Calefato, Lanubile & Novielli, 2015). In the context of this study, benevolence denotes the perception that a service provider acts in the best interest of their customers. A further contributor to affective trust is shared values, which refers to a situation where exchange parties’ beliefs are in alignment (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). Other components of affective trust are integrity, openness and honesty (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010).

### **Double deviation and trust**

Although the literature provides ample evidence that service failure has a negative effect on trust, the literature is scant on the effect of a double deviation on trust. The few studies on the link between a double deviation and trust, include those by Pacheco,

Pizzutti, Basso and Van Vaerenbergh (2019), Basso and Pizzutti (2016) and Casado-Diaz *et al.* (2007).

Since a double deviation has a negative effect on customer satisfaction, the affected customers shift their focus to the future of the relationship (Basso & Pizzutti, 2016). Based on the premise that satisfaction is a well-established antecedent of trust (Leisen & Hyman, 2004), it is argued that, once a double deviation occurs, the effect on trust will be even more negative.

The possible link between a double deviation and trust can further be justified from a cognitive trust perspective. Cognitive trust, which relates to rationality, develops from customers' perceptions of a service provider's competence and consistency (Sekhon *et al.*, 2013). In addition, a double deviation represents a certain level of inconsistency in service delivery, which is also by customers in a rational manner (Sekhon *et al.*, 2013). When a customer experiences a service failure, the customer's vulnerability is exploited (La & Choi, 2012). Subsequently, customers may experience stressful cognitive appraisals when they feel that they have been exploited twice (Casado-Diaz *et al.*, 2007).

The impact of a double deviation on trust is based on the notion that negative moments of service delivery fail customers (Basso & Pizzutti, 2016). These failures, result in a general deterioration in trust. According to Tax, Brown and Chandrashekar, (1998), it is evident that a trust violation has implications for the management of long-term customer relationships. Furthermore, a failed service recovery intensifies the effects of the first deviation or service failure (Bitner, Booms & Tetreault, 1990) eroding customer trust even further (Holloway, Wang & Beatty 2009).

Based on the prominence that is given in the literature to the concepts of service failure, double deviations and trust, the following hypotheses are stated:

- H<sub>01</sub>: Affective trust is not influenced by the different levels of service failure
- H<sub>a1</sub>: Affective trust is influenced by the different levels of service failure
- H<sub>02</sub>: Cognitive trust is not influenced by the different levels of service failure
- H<sub>a2</sub>: Cognitive trust is influenced by the different levels of service failure



## Methodology

This study made use of an experimental quantitative research technique. The following section provides information on the experimental design, the measurement instrument that was used, the development of the scenarios, data gathering, the sampling procedure and data analysis.

*The experiment:* A quasi 2x2 experiment (a single service failure followed by failed service recovery; therefore creating a double deviation), and their effect on cognitive and affective trust) was used in this study. A one-group pre-test post-test design was used, since the same group of respondents were exposed to both scenario 1 (the single deviation) and scenario 2 (the double deviation). The respondents were observed before and after the two exposures.

*Measurement instrument:* A questionnaire was developed according to a selection of trust items identified in the literature. This was done to ensure that only those items of which the reliability of the scales was previously established, were included in the study. The items were mostly sourced from Basso and Pizzutti (2016); Sekhon, Ennew, Kharouf and Devlin (2014); Sekhon *et al.* (2013); and Johnson and Grayson (2005). All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 7 representing strongly agree. A number of demographic questions were included at the start of the questionnaire to determine the demographic profile of the respondents.

*Development of scenarios:* A pre-test was conducted to develop the stimuli. Respondents were introduced to seven hypothetical service failure situations in the airline industry. To ensure anonymity, a fictional airline (referred to as 'Airline X') was used, along with seven hypothetical scenarios of service failures. Respondents had to rank these seven scenarios on a scale of one to 10 according to the intensity (or level of severity) of each service failure. Mean scores were calculated for each of the seven scenarios, after which the scenarios with the lowest and the highest mean scores were selected as the two final scenarios. The first stimulus (indicating a low-level service failure) was labelled 'first deviation', and the second stimulus (indicating a high-level service failure) was labelled 'second deviation'.

*Data gathering:* Respondents were introduced to the first service failure scenario (i.e., the first scenario according to the results of the pre-test). After being exposed to this scenario, respondents had to indicate their level of trust in Airline X. Once completed, the questionnaires were collected and the respondents were introduced to the second scenario. The second scenario pertained to the scenario achieved the highest mean score in the pre-test. The respondents then had to complete the same questionnaire that was used for scenario 1. In this way, the respondents were introduced to two levels of service failure, which represented a double deviation.

*Sampling:* A non-probability convenience sample was drawn to select respondents. The final sample consisted of students of a large, multicultural South African university. All the respondents belonged to the generation Y cohort. In order to satisfy the requirements of the statistical techniques to be employed during the data analysis, a sample of between 150 and 200 respondents was targeted.

*Data analysis:* The reliability of the data was assessed by means of Cronbach alphas, and the hypotheses were assessed by conducting one-way Anova tests. All the analyses were performed using SPSS version 26.

## **Empirical results**

First, a pre-test was conducted to identify two deviation scenarios. During the pre-test, respondents were exposed to seven service failure scenarios. The respondents were asked to rank the scenarios according to their perceived level of severity of the service failure. Based on the average mean score for each of the seven scenarios, two scenarios were identified: The first one reflected a low-level service failure scenario (stimulus 1), and the second reflected a high-level service failure scenario (stimuli 2). These two scenarios are illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Results of the pre-test**

<b>Service failure number</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Scenario number</b>
1	Suppose you are a frequent flier with Airline X. On your way back home after a holiday, your flight is delayed. After checking in your baggage and progressing through customs, you end up waiting for your flight at the boarding gate for three hours. During this time you have not received any information regarding your delayed flight and when your new boarding time would be. As a result, you are unable to inform your friend, who has planned to pick you up at the airport, when you will be arriving. Your friend, in turn, ends up having to wait for you at the airport for an extended period of time.	1
6	Suppose you are a frequent flier with Airline X. On your way back home after a holiday, you make use of Airline X. You and your fellow passengers board the aeroplane. Everyone has taken their seats, but after more than two hours, the plane has not departed. The passengers have not received any explanation about the reason for the delay either. Through the window you notice that smoke is coming from the left engine. Finally, the aeroplane moves towards the runway. On the runway, however, the airhostess announces that the left engine of the aeroplane has failed to start but that the pilot will attempt to start it with take-off. As a result, the aircraft might take-off with only one working engine.	2

The two scenarios presented in Table 1 signify a lower-level and a higher-level service failure scenario, which formed the basis from which the actual scenarios for the main study were developed.

The next step was to use the two scenarios described in Table 1 and to link them to each other. This link was necessary to show a first service failure followed by a recovery of the service failure. These final two scenarios, in which the link between them is indicated, are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Single and double deviation scenarios**

Scenario	Description
Single deviation	Suppose you are on your way back home from a holiday. You are travelling on Airline X, of which you are also a frequent flier. However, the flight is delayed, and you end up waiting for your flight at the boarding gate for three hours. During this time, you have not received any information regarding your delayed flight and when your new boarding time would be. As a result, you are unable to inform your friend, who is picking you up at the airport, when you will be landing. Therefore, your friend ends up waiting for you at the airport for an extended period. You find this situation unacceptable, and you contact Airline X's ground staff. In order to pacify you, they offer you a free upgrade to first class.
Second deviation	Finally, a boarding announcement has been made and you are now seated in first class. All passengers have taken their seats and the doors are closed. However, something appears to be wrong since it has taken another two hours for the plane to start moving. Again, there is no communication from Airline X. Finally, the plane starts moving towards the runway. On the runway, the airhostess announces that the left engine has failed to start and that the pilot will attempt to take-off with one working engine only. The majority of the passengers start to complain fiercely, resulting in the plane having to return to the terminal.

The two scenarios presented in Table 2 formed the basis for the main part of the study. During the main study, a total of 196 respondents participated in the research. This number of respondents was deemed adequate for the statistical techniques that were employed during the data analysis. After screening the data for incomplete responses, eight questionnaires were removed from the dataset. The perceptions of 188 respondents were therefore included in the remainder of the study.

In terms of gender, 57 per cent of the respondents were female and 43 per cent were male. The majority of the respondents had previous exposure to flying, with only about two per cent of respondents indicating that they had never flown before. From the 98 per

cent with experience of airline services, about six per cent were frequent flyers (i.e. flying more than 10 times a year). Almost all respondents indicated that their tickets were paid for by their parents and/or spouses.

The normality of the data was assessed by calculating skewness and kurtosis scores. In all cases, these scores fell in the generally accepted levels for skewness and kurtoses. Therefore, it can be deducted that the assumption of normality was not violated. The reliability of the measurement instruments was assessed through Cronbach alphas, and the results of these assessments appear in Table 3.

**Table 3: Reliability scores**

Constructs	First deviation	Second deviation
Affective trust	0.844	0.885
Cognitive trust	0.787	0.824

From the values given in Table 3, it can be assumed that the measurement instrument provided sufficient evidence of reliability, since all values are well above the generally accepted cut-off point of 0.7.

In order to assess the stated hypotheses, two within-subjects one-way Anova tests were conducted. The results of the two tests are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Results of hypotheses testing**

Hypothesis	Wilks' lambda	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	F-value
H <sub>01</sub> : Affective trust is not influenced by the different levels of service failure.	0.51	0.00	0.49	150.79
H <sub>02</sub> : Cognitive trust is not influenced by the different levels of service failure.	0.396	0.00	0.60	239.35

In terms of the first test relevant to the assessment of H<sub>01</sub>, the Wilks' lambda value was 0.51 with an associated p-value of 0.00. The effect size of the statistically significant results was 0.49, which suggests a large effect size. The F-value was 150.79. Based on these values, the study found that affective trust is indeed influenced by different levels

of service failure. The stated null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ) was therefore rejected whilst  $H_{a1}$  was supported.

Similar results were obtained in the case of cognitive trust pertaining to the second null hypothesis ( $H_{02}$  in Table 4). This hypothesis was also rejected. The Wilks' lambda value was 0.396 with an associated p-value of 0.00, demonstrating statistical significance. Once again, the effect size of 0.60 demonstrated a large effect size. Support was therefore found for  $H_{a2}$

The results of the study thus provide evidence for the rejection of both the null hypotheses, and support for the alternate hypotheses ( $H_{a1}$  and  $H_{a2}$ ), meaning that affective and cognitive trust is indeed influenced by the different levels of service failure.

## **Discussion and recommendations**

Although it was found that both affective and cognitive trust is negatively influenced by a double deviation, the empirical results showed that cognitive trust is influenced more than affective trust. It is therefore argued that if a double deviation occurs, service providers should ensure that the focus is firstly placed on regaining customers' cognitive trust, and then affective trust.

Since cognitive trust is based on a service provider's dependability, reliability, their ability to keep promises, their competency, adequate knowledge and skills, these dimensions should form the core elements from which cognitive trust is managed. Not only should frontline employees receive behavioural training to assist them in managing customer complaints, but they should also have the authority to resolve complaints and service failures. The ideal is, however, to prevent that frontline employees are exposed to situations where a double deviation could occur.

Since the service industry is about promises that are made and kept, it is important that employees are familiar with customers' expectations. The golden rule remains to rather under-promise and to over-deliver.

The study also revealed that affective trust is negatively influenced by repeated service failures. This type of trust, which relates to the emotional side of trust, could be managed by focusing on effective communication. Given the variety of communication

media that are available, service providers are in the unique position to select the most appropriate communication media. Often service failure is the result of poor communication, and proper interaction between especially frontline employees and customers could be vital. The focus should be on the service provider's honesty, openness, as well as timeliness and accuracy of communication. To improve their communication skills, frontline employees should also be able to interact in the customers' home language, which could contribute to a sense of shared values. In addition, training should be provided to frontline employees to sensitise them towards different cultures and ethnicities.

As service failures often have to be addressed by frontline employees, the service providers' human resource departments should consider appointing the appropriate employees. Appointments should not be made based on whether the candidates purely comply with the basic conditions of a job specification, but their interactional skills should also be taken into account. The focus should thus be on frontline employees' social and emotional literacy – assets that can help these employees to deal with challenging service situations. Educating front-line employees in how to handle conflict situations successfully should also be a priority.

### **Reconciliation with the literature**

The origin of service failure can often be related to the unique characteristics of services as opposed to tangible products. Services are manufactured and consumed simultaneously and often result in situations where the actual service delivery deviates from the planned service delivery. This study supports the view of Schumann *et al.* (2010) that, when considering service recovery, trust is arguably one of the single most powerful relationship marketing tools available to a service provider. However, service failure leads to the deterioration of trust, which puts renewed focus on restoring and managing trust in customer relationships.

Although both affective and cognitive trust is negatively affected in the case of a double deviation, it was found that cognitive trust erodes more easily than affective trust. This finding indicates that customers attempt to suppress their emotions in an effort to preserve the relationship with a service provider (Tsai, Yang & Cheng, 2014).

In addition, the current study confirmed the notion that cognitive trust should receive precedence when a double deviation occurs. It is generally assumed that service providers should focus on psychological strategies when service recovery is required after a double deviation (Basso & Pizzutti, 2016). However, the findings of this study rather support the view of Joireman, Gregoire, Devezer and Tripp (2013) that psychological tactics would be more successful if it included a focus on cognitive trust. The study also confirmed the important recommendation of Sekhon *et al.* (2013) that the most effective service recovery strategy is one where cognitive and affective trust is managed in congruence with each other.

### **Limitations and future research**

As is the case with all studies, this study was not without its limitations. These limitations centre on sampling and therefore the generalisability of the results. It should be kept in mind that the study made use of a student sample. Despite the fact that respondents were from a large and diverse multicultural university, the results might not necessarily be applicable to cohorts other than that of Generation Y. However, the Generation Y cohort provides valuable insights into the effect of double deviations on trust among the younger generation. When considering the demographics of the sample, especially pertaining to who was responsible for the payment of flight tickets, the study revealed that about 97 per cent of the respondents did not pay for the tickets themselves. It would have been interesting to determine whether the results of the study would have been different if the respondents themselves were responsible for the cost of their airline tickets.

In addition, the study focused on the airline industry only. The generalisability of the results to other industries might thus be questioned.

The study was conducted on a limited scale, therefore a number of areas for future research arise. For example, as far as could be ascertained, this study was the first of its kind to investigate the effect of a double deviation on the management of trust from a South African perspective. It could be valuable to assess the role that demographics and culture play when double deviations are analysed. The question arises whether different demographic or cultural groups might have different perceptions on the effect of



double deviations on the formation of trust. By addressing this question, service providers would be able to sharpen their targeting strategies, by customising their trust efforts according to the needs of their target market. Secondly, the influence of gender could yield interesting results, as the literature provides evidence that female customers respond more positively to trust violations than men (Haselhuhn, Kennedy, Kray, Zant & Schweitzer, 2014).

## **Contribution**

Arguably the biggest contribution of this study is that it highlights the relatively under-researched topic of double deviation, especially from a South African perspective.

It should be remembered that not all customers are equal. For instance, it cannot be assumed that the needs of customers from developing countries are similar to those of customers from developed countries. Service providers should therefore be cautious not to apply trust building strategies that were developed for customers from developed countries, to customers from developing countries. For example, it might be fair to assume that these customers may differ in terms of their expectations.

In addition, it is often argued that trust is firstly established on emotional rather than rational grounds. However, this study established that service providers should prioritise cognitive trust (a more rational approach) above affective trust (a more emotional approach) in service recovery situations. It must be noted that this study in no way underestimates the value of affective trust: the best results could be achieved if service providers focus on a combination of cognitive and affective trust.

## **Conclusion**

Despite a strive towards a zero-defect culture, all service providers have to deal with service recovery from time to time. Once a service failure occurs, a service provider has the almost “once-in-a-lifetime” opportunity not only to recover from the failure, but also to foster the continuation of customer relationships. Unfortunately, appropriate service recovery cannot always be assumed, resulting in a situation where service recovery is a failure as well. Should service recovery efforts fail, a double-deviation occurs, which could cause significant harm to the customer’s trust in the service provider.

As proven by this study, customer relationships could be rebuilt by focusing on both the cognitive and affective building blocks of trust. In particular, the study found that trust management efforts should be given preference to cognitive strategies above affective strategies.

However, the solution to managing trust under circumstances of double deviation, might be more apparent than previously anticipated. The fundamentals of the service industry are based on making and keeping promises. It is service providers' responsibility to ensure they avoid making empty promises and focus on promises that are attainable. *Back-to-basics*, could once more provide the solution to this intricate problem.

## **Acknowledgement**

The invaluable contribution of Ms Colette Rossouw is hereby acknowledged.

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