

From Self-Preservers to Vigilantes: The Rule Enforcement Models of Frontline Employees

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Abstract

Past research has established variations in how individual FLEs enact the rule enforcement role. However, these differences are often only attributed to organizational/job characteristics, the social environment or personality factors. This paper reveals that FLEs interpret the rule enforcement role in different ways and that these interpretations matter. Our findings illuminate six important individual-level attributes that shape these interpretations 1) FLEs' rationale for rule enforcement 2) role boundary definitions 3) perceptions of service rules 4) stakeholder orientation 5) perceptions of rule-breakers and 6) framing of rule enforcement situations. These beliefs combine to create four distinct rule enforcement models: self-preserver, dutiful citizen, instrumentalist, and vigilante. We describe the consequences associated with these models and explain the implications of our typology for service management theory and practice.

Keywords: frontline employees, rule enforcement models, self-preserver, vigilantes, customer misbehaviour

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