

# How Frontline Employees Navigate Complaints: Understanding Heuristics in Service Recovery

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## **Abstract**

While the literature offers many recommendations for optimal decision-making in service recovery, less is known about the actual decision strategies FLEs employ. We draw on a qualitative dataset including 40 semi-structured in-depth interviews, a diary study with 20 participants, and a survey, and identify five distinct decision heuristics used by FLEs in recovery situations, depending on their specific recovery context. We find that recovery contexts shape distinct cost considerations for FLEs, which, in turn, determine the recovery heuristics they resort to. Our study contributes to the literature on the role of FLEs in recovery by shedding light on FLE decision-making processes and by examining the role of costs in recovery contexts resulting from organizational parameters. Our findings show that the heuristics can play out differently for staff, managers, and customers, with each group experiencing different benefits and challenges.

**Track:** Service Marketing & Service Innovation