The Identification of the Frontline Employees Cognitive Appraisal in the Face of the Customers Aggression in Oil Industries Business Management (Case Study: Iran Petroleum Products Distribution Company - Tehran Region)

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ABSTRACT

One of the main strategies in oil industries management is the evaluation of the relationships between the customers and employees. To do so, the interpretive paradigm, the qualitative approach, and the Grounded Theory Approach have been used. As for the qualitative approach, snowball sampling has been used, and the latent content analysis technique has been used to analyze the in-depth reviews, helping to code and identify the employees' cognitive appraisal indices. Also, as for the quantitative approach, simple random sampling was used, with a structural equation model used for data analysis. The results and findings of the study indicate that the top managers in Iran Petroleum Products Distribution Company, especially those in the Human Resource Development, Commercial, and Research & Technology sections, can use the model extracted in the current study as well as the suggestions provided, to pay more attention to the mental health of the Frontlie Employees (FLEs). They can also use the results to know how the employees deal with the

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customers' aggression and abuse. Hence, the current study can be useful for the oil industries researchers.

1. Introduction

The critical service incidents have been widely analyzed in the service marketing literature to find new methods for services quality improvement (e.g. Binter et al., 1990). Most of these researches have been generally focused on the customers' view of the incidents. And also, the customers have been blamed for customer dissatisfaction, anger, and even rage. Since the service encounters need at least two persons, it is very crucial to view the confrontation from both points of view, to discover some of the basic reasons behind the low service quality, whereas, this affects more, especially the FLEs facing the customers every day, who should have ever-increasing sales and also adapt to the customers and managers' demands (Ben-Zur and Yagil, 2005 Chan and Wan, 2012 Daunt and Harris, 2013).

Today, a great deal of the theoretical literature use different expressions such as the customers' misbehavior (Huang et al., 2010), customer deviance (Reynolds and Harris, 2006), problematic customers (Binter et al., 1994; Poddar and Madupalli, 2012), standoffish customers (Walsh, 2010), unfair customers (Berry and Seiders, 2008), angry customers (Dallimore et al., 2007), customer rage (Surachartkuntonkum et al., 2013), and customer dysfunctional behavior (Harris and Reynolds, 2003; Fisk et al., 2010). These behaviors include verbal aggressions such as the raised voice, sarcasm, screaming, threatening, yelling, and insulting, physical threats including punching down, slamming, or throwing the phone, and non-verbal signals such as an angry face, staring, and other forms of body language (Grove et al., 2004; Huang et al., 2010).

Customer anger is ever-increasing in all businesses, especially in service companies (grove et al., 2004). The British National Committee of Customers' deputy has stated that "every day, we are witnessing more and more customer rage and complaints against the service companies to their improper performance" (BBC NEWS, 2006). This organization receives about 800000 complaints, annually. The ComPsych Company which is consulting company in terms of businesses has recently reported that the stress consultation sessions for the employees facing the customer's rage have been increased by 78% (Villagran, 2006).

In fact, the service sector employees are especially at the key frontline of customers' rage and anger, and facing these anger events can be very stressful for the FLEs (Van Jaarsveld et al., 2010; Walsh, 2010). Coping with dissatisfied customers has several negative effects on the FLEs, including excessive fatigue, psychological damage, feeling inhuman, performance burnout, and more employee turnover within the company (Grandey et al, 2004; Harris and Reynolds, 2003; Karatepe et al., 2009), and as a result, they can cause long-term emotional problems for those employees, i.e. such behaviors put the employees in a victimized position by the psychological and/or physical aggression, and inflict severe damage to them (Dallimore et al., 2007; Reynolds and Harris, 2006). Such employees have an effective role in the customers' perception of the quality of the services (Brady et al., 2012), and employees directly involved in such incidents are prone to rage reactions (Dallimore et al., 2007), probably even inflected by severe mental damage (Dormann and Zapf, 2004; Grandey et al., 2004). Despite the increase in aggressive incidents, the organizations are not properly prepared for coping with the potentially risky conditions (McGregor, 2008).

The fact is that during the recent years, the service failure has grabbed the service area researchers' attention, however, most of such research has dealt with the failure from the customers' viewpoint, consequently portraying the FLEs as the guilty, and the customers as the victims (Bougie et al., 2003; McColl-Kennedy al., 2009 Surachartkuntonkum et al., 2013). The number of research dealing with the service failure from the FLEs point of view and the psychological effects of such failure on them is very limited (Rafaeli et al., 2012).

As mentioned above, the research has mainly dealt with the perception of the employees' performance results in favor of the customers and organizations (e.g. what the employees do for the customers), and they have

ignored the employees' well-being (their feelings) and how their psychological well-being impacts their service performance (what they feel and when they have a specific feeling) (Loo et al, 2021).

The customers' complaint handling behavior is addressed in the studies on service marketing (Bergel and Brock, 2018; Berry et al., 2018; Blodgett et al., 2015).

In the current study, instead of focusing on the employees as the failure factors, we have used a different approach, dealing with the relationship between the customers and employees when facing the failure. Therefore, we have considered individual well-being as a crucial research priority in scientific research (Ostrom et al., 2010). Thus, we seek to more deeply perceive how the FLEs cope with service failure, as well as the effects of the cognitive appraisal on their mental well-being.

2. Literature review

Numerous research has been conducted on how service employees manage several stressful conditions (such as the customers complaining and anger) (Goussinky, 2012; Chan et al., 2016). For instance, Bell and Laddington (2006) evaluated that how the individual's attitude towards the perceived events (susceptibility) affects the complaints negative effects of their service commitment. Also, Goussinsky (2012) has studied the moderating role of the negative effect on the relationship between customer aggression and the three agitation-based coping strategies. On the other hand, Billy and McClough (2000) indicated the effectiveness of the emotional force in those service employees faced with the problematic employees, using several coping strategies.

Although such researches lead to the creation of a mindset and insight in the individuals, it is trivial, and Lee and Madra (2019) have recently complained about the lack of research on the potential interventions to help with the service employees who adopt effective emotional strategies (Loo et al., 2021).

The cognitive appraisal is an incident, not only affecting the individual's psychological health in general but also, most probably the job stress is the mediator between the job demand and the individual's health (Mark and Smith, 2008). In addition to the employees' stress, the complaining customer itself can be stressful and thus, the results can vary, i.e. the employees can react differently and take measures not much desired by their organizations (Torres et al., 2017). Interacting with angry and aggressive customers can affect both the customers and the employees, as well as the service recovering results (Komunda and Osarenkhoe, 2012;

Cambra-Fierro and Melero-Polo, 2017; Chen et al., 2018; Nwokorie, 2016).

Based on the research on emotional work, the service employees have to show positive feelings, despite the management of the unfavorable conditions in which the dissatisfied customer expresses his/her negative feelings or shows them by body language (Kim, 2008). This emotional abnormality can instead force the employees to moderate their feelings and probably, their behavior. However, how the service employees evaluate a complaint situation and use this appraisal to moderate their feelings is yet to be studied (Loo et al., 2021).

The cognitive appraisal indicates the individual's mental appraisal about whether he/she has felt threatened in a stressful situation or not. If a situation is perceived as a threat or risk to the personal credit such as the values or needs, it may lead to a negative emotional reaction (Surachartkumtonkun, 2011). Basic human needs are what people strive to meet in life. These needs guide the cognitive appraisal process and affect emotional reactions (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). When the needs are suppressed, the people constantly strive to find some ways to meet their needs, since they are the intrinsic motivations of human behaviors and inspirations (Markus and Wurf, 1987). Personal needs are the essence of the individual health and a part of the intrinsic features that build his/her personality (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The maladjustment between the meaning of a situation (e.g. violating the individual's self-esteem due to customer's rage) and the intrinsic perception of the individual from himself/herself (e.g. need for self-esteem) can lead to severe stress (Burke, 1991). If the needs are constantly suppressed, it can lead to severe negative reactions (Baumeister and Leary, 1995).

Searching the credible databases of the world, diverse literature can be found in the international sources, most of which are relevant to a part of the current study topic, though not as comprehensive. Some of the related literature would be presented in the following.

The empirical findings Jannet et al., (2021) indicate that deception is prevalent in organizations and has a notable effect on immoral behaviors. This study also indicates that deceitful behavior can protect the employees against the threat of identification of their immoral behaviors. These findings provide new insight into the relationship between deception, the employees' threat appraisal process, coping appraisal process, and immoral behavior, paving the way for further studies in this regard.

In a study Loo et al., (2021) entitled "How Should I Respond to a Customer's Complaint? A Cognitive-

Emotional-Behavioral Model of Restaurant Service Employees Vision", asserted as below:

The results indicated that the service employees conduct several cognitive appraisals and show different emotional reactions in response to different complaints. As a result, they have shown agitation coping behaviors including avoidance and physical encounter. These findings can help the experts of the field to provide better solutions in terms of complaints management and handling that increase both customers' and employees' satisfaction.

A study Kang and Gong (2019) entitled "The Customer's Dysfunctional Behavior: An Empirical Conceptualization and Validation", dealt with the precise dimension of the dysfunctional customer's behavior, and concluded that its exact composition is unknown. Customer dysfunctional behaviors are localized and different in several services and is a growing problem for employees and organizations. This study contains a customer dysfunctional behavior structure which includes three dimensions as the verbal abuse, improper demand, and illegal complaint.

The results indicate that customer dysfunctional behaviors are localized and can be found in different service sectors. However, in spite of the significant attention paid by the physicians and thinkers, the perception of the customer dysfunctional behavior concept and its measurement is limited to date.

In a study Alamadag and Elinger (2018) entitled "The Effects of Job Stress Reduction on the Employees Work Improvement", the effects of the organizations' services on the job pressures were evaluated. In addition, the cooperation that promoted the employees' well-being when facing the customer was identified to encourage better experiences of service to the customers. Using the equity theory, this study investigates the commitment to the organization, the effects of the replacement reward approach on the job stress, and the customer-orientation attitudes by evaluation of the effects of intrinsic reward (social cognition) and output (monetary). The results of

the study conducted on 220 samples from different service organizations revealed that social recognition reduces job stress, however, contrary to the expectations, the monetary reward increases it. In addition, payment satisfaction is more effective on customer behavior than social recognition.

In a study Yu et al., (2017) entitled "Bad Feeling and Doing the Right Things: The Effects of the Customer Behavior on the Service Employees", it was investigated whether the employees with negative feelings due to customer misbehavior, confront the cooperation in helping with others or not. Customer abuse is a common occurrence for many FLEs. While some evidence shows that some employees work as a result of the abuse and dysfunction at the working place, other studies indicate that the employees may deal with such negative experiences through helping others.

Study aimed Akawintcha et al., (2015) at investigation of FLEs cognitive appraisal when facing aggressive customers as well as its effects on the employee's well-being. Besides, it dealt with the evaluation of the moderation effects in an eastern cumulative culture.

The findings indicated that feel threats such as the threats to self-esteem, physical health, reaching job goals, fairness and equity, and sense of control when facing the customers' aggression. These cognitive appraisals affect the employees' psychological health in the form of negative effects, anger, depression, and stress. More importantly, in this study, the factors that moderate effects of the customer aggression on cognitive appraisal as well as the effects of the cognitive appraisal on psychological well-being (worsen or weaken) have been identified.

Contrary to the previous literature, the current study has considered the cognitive appraisal leading to the aggressive incidents to include the violence of basic needs (e.g., economic resources[2], self-esteem[3], fairness[4], control[5] and physical well-being[6] (security)).

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[2] The economic needs imply the need for the protection of one's own economic welfare and financial security (Schneider and Bowen 1999)

[3] The quality of the service employees' interpersonal interactions plays a critical role in the improvement or threatening of the customer's value (Patterson et al., 2009). Several service organizations have perceived this point and consequently, have trained their FLEs to improve their customers' self-esteem by, for example, a friendly welcome, remembering customers' names, and considering their opinions (Surachartkumtonkun, 2011), so their self-esteem would also remain intact.

[4] The fairness indicates a need that the individual should not get less than he/she deserves (Lerner, 2003). In any transaction, there is an

implicit commitment based on fair treatment, between the customer and the seller (Seiders and Berry, 1998).

[5] The need to have control over one's own life is known as one of the basic psychological needs (Skinner, 1996). People have a positive feeling or behavior when they think they are independent and can decide freely (Hui and Bateson, 1991). On the contrary, the lack of sense of control can lead to the assumption of helplessness and consequent untimely behaviors (Bowen and Johnston, 1999).

[6] The physical welfare needs or the need for being secure from physical damage, are among the most basic needs in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and the most important need of any human being. The service organizations must be aware of the security issues and have a plan to protect the customers and the employees. Failure in the provision of a

The current study is the first empirical research to investigate the Frontline Employees (FLEs) behavior when faced with customers' aggression in one of the country's oil companies. It is also the first research to use a contingency approach to identify how the employees treat the customers' aggression, i.e. when faced with customer aggression, under what probable conditions are the employees' cognitive appraisal effects on their mental health, in the oil industries?

3. Research methodology

The current study is conducted by the use of a mixed research method. The first study method is qualitative with a phenomenological approach, while the second study is quantitative and empirical. Also, in terms of typology, according to Crosswell and Plano-Clark, it is combined-explorative research in which the researcher should first, qualitatively explore the research subject with some participants, and then, these qualitative findings allow for vocabulary development or scales of quantitative scaling tools. It is taxonomical research in terms of the area of implementation in which the researcher seeks to develop the main research question (Moradi & Sadeghi, 2014). Therefore, the current study is a sequential (sequential-explorative) research in which the qualitative data was gathered and analyzed first, and then, the quantitative data was gathered and analyzed as a supplementation. Finally, both qualitative and quantitative analyses were interpreted together as follows:

First Study: qualitative- based on phenomenological paradigm (tradition)

This type of study aims to investigate the meaning of a phenomenon or concept under study from the viewpoint of a group of individuals, by the use of qualitative research and phenomenological approach (Von Mannen, 1982), since in phenomenology, the phenomenon under study is investigated based on the interpretive epistemology approach and the individuals' mentality and the meaning of the phenomenon they know in their lived experience. Phenomenological research is intrinsically qualitative and contains a set of interpretive methods that seek to describe, decode, and experience. Also, this tradition (approach) in the qualitative-phenomenological research, with emphasis on "why" and "how" customers behave based on lived experience, is the most used research method in

marketing (Black et al., 2014). Another important aspect of phenomenological studies is their ability to translate interpretive reports the individuals give from their experiences. A key aspect of this research that distinguishes it from the positivist and functional methods is that the experience is imagined as a dynamic process in which specific incidents are revealed in each specific moment, while other incidents become a background for these experiences (Mohammadpour, 2012).

The objective of this phenomenological study is to understand and discover the lived experience of the FLEs in the face of customers' aggression in the oil industries. We aim to understand the FLEs' experience in a situation they are naturally and unconsciously faced with aggressive customers, without any manipulations and only from their point of view. Phenomenology is a method that investigates the nature and essence of the phenomena. In other words, is a descriptive-interpretive and reflective approach for the perception of essence and nature of the individuals' lives experience which is usually narrated by themselves? This experience can be anything (Mansourian, 2014). When we use this method, we want to deeply perceive a meaning created by the cognitive assessment of the FLEs when faced with customer aggression. Thus, the experience has become the focus of phenomenology. The experience in daily life, which is obtained by reliance on human innovation in interaction with the social contexts, shapes human life. Therefore, the experience is interwoven with human life and considered by the phenomenologists under the title of 'lived experience'. The phenomenologist believes that the lived experience can be perceived under the awareness of physical things, values, states, activities, and feelings. In this regard, some sociologists seek to investigate the relationship between individual awareness and social life through phenomenology. The phenomenologist seeks to explain how human awareness affects the production of social action, situations, and the world. From the phenomenological point of view, scientific knowledge seeks to identify and describe a method by which the individuals mentally and consciously enclose specific meanings to the objects. It should be noted that it happens in the daily life of man and in other words, it is how the reality of daily life happens. Thus, the main position of reality is in human awareness and Husserl tried to clarify this position by various philosophical conceptualizations and techniques (Iman, 2014).

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secure service environment can lead to public anger (Schneider and Bowen, 1999).

In other words, the narration, description, analysis, and interpretation of the FELs' confrontation with the aggressive customers is the basis for our phenomenological research. Generally, phenomenological studies aim to describe life experiences in the same way they have occurred. A direct explanation of the phenomena, experiences, and events as they are, occurred in the time, place, and world we are living in. in the phenomenological analysis, individuals' interpretations of realities they have experienced are investigated and the researcher seeks to find an interpretation of the experiences posing in the mind of the studied group. The interpretations and experiences are always unique due to being limited to different times and places. Phenomenologically, experience is somehow related to the human perceptions of his own presence in the world when the affairs, truths, and values are being built. In this regard, they seek to describe what all humans enjoy and that is nothing but the phenomena all of whom experience, e.g. sorrow and grief is a universal experience. In the current study, we use the contemporary (interpretive phenomenology) approach. As a result, what matters to us is the meaning enclosed by the studied individuals to the experience of FLEs when faced with aggressive customers. Understanding the essence or nature of phenomena should be realized with reliance on the intrinsic characteristics of the phenomenon itself, not by the use of previous theories (Mansourian, 2014). Also, the researcher should abandon his past accustomed attitude during the phenomenological perception of phenomena and avoid any stereotypes and conventional prejudices. We would adopt the Epoche and phenomenological reduction for this purpose. Epoche is avoidance of judgment and requires prioritization of observation over judgment (Mohamamdpour, 2010). And phenomenological reduction focuses on the ideological criteria and meanings independent of all specific situations in which we put the presumptions within brackets (Iman, 2014). The practical steps to implement this section of the research based on Parseh's analytical plan are as follows:

The first step is the extraction of the internal concept (essence) of recorded descriptions from the research participants' opinions. In this stage, the most precise description narrated by the group under study is collected. The second step is the combination of concepts, i.e. through comparison of similarities and differences between the extracted concepts in the first stage, the research categories are identified and organized. The third step is the formulation of one or more theorems from the descriptions provided by the participants. The fourth step is the extraction of core concepts around which other concepts revolve, and plays a pivotal role in the expression of lived experience. The fifth step is depicted by putting the findings obtained from the fourth step beside each other, by which an image of the phenomenon or event under study is represented (Mansourian, 2014).

Therefore, since the current study has a phenomenological nature in the qualitative section, it sought to investigate the experiences of the FLEs when faced with angry customers and how they narrate these experiences.

The statistical population in the current study included the operational and experienced managers in the operational units of the National Petroleum Products Distribution Company - Tehran region, who have a history of responsibility in handling customer complaints, as well as experienced employees relevant to the subject of the study who work in the frontline of the company facing the customers. The sampling has been done by the use of multiple targeted method in the form of the snowball method until the theoretical saturation is reached. The data was gathered through 34 in-depth interviews with 9 operational managers and 25 experienced employees. The protocol's questions were developed by the use of theoretical literature. The main method for data analysis in the current study is coding which is done in a three-stage process, including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. These stages are also not mechanically separated, but just for further explanation, they are described in the form of three distinct stages. In this three-stage process (non-linear), the initial themes of date are given some titles and then the categories are extracted from those concepts. Finally, in selective coding, a central category is organized from the relationship between these categories, and a theory is developed for the explanation of a phenomenon (Farasatkhah, 2008). In the current study, the data were analyzed at the same time they were collected. Open coding is an analytical process through which the concepts are identified and their characteristics and dimensions in the data are discovered. There are different ways to perform open coding one of which is line-by-line coding. In this method, the close and precise examination of the data is done phrase-by-phrase and sometimes word-by-word (Iman, 2014). In the current study, open coding is performed line-by-line. The data is gathered in the field of the study and analyzed outside of it. However, the data collection and analysis are done in a reciprocal process. In axial coding, a set of concepts are grouped around a category and covered in chambers, forming various categories. These conceptual clusters are departure points that direct the researcher towards the

theory (Farasatkhah, 2008). Finally, in the selective coding, the researcher feels there is a central category among the categories to which all other categories are somehow connected. In the current study, it was tried to extract the central categories of the study by analyzing and putting the extracted categories from the primary concepts obtained from the data beside each other.

In terms of demographic attributes of gender, 18 participants were female and 16 were male. The total interview time for all 34 interviewees was 1283 minutes, with an average interview time of 37 minutes for each participant. The age range was 22 to 55 years old. Also, the interviews with the operational managers started in 2020 and continued until 2021. The interviews with the FLEs started in early autumn, 2020, and continued until the late winter of the same year.

Second study methodology: quantitative, based on survey-descriptive paradigm

In the second study (quantitative-descriptive), the data was gathered by the use of a 60-item questionnaire (extracted from the qualitative section) with a 5-item Likert scale, using the results obtained from the first study (qualitative-phenomenological). In this section, those FLEs who have experienced or are experiencing the customers' aggression were asked to answer on a scale of 'totally disagree' to 'totally agree'. Therefore, in this section, the survey method is another common research tool and a direct method to obtain the data. The questionnaire was distributed among the participants and the answers obtained from them were analyzed. The objective is this section is to identify the components and the indicators relevant to each component.

The statistical population of the study included the FLEs in the *National* Iranian *oil products Distribution Company* (NIOPDC)-Tehran Region, and the simple random sampling method was used for sampling.

The sample size was calculated as 240 persons by the use of the Cochran formula. 250 questionnaires were distributed to ensure higher reliability and obtain the minimum number of the questionnaires needed, among which 213 were reliable for analysis. The needed computations were first done by the use of SPSS and the computed data was analyzed by PLS Software.

A total of 30 questionnaires were handed out to the experts and scholars to evaluate the content validity. Using the collected data and considering the content validity ratio based on the Lawshe ratio as well as the minimum required number, and considering the number of evaluators which is 33%, all parameters had content validity. To assess the construct validity, the face, convergent, and divergent validity methods were used. The questionnaires were handed out to 45 FLEs in the *National* Iranian *oil products Distribution Company* (NIOPDC)-Tehran Region who were randomly selected and they were asked to express their opinions whether these questions are meaningful to them or not. After some modifications and revisions, the final questionnaire was formulated. Several questionnaires were again handed out to other participants and the results showed that it enjoys face validity.

The researcher also confirmed the validity of the research by the use of structural reliability tests (Cronbach's alpha, combined reliability, rho-a shared reliability) and structural validity (convergent validity: AVE>0.5, CR>AVE, and divergent validity: cross loading test, Fornell and Larcker test, HTMT).

4. Research findings

First, the primary codes, without any interpretation, elicited the significant units by the use of the latent content analysis technique.

In fact, by listening to the interviews, the researcher made meaningful labels to the conversations that formed the core of the original code.

The researcher provides additional information about the frequency of the code in figures 1 and 2, in the form of a Shannon matrix, merely due to the scientific conventions ruling the qualitative research. However, the frequency of the code has no effects on the data analysis in the latent content analysis.

Figure 1: Shannon matrix of identification of codes importance in terms of FLEs population frequency (MaxQDE software, 2020)

As seen in Figure 1, the initial code of feeling worthless and the feeling of being deceived were the most frequent codes with 42 and 41 repetitions, while the feeling of threatening the economic resources (such as the money, time, financial security) was the least frequent code with 32 repetitions.
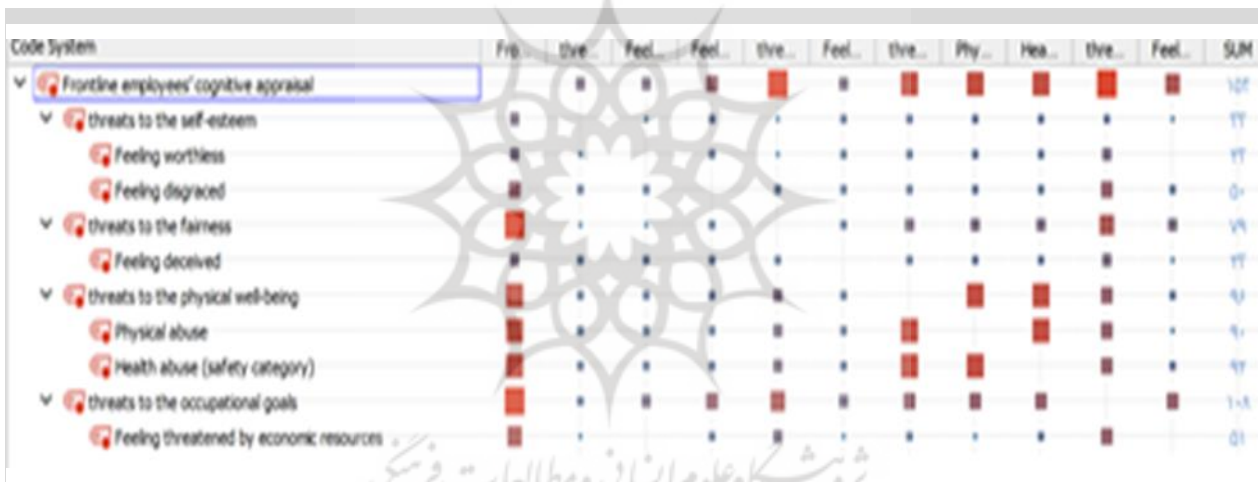
Figure 2: Shannon matrix of identification of codes importance in terms of operational managers' population frequency (MaxQDE software, 2020)

As seen in Table 2, the primary code of threat of being exposed with 216 repetitions, health abuse (safety component) with 191 repetitions, inability to decide with 186 repetitions, and physical abuse with 181 repetitions were the most frequent codes, while the mutual interdependence, equality/emphasis on independence, and successfulness with 4 repetitions, and establishment of absolute truth with 3 repetitions were the least frequent codes in the significance units.

4. 1. Qualitative research analysis

Then, with the help of supervisors and consultants, as well as an in-depth study of the literature, we categorized the initial codes, since based on Cresol's definition

(2015), the open coding consists of two main pillars: the creation of primary codes and their categorization.

After categorization, 5 threat categories as threats to job goals, self-esteem, control demand, physical health (physical welfare), and fairness, were created, and clearly, the primary code of FLEs cognitive appraisal currently remained single since it was the main phenomenon of the research and too important, till the axial coding is done. In the next step, after the literature review and eliciting the opinions of the experts, and avoiding to use the paradigm model as an outdated model even the researchers had offered as a minimal model, the researcher classified the categories that were conceptually related, and ultimately, there remained the axial code of FLEs cognitive appraisal. In the following,
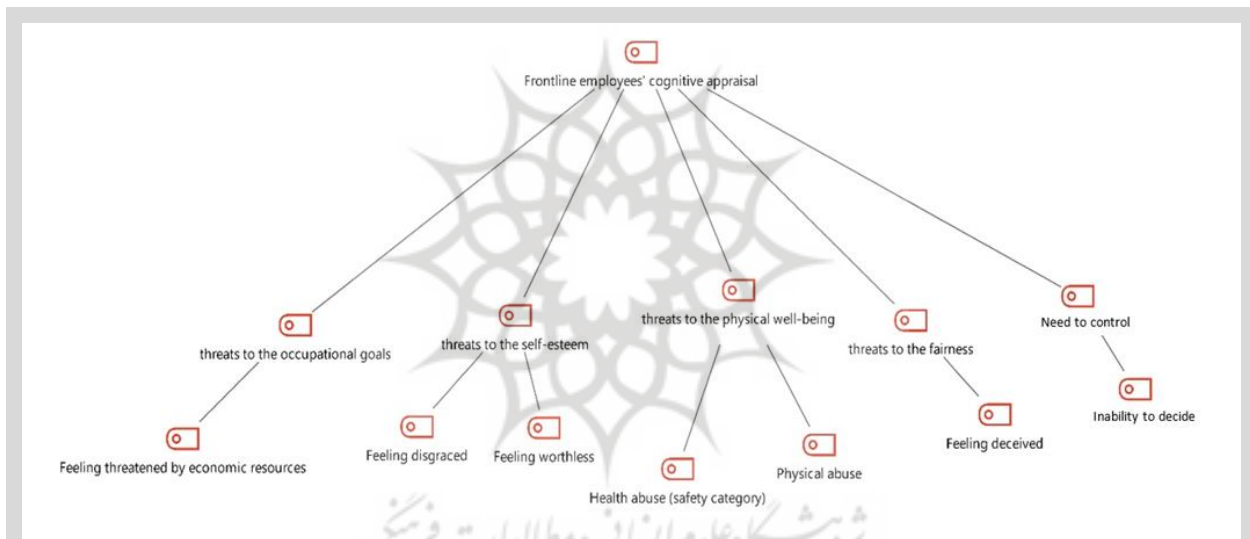
tables 2 and 3, as well as the tree diagram figures 3 and 4 which reflect these independent meaning units, and the primary and secondary categories as well as the primary codes, respectively, are provided.

Table 1: The FLEs cognitive appraisal axial codes alongside all its subcodes relevant to the frontline employee's population
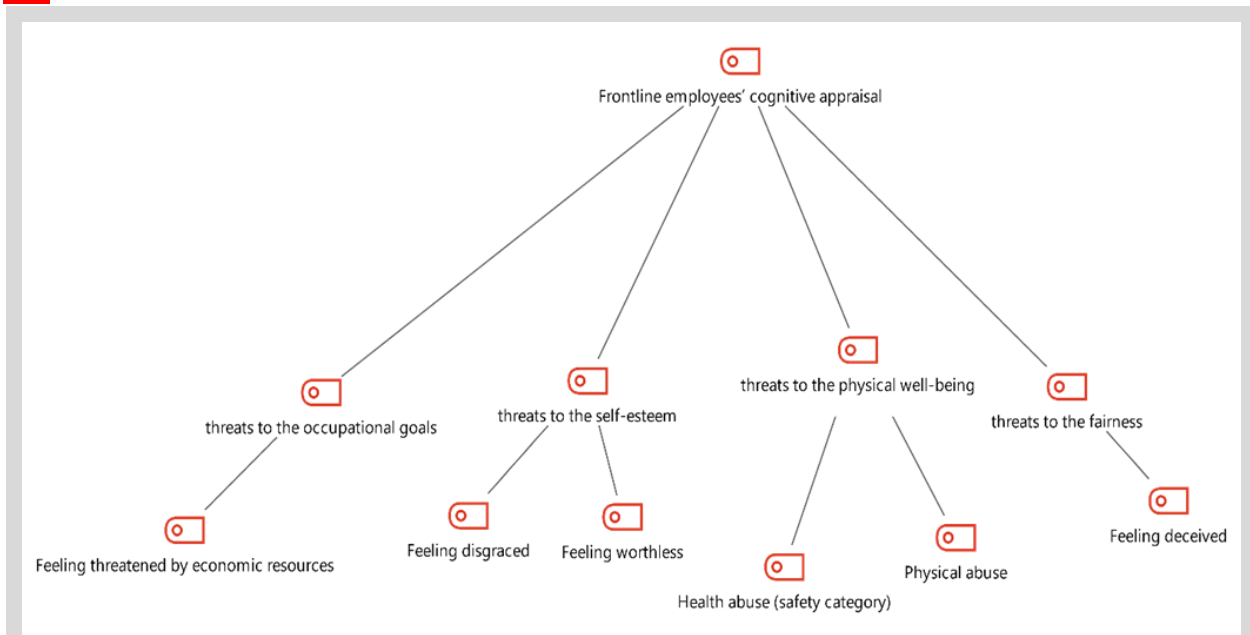
| Axial code	Main category	Secondary category	Primary codes
FLEs cognitive appraisal	Threats to the job goals	- - - -	Threat to the economic resources (money, time, financial security)
	Threats to self-esteem (self-confidence)	- - - -	Feeling dishonored
		- - - -	Feeling worthless
	Control demand	- - - -	Inability to make decisions
	Threats to physical well-being (physical welfare)	- - - -	Physical abuse
		- - - -	Health abuse (safety)
	Threats to fairness	- - - -	Feeling deceived

Figure 3:The tree diagram of FLEs cognitive appraisal axial codes alongside all its subcodes relevant to the frontline employees population (MaxQDE software, 2020)

Table 2: The FLEs cognitive appraisal axial codes alongside all its subcodes relevant to the frontline employee's population

Axial code	Main category	Subcategory	Basic codes
FLEs cognitive appraisal	Threats to the job goals	- - - -	Threat to the economic resources (money, time, financial security)
	Threats to self-esteem (self-confidence)	- - - -	Feeling dishonored
		- - - -	Feeling worthless
	Control demand	- - - -	Inability to make decisions
	Threats to physical well-being (physical welfare)	- - - -	Physical abuse
		- - - -	Health abuse (safety)
	Threats to fairness	- - - -	Feeling deceived

Figure 4: The tree diagram of FLEs cognitive appraisal axial codes alongside all its subcodes relevant to the operational managers (MaxQDE software, 2020)
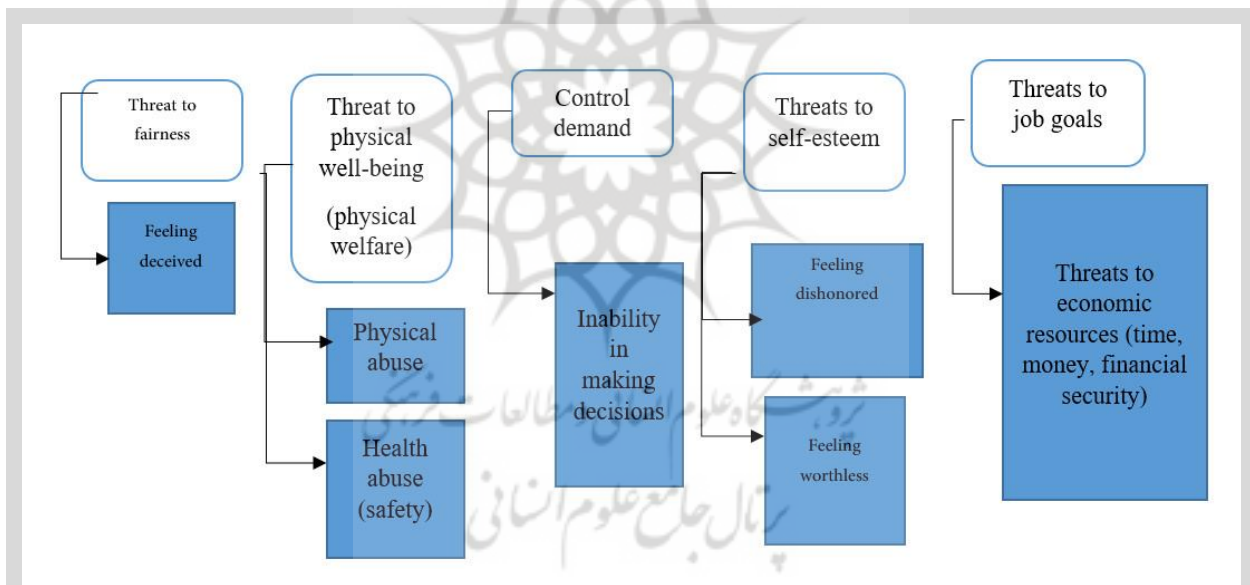
Figure 5: The conceptual model elicited from the phenomenological model

Critical events

Theoretically, the critical events require the disapproval of the expectations. The role and the context theories have expressed that the customers and the service providers should have common views about how the process progresses and the order of activities (Bitner et al., 1994). Deviation from these common expectations leads to positive or negative disapprovals and as a result, critical events take place. The positive disapprovals of the expectations occur when the service provided by the

service provider meets the expectations of the customer. On the contrary, the negative disapproval of expectations occurs when the customer's expectations are not satisfied with the service provided (Akkawanitcha et al., 2015).

Cognitive appraisal

Cognitive assessment refers to a person's mental assessment of whether or not he or she feels threatened in a stressful encounter (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Also, it indicates that the appraisal stage is a cognitive

mediator of stress reactions. In addition, the cognitive appraisal of an encounter affects the person's emotional experience. For example, if the FLEs assess the customers' aggression to be harmful to their well-being, they would be more likely to feel their self-esteem or physical safety threatened or feel that their career goals are obstructed (Surachartkuntonkumet al., 2013).

Service failure

The failure in the delivery of the services can be defined as follows: when a customer buys a product or a service with the confidence perception he/she has about the relevant product or organization, when that product or service fails or is insufficient, a disconnection between the customer's expectation and reality occurs that is referred to as 'service failure' (Taherkhani, 2016).

Customer anger

Customer anger is defined as an intense, restless, and overwhelming anger that manifests itself in potentially dangerous behaviors toward the organization after experiencing unsatisfactory service (McColl-Kennedy et al. 2009). In other words, customer anger is intense negative emotions (e.g. hatred, disgust. Etc.) Associated with its manifestation (physical, verbal, and non-verbal) and potentially dangerous behavior (e.g. leaving the place, negative words, or even revenge) towards the organization which is the result of a collection of

unsatisfactory service experiences (McColl-Kennedy et al. 2009).

Coping

Coping is referred to as "cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal requirements that weaken or strengthen the individual's abilities" (Folkman and Lazarus 1988, p.310). The coping forms can be categorized into two wide groups: Problem-focused coping (trying to change or eliminate the source of stress including affairs such as designing for problem-solving and confronting the source of the problem) and emotion-focused coping (trying to reduce or manage the negative emotions including reactions such as unbosoming to the friends, getting family support, venting). People generally adopt different coping strategies to manage stressful situations.

Inadequate service

If companies cannot fulfill the promises they have made to their customers in various ways and do not meet their expectations, this issue will lead to negative effects on the customers' attitudes towards the service provider company. In fact, unfulfilled customer expectations are called service inadequacy (Mirani Vala, 2015).
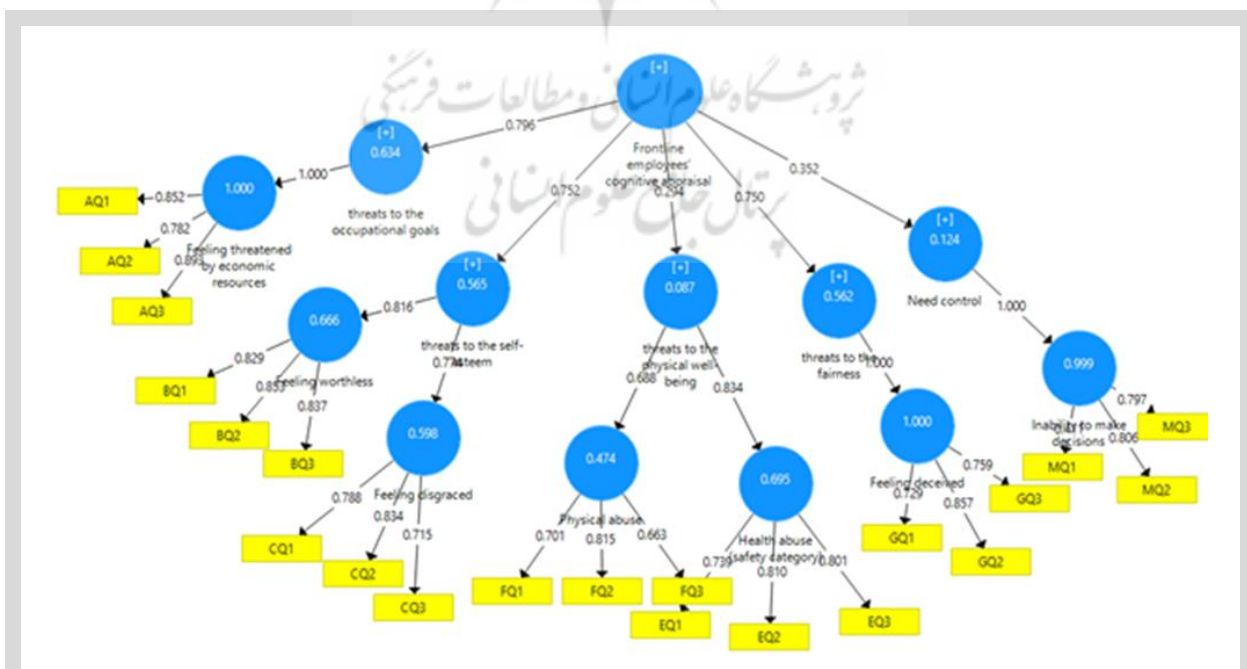
4. 2. Quantitative research analysis

Figure 6: Research initial external model in the estimation of standardized coefficients mode
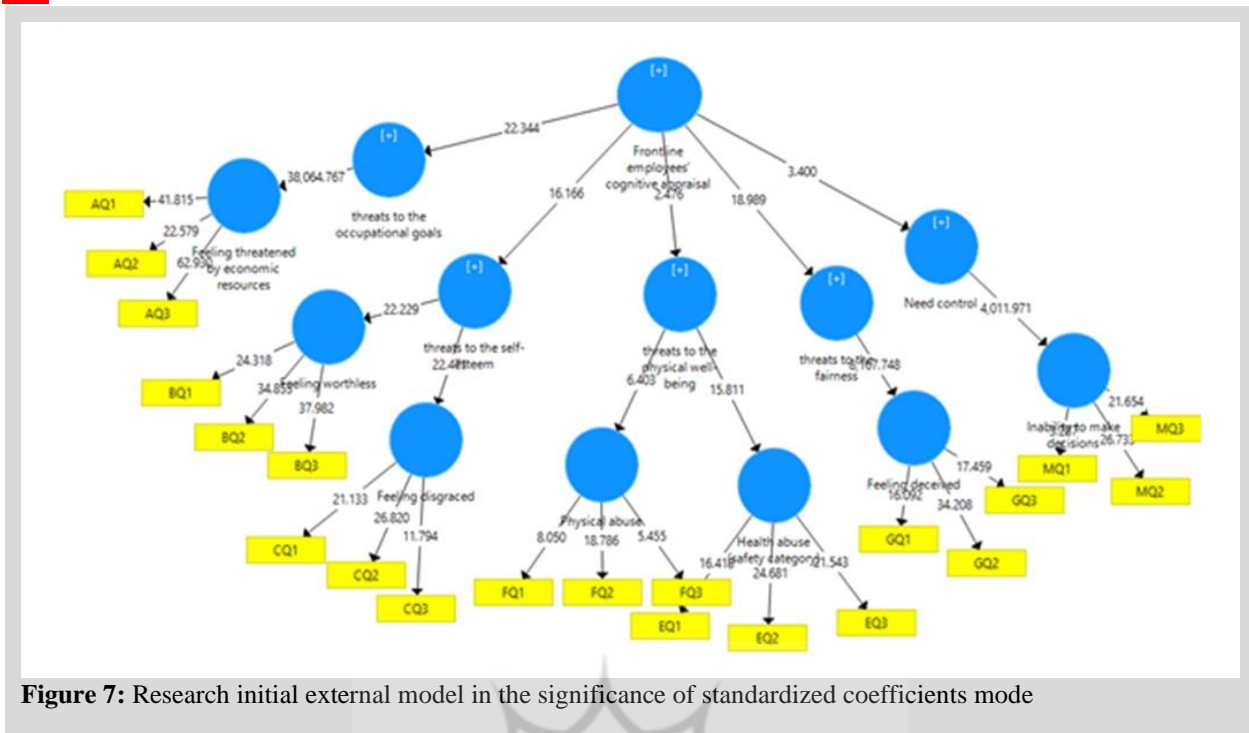
Figure 7: Research initial external model in the significance of standardized coefficients mode

Table 3: Factor loadings of the initial external model

	A	B	C	E	F	G	M
AQ1	0/852						
AQ2	0/782						
AQ3	0/893						
BQ1		0/829					
BQ2		0/853					
BQ3		0/837					
CQ1			0/788				
CQ2			0/834				
CQ3			0/715				
EQ1				0/739			
EQ2				0/810			
EQ3				0/801			
FQ1					0/701		
FQ2					0/815		
FQ3					0/663		
GQ1						0/729	

GQ2						0/857	
GQ3						0/759	
MQ1							0/411
MQ2							0/806
MQ3							0/797

The researcher should investigate the factor loadings of the external model and all these values should be above 0.7. Otherwise, the question should be omitted. However, Hair (2010) believes that if the factor loading of a question is above 0.65, and factor loading of the other questions of the same variable compensate it, this question can be also kept in the model.

The sixteen questions MQ1, NQ2, SQ3, TQ1, TQ2, XQ2, FQ3, SQ1, and WQ1 should be omitted from the primary external model, and the model should be revised based on the existing process.
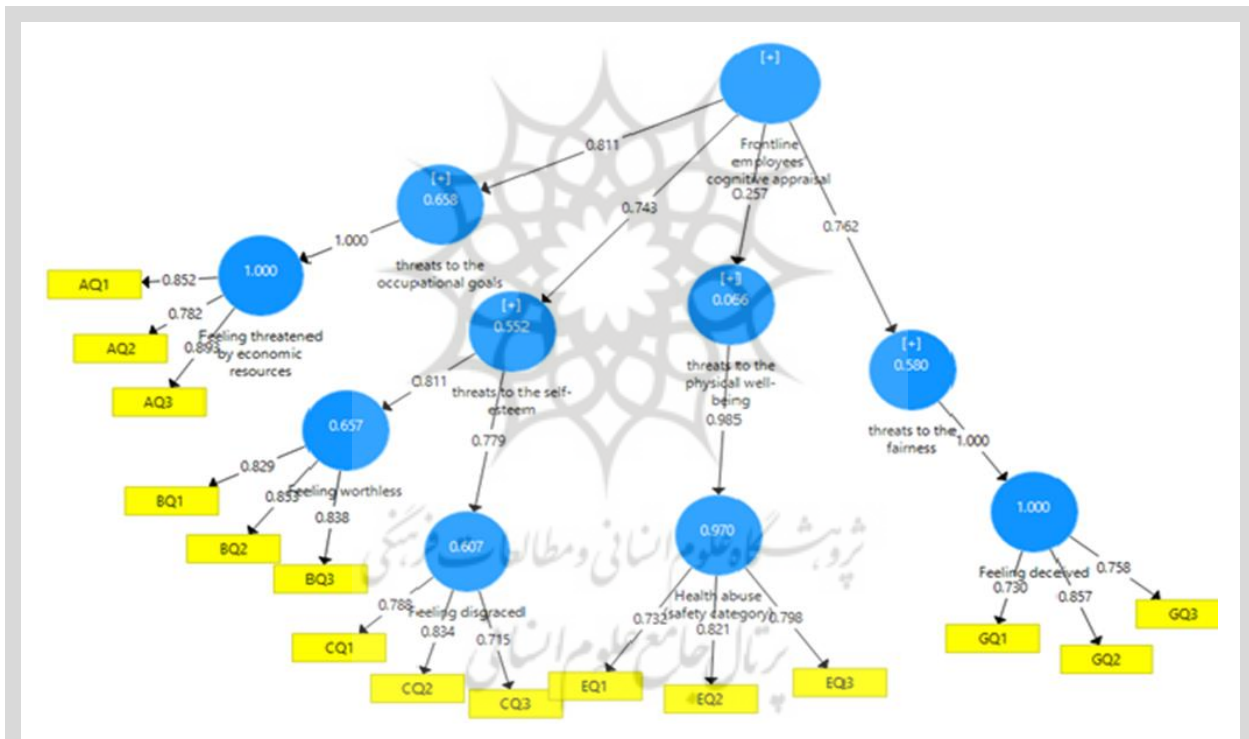

Figure 8 : The modified external model in estimation of standardized coefficients mode
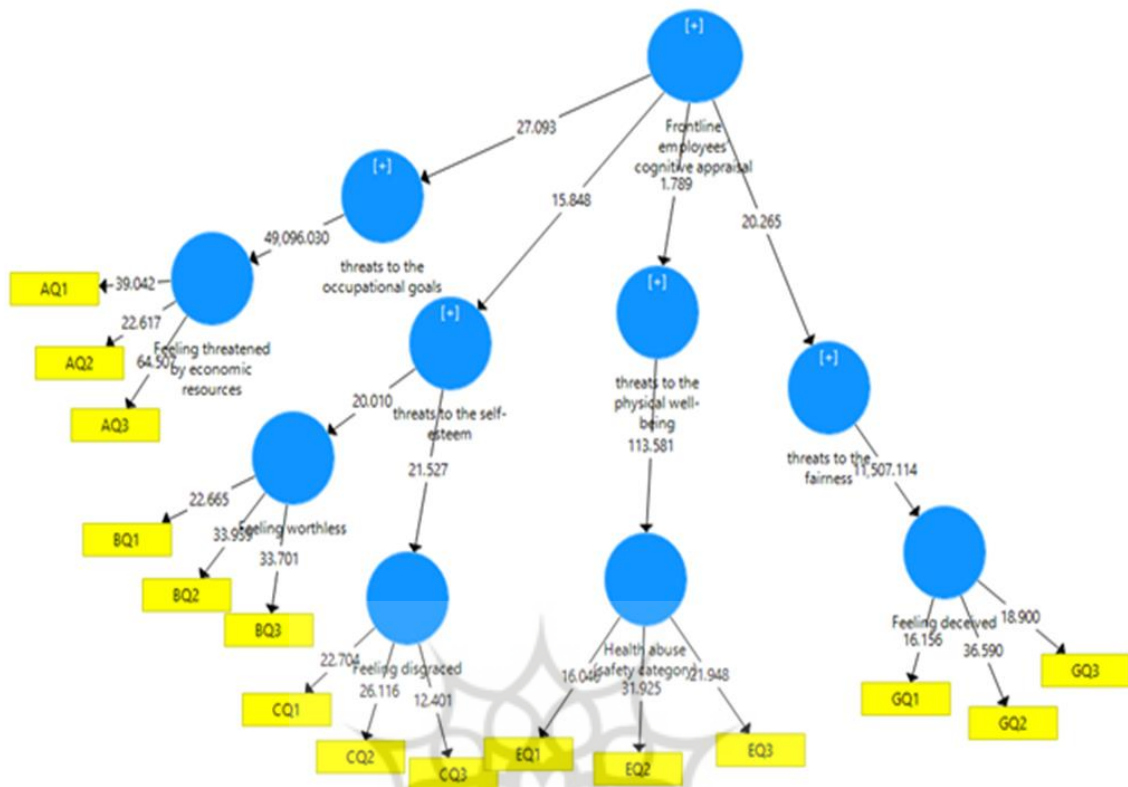
Figure 9: The modified external model based on the significance of standardized coefficients mode

Table 4: Cronbach's alpha coefficients, composite reliability coefficients, questions' Spearman correlation, and shared reliability coefficients

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Threats to economic resources	0/796	0/802	0/881	0/711
Feeling worthless	0/792	0/792	0/878	0/706
Feeling dishonored	0/677	0/683	0/823	0/609
Health abuse (health category	0/686	0/691	0/827	0/615
Feeling deceived	0/683	0/692	0/826	0/614

According to the results in Table 4, all variables have internal consistency with an alpha coefficient of above 0.6. Thus, the reliability is confirmed based on this test.

Table 5: Cross-validation of the factor loadings

	Threats to economic resources	Feeling worthless	Feeling dishonored	Health abuse (health category	Feeling deceived
AQ1	0/852	0/166	0/384	0/154	0/409
AQ2	0/782	0/197	0/291	0/110	0/372
AQ3	0/893	0/095	0/371	0/125	0/547
BQ1	0/143	0/829	0/241	0/028	0/196
BQ2	0/175	0/853	0/164	0/060	0/134

BQ3	0/133	0/838	0/259	-0/005	0/156
CQ1	0/329	0/245	0/788	-0/043	0/388
CQ2	0/271	0/191	0/835	-0/003	0/225
CQ3	0/379	0/182	0/715	0/080	0/309
EQ1	0/110	-0/066	-0/039	0/730	0/048
EQ2	0/024	0/026	-0/042	0/824	0/031
EQ3	0/231	0/108	0/103	0/796	0/100
GQ1	0/433	-0/002	0/278	0/228	0/730
GQ2	0/388	0/182	0/305	0/071	0/856
GQ3	0/428	0/266	0/344	-0/113	0/758

According to kline (2010), this test is very similar to the exploratory factor analysis and its function in a way that the software hypothetically connects each question to all variables. Then, the question's factor loading with its own variable should be at least 0.1 higher than its factor loading with other variables. The divergent validity of each variable's questions relative to other variables' questions was approved by the cross loadings test and now the divergent validity of the variables can be investigated by the Fornell-Larcker test.

Table 6: Fornell-Larcker divergent validity test

	Threats to economic resources	Feeling worthless	Feeling dishonored	Health abuse (health cat.)	Feeling deceived
Threats to economic resources	0/843				
Feeling worthless	0/178	0/840			
Feeling dishonored	0/415	0/265	0/781		
Health abuse (health category)	0/154	0/032	0/011	0/784	
Feeling deceived	0/528	0/194	0/394	0/076	0/784

The mean variance square root extracted for each variable is higher than the correlation between that variable and other variables. Therefore, the divergent validity of these variables is also confirmed. However, now, the questions and variables should be evaluated by a final diagnostic test in the form of an organized whole and an advanced test that is named multivariate test.

Table 7: Multi-feature and multi-method test

	Threats to economic resources	Feeling worthless	Feeling dishonored	Health abuse (health cat.)	Feeling deceived
Threats to economic resources					
Feeling worthless	0/229				
Feeling dishonored	0/569	0/359			
Health abuse (health category)	0/216	0/125	0/134		
Feeling deceived	0/718	0/285	0/582	0/260	

The values of all variable pairs evaluated with the multivariate test are lower than 0.9, thus, regarding the results of this test and the two tests of cross loadings and the Fornell-Larcker Test, the divergent validity of the research model is confirmed. On the other hand, due to the confirmation of divergent validity, the researcher now claims that his model also has construct validity based on the collected tools and data.
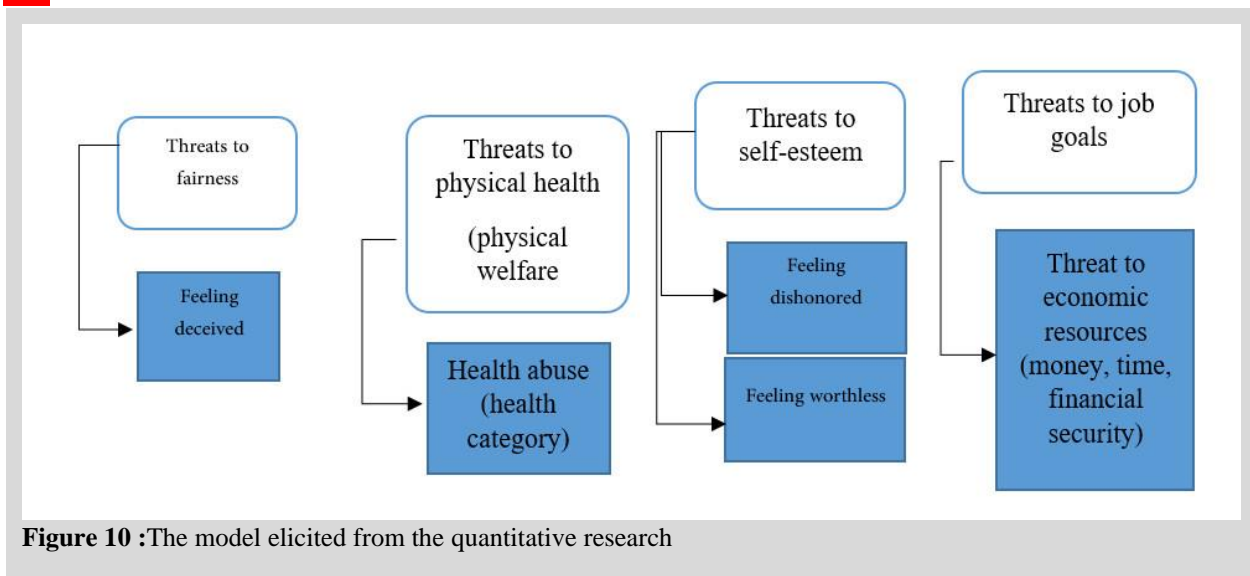
Figure 10 : The model elicited from the quantitative research

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The results of the study in the qualitative part indicate that comparing the analyses of the two statistical populations as the FLEs and the operational managers handling the complaints, to identify the FLEs cognitive appraisal facing the customer aggression, both groups believed that the FLEs cognitive appraisal consists of five dimensions of threats including the threats to job goals, self-esteem (self-confidence), control demand, physical well-being (physical welfare), and fairness. These five dimensions consist of different components:

The threat to job goals (from the threat to the economic resources such as the money, time, and financial security), a threat to the self-esteem (from the components of feeling dishonorable and feeling worthless), control demand (from the components of inability to make decisions), a threat to the physical well-being (from the components of the physical and health abuse), and threat to fairness (from the component of feeling deceived).

Comparing the analyses of the two statistical populations as the FLEs and the operational managers handling the complaints, to identify the FLEs cognitive appraisal facing the customer aggression, some differences were also discovered that are presented in the following:

On the one hand, the operational managers did not mention the control demand component (inability to make decisions). In fact, they are more focused on the threats to fairness and self-esteem. From their point of view, the primary code of being worthless with a

frequency of 42 times, and feeling deceived with a frequency of 41 times, were the most important codes in terms of frequency, while the threat to the economic resources (such as the money, time, and financial security) had the least importance with a frequency of 32 times. On the other hand, the FLEs did not mention the primary code of worthlessness. In fact, they were more focused on the threats to physical well-being (physical welfare). From their point of view, the primary code of health abuse (safety category) with a frequency of 71 times, and the body abuse with a frequency of 66 times, were the most important codes in terms of frequency, while the code of feeling deceived with a frequency of 2 times had the least importance.

The comparison between the results and findings actually revealed that while the operational managers have paid more attention to the codes of feeling worthless and deceived, the FLEs have not considered these codes, and conversely, despite employees' attention to the code of inability to make decisions, operational managers were completely unaware of it. Also, the results indicate that both populations consider the code of threat to the economic resources (such as money, time, financial security) to be almost equally important.

In the quantitative part also, the analyses results indicated that the FLEs cognitive appraisal consists of four dimensions of threats as the threats to the job goals, self-esteem (self-confidence), physical well-being (physical welfare), and fairness. These dimensions consist of different components:

The dimension of the threat to the job goals consists of the threat to the economic resources component (such

as the money, time, and financial security), the threat to self-esteem consists of the components of feeling dishonorable and feeling worthless, the threat to the physical well-being consists of the component of health abuse, and threat to fairness consists of the component of feeling deceived. Unexpectedly, the components and indices of the control demand (inability to make decisions) were not significant in the quantitative analysis.

The related literature indicated that theoretically, the findings confirm the stress and coping theory by indicating the way the FLEs interpret aggression as a "threat" or violation of their health. Also, there is an article that has used the stress and coping theory to explain the FLEs psychological health when facing customer aggression. The analysis has revealed 5 categories of cognitive appraisal-threat to the self-esteem, physical well-being, job goal, fairness, and control- which negatively affect the employees' health when facing customer aggression (Akkawamitcha et al., 2015).

The cognitive appraisal studies are widely used to explain the emotional reactions of the customers (Watson and Spence ،2007; Nyer ،1997؛ Smith and Ellsworth ،1985) however, using it for employees' emotions, especially in terms of the governmental companies such as the National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company has not been investigated. Unlike the studies of the coping behavior which has specified the dimensions of the approach-avoidance bipolar (Folkman et al., 1986), the current study indicates that this approach-avoidance might be positive or negative based on the benefits/harms to one's well-being. In addition, the current study extended Folkman et al.'s (1986) approach-avoidance dimensions in terms of complaint handling through the revelation of the relationship between the emotional regulation choice (acting or real emotions) and the coping behavior adopted by the employees.

In addition, the current study is the first to show that although the service companies expect their employees to always show positive emotions as desired by them, it is very challenging since some employees need to take the time to control and regulate their negative emotions. It should be noted that findings of the current study show that customers' complaints affect employees' emotions, welfare, and their future behavior responding to the complaining customers.

Surachartkumtonkun (2011) also in his study identified five main categories of failure in service encounters, as well as five basic needs of people, after content analysis, which are in line with the results of the current study.

Also, the related literature indicates the process the service employees undergo when they face a complaint by the customer. First, a service employee cognitively evaluates the complaint as a damage/threat. This evaluation leads to the agitation reactions such as fear, hopelessness, or anger. He/she may consider the intended emotions for display, and through playing the superficial game, moderate the deep game or real emotions. The emotional mismatches derived from the situation cognitive appraisal and the organization's expectation from the desired emotions require the employees to show emotional coping behavior. Various emotional coping behaviors can be classified as encounter or avoidance, through analysis (Loo et al., 2021), which is in line with the results of the current study.

Generally, previous studies' results indicate that there is a strong correlation between deception, immoral acts, perceived threat appraisal by the employees, and their coping appraisal process (Jannat et al., 2021).

Based on the obtained results, it is suggested for the human resource and commercial sections' managers in Iran Petroleum Products Distribution Company that:

The necessary training should be provided for the employees, so that they would understand there is this advantage to temporarily take themselves out of those conditions when they face the customer complaint (for example by drinking water). Many of the respondents feel quick relief as soon as they can go drink water and hide from the customer, do a different thing, such as a short walk. After doing such quick coping acts, the respondents are more ready to handle the complaint and/or provide the service to the customers, and they will not feel the inability, later on the working shift. Therefore, the managers should announce to their employees that in case of facing a complaining customer, they are free to use quick emotional coping behaviors.

The NIOPDC's managers should pay special attention to the concept of 'reputation' (a dimension of self-esteem) that exists in most aspects of people's lives in the country. Reputation is seen as the public attitude and behavior of those closely related to the individual. As a result, it can be easily threatened in the social interactions, and thus, the managers themselves should

know that concern to protect their reputation exists in most activities of the employees. It is indicative of the fact that different values such as the social base, dominant rules, and concept of reputation are norms that are firmly attached to the culture of our country. In situations in which there is the possibility that an employee's reputation is damaged in a service encounter, the NIOPDC's managers should quickly take measures and if needed, transfer the argument to a private place far from other employees and customers, so that a portion of the FLE's reputation is protected.

To improve the mental health of the employees, the NIOPDC's should use management programs for intervention. Such programs train the FLEs to manage stressful situations and react in a way that the mental effects are minimized. For example, the FLEs learn to understand the role of customers' thoughts and points of view (perception of customer's attitude). If the employees are able to empathize with the opposite party (customer), they will be more likely to find their unfair behavior less personal. They even might be able to replace the negative effects with positive thoughts. As a result, they might be able to change their thought and use appropriate coping options.

Also, the FLEs are usually working under pressure (i.e. dominant organizational rules, encounters in the public, etc.), and as result, such conditions affect their mental health. Therefore, regarding the findings of the current study, some practical meanings/functions are identified. First, in situations the customer is obviously wrong and is getting angry, the manager or team leader should get the FLE away from the potentially serious situation. In other words, the NIOPDC should unconditionally allow the FLEs to stop their contact with abusive customers. Second, since the NIOPDC, like any other organization, seeks to achieve most customers and maintain the relations, it should build a team for easing the critical situations which are able to interact and intervene when facing abusive customers. The negotiation and conversation ability is very vital for such a supportive team. This strategy would be beneficial for both parties (the customer and the FLE). Finally, the findings of the current study indicated that social support should be used systematically so that the employees' stress would be minimized after an encounter that has made them threatened or scared. One suggestion is that when facing an angry customer, the coworkers' support is the best strategy to reduce the stress created by this behavior. To do so, the NIOPDC's managers can train

the FLEs to support their coworkers in critical situations when facing abusing customers.

While this study focused on the basic needs threatened by aggressive incidents, it might be useful if the emotional and behavioral reactions of the employees are evaluated when these needs are strengthened. The identification of the basic human needs that can strengthen the positive outcomes and weaken the negative consequences can be useful for both the FLEs and the oil companies.

Also, it is suggested that future studies investigate this subject in other service sectors of oil and energy industries which are in direct contact with the customers since based on the type of their mission, they can show different coping behavior and handling of the complaints in terms of the different services. It can also lead to an increase in the generalizability of the results obtained in the current study.

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