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ABSTRACT

Purpose: this paper explores the contingencies and characteristics of service recovery system (SRS) design.

Design/methodology/approach: informed by extensive case study data from two large Italian retail banks, our theory-building study builds on the seven design characteristics proposed by Smith et al. (2009). Nineteen sub-dimensions are identified that provide a finer-grain view of the SRS at the operational level. The design characteristics and the corresponding sub-dimensions comprise the SRS design framework. These sub-dimensions are then analysed across the two cases. Specific attention is given to sub-dimensions that are contingent upon service recovery strategy.

Findings: the findings suggest that the extended set of SRS sub-dimensions (providing greater specificity) contributes to identifying commonality and difference between SRS configurations. This specificity facilitates the identification of two sets of SRS design characteristics (S-Type; C-Type) that correspond with SR strategy. Two propositions have been formulated with respect to this SR strategy – SRS contingency. An additional set of sub-dimensions, common to both cases, is explained by conformance to regulatory control.

Originality/value: the paper provides novel theoretical insights into SRS design. The increased specificity of the SRS framework and the sets of sub-dimensions contingent on SR strategy extend current theory in OM. This provides opportunities for both practicing managers and for future theoretical development.

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INTRODUCTION

Service recovery (SR) refers to the actions taken by organisations to deal with service failures and customer complaints (Michel *et al.*, 2009). It contributes to enhancing competitiveness by restoring customer satisfaction and maintaining loyalty as well as by facilitating the utilisation of failure information to improve operations (Smith *et al.*, 2012). For instance, Dell estimates that it is able to convert an unsatisfied customer into a satisfied one in more than 30% of cases (Barry *et al.*, 2011). Substantial operational benefits have also been reported by organisations that analyse failure data to identify and eliminate the root causes of problems (Johnston and Michel 2008).

Fifty-one percent of US consumers switched service providers in 2012 (Accenture, 2013). The financial services sector is strongly affected with industry reports emphasising the intensity of switching behaviours and the erosion of customer satisfaction and loyalty levels (Capgemini, 2013). Similarly, a survey finds that nearly 25% of European customers of banks have previously changed provider, and 11% of these customers plan to change again in the future (Ernst and Young, 2012). Poor customer experience quality is the primary factor that drives customers to defect. Because service failures are commonplace, and pose threats to future competitiveness, retail banks are under pressure to adopt an effective SR strategy (Harris *et al.*, 2006). A previous study shows that "good" SR has a significant and positive impact on the switching behaviour of retail banking customers (Nunez and Yulinsky, 2005). SR provides an excellent opportunity to reduce churn and improve operations; a top priority for retail banks facing increasing competitive pressure and heightened customer expectations regarding complaint handling (Leal and Pereira, 2003).

This emphasis highlights the importance of understanding how the system that handles failures and complaints operates. While a customer-oriented perspective has dominated SR research, few studies have investigated the design and management of the service recovery system (SRS) (Homburg and Fürst, 2005; Sousa and Voss, 2009). The SRS is composed of the operational processes and resources that deal with failures and customer complaints. Smith *et al.* (2009) propose and empirically validate seven design characteristics that describe the SRS (i.e. accessibility, comprehensiveness, formality, empowerment, influence, human and system intensity). These authors demonstrate that configuring the SRS in the right way leads to superior SR performance (Smith *et al.* 2010).

Scholars have previously focused on articulating a set of universally-applicable principles for SR (Hoffman and Kelley, 2000). Recent evidence suggests, however, that different recovery actions should be taken in different failure situations. For instance, the

ability of SR practices to restore customer satisfaction depends on the severity of the failure and on the complainant's expectations (Craighead *et al.* 2000; Goldstein *et al.* 2002). Additionally, studies suggest that the design of the SRS may be context-dependent (Homburg and Fürst, 2005; Silvestro 1999). For example, Smith *et al.* (2010) empirically demonstrate that changes in customer contact and labour intensity are associated with changes in SRS design.

Against this background, this paper reports on an empirical study to build theory in the SR area. Specifically, our objective is to provide novel theoretical insights into the configuration of SRS in the context of a strategy contingency. Informed by extensive case study data, our study builds on the seven design characteristics proposed by Smith *et al.* (2009) to explore the detailed configuration pattern of SRS in two exemplar (high-performing) Italian retail banks that pursue markedly-different SR strategies. Nineteen sub-dimensions are identified from extensive case data. These provide a finer-grain view of the SRS at the operational level and help to inform SRS design. The seven design characteristics and the 19 sub-dimensions comprise the SRS design framework. These sub-dimensions are then analysed across the two cases to explain the relationship between SR strategy and SRS configuration.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, we review the relevant SR literature and identify the need for additional research that informs an operations perspective of SR. The importance of contingency factors is established, focusing specifically on the strategic orientation of SR, prior to empirical investigation. Next, we describe the research methodology justifying the study and specifying the research design employed. We then present our empirical findings followed by a detailed discussion and explanation. Finally, we show how these findings contribute to the theory and practice of SR management and articulate future research directions.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

SR is an important field of study given the difficulty to achieve "zero defects" in service delivery (Hart *et al.*, 1990). This multifaceted phenomenon has been conceptualised as a triad encompassing three kinds of interrelated practices: 'customer recovery' (i.e. practices aimed at dealing with the customer, solving the problem and restoring customer satisfaction), 'employee recovery' (i.e. practices focused on training and rewarding employees to help them handle failure situations) and 'process recovery' (i.e. practices targeted at ensuring changes to the service delivery system are implemented to prevent the problem from

happening again) (Michel *et al.*, 2009). Contributions that address the 'customer recovery' theme include: understanding customers' expectations of recovery efforts and the antecedents to these expectations (Kelley and Davids 1994; Goldstein *et al.* 2002); developing recovery plans that are successful in restoring customer satisfaction (Tax and Brown 1998); articulating the 'SR paradox', which suggests that outstanding SR leads to higher customer satisfaction compared to a situation where a failure doesn't occur (Hart et al, 1990); introducing justice theory to explain changes in customers' evaluations of recovery actions (Blodgett *et al.*, 1997) and examining how SR can lead to desirable customer outcomes such as repurchase intentions, favourable word of mouth and loyalty (Brown *et al.*, 1996). The topic of 'employee recovery' has also received attention. The attitudes and behaviours of the employees who handle the complaint and the complainant are a major influence on the success of SR actions (Homburg and Fürst, 2005). Miller *et al.* (2000) show that training and empowering employees to solve failure situations is essential. Boshoff and Allen (2000) demonstrate the importance for front-line employees to make emotional atonement and display feelings of empathy.

Smith *et al.* (2012, pp. 1-2) observe that "the majority of research on service recovery has explored mainly the topic from a customer perspective". This is consistent with Johnston and Michel's (2008) literature review which indicates that less than 10% of scholarly articles published in this area are found in operations management (OM) journals. Important issues addressed from an operations perspective include: how to use failure information to drive operational improvements (i.e. 'process recovery'), developing a methodology to analyse service failures, and articulating internal and external measures of performance (Leal and Pereira, 2003); identifying the different phases and activities of the SR process (Miller *et al.*, 2000); exploring questions regarding resource allocation (Simons and Kraus, 2005).

Johnston and Michel (2008, p.94) argue that "many organisations have a long way to go to develop the management and execution of service recovery". In particular, there is the need to inform how the system that handles failures and complaints should be configured. Smith *et al.* (2009) develop and empirically validate a framework for conceptualising SRS design. Their model consists of seven design characteristics which collectively describe the SRS, as reported in Table 1. Follow-up work by the same authors shows that the way in which the SRS is organised impacts customer and organisational outcomes (Smith *et al.*, 2010; Smith *et al.*, 2012a). Additionally, Smith and Karwan (2010) empirically establish three distinct profiles of SRS. Each profile is associated with specific design characteristics, recovery practices and performance outcomes. They suggest that mature firms operate SRS

characterised by high formality, comprehensiveness, empowerment, accessibility, influence, human intensity and system intensity. This empirical evidence suggests that an SRS with these characteristics delivers higher performance than a SRS exhibiting other characteristics. Some evidence suggests, however, that adopting a contingency lens may yield useful insights into the design of SRS (Silvestro, 1999; Smith *et al.,* 2012b) in particular contexts.

<Please insert Table 1 about here>

Contingency theory asserts that organisations adapt their structures to maintain alignment with changing contextual factors to maximise performance (Donaldson, 2001). In OM, a contingency view considers that some operations design choices and practices are more effective than others in a given context (Sousa and Voss, 2008). In the SR area, previous research shows that the effectiveness of recovery plans varies by service settings (Bitner *et al.* 2000), by an organisation's approach to complaint handling (Homburg and Fuerst, 2005) and by service concept (Mattila, 2001). Consequently, distinct practices should be applied in different failure situations to restore customer satisfaction. Taking an operations perspective, Smith *et al.* (2012) find that both low customer contact organisations and high customer contact organisations adopt different SRS designs but achieve similar SR performance. They suggest that the contextual conditions in which organisations operate drive SRS design. With the exception of this study, the literature falls short of identifying the contextual variables that may influence SRS design. Smith and Karwan (2010, p. 121) call for "more detailed study and tight comparisons across divergent contingency variables".

A review of OM contingency research identifies numerous studies linking an organisation's strategic intent and the type of OM practices it uses (Sousa and Voss 2008). Strategy is a relevant contingency factor because it plays a fundamental role in defining operations priorities and performance objectives, which in turn influence operational practices and decisions. For example, Sousa and Voss (2001) show that quality management practices are contingent on the strategy of manufacturing organisations. In the service literature, scholars emphasise the importance of aligning strategy, the service concept and service delivery system design (Ponsignon *et al.*, 2011; Roth and Menor, 2003). As the SRS is a part of the service delivery system (Goldstein *et al.* 2002), strategic effects are likely to influence the design of the SRS. This is in line with Silvestro's claim (1999) that SRS design is contingent upon the volume-variety characteristics of the operation. These contentions are

supported by Smith *et al.* (2012b) who empirically show that an organisation's strategic position affects the design characteristics of the SRS.

We suggest that an organisation's SR strategy is embodied by the strategic focus of the SR activities. This argument is based upon the work of Metters and Vargas (2000) who develop a positioning matrix for retail banks. The concept of strategic focus describes a firm's decision to focus on solving customer problems or to concentrate on maximising the efficiency of the SRS. This is consistent with previous service research that has considered operations strategy in terms of 'low cost vs. superior experience' (Frei, 2007; Zomerdijk and de Vries, 2007), 'customer-oriented effectiveness vs. internally-focused efficiency' (Johnston, 1999) and 'flexibility-oriented vs. cost-oriented competitive priorities' (Safizadeh *et al.*, 2003). This literature suggests that an organisation's strategic focus can be positioned along a cost-service continuum. We therefore formulate our research question as: *How does SR strategy influence the design of the SRS?*

METHODOLOGY

This theory-building study addresses the question of how SR strategy influences SRS design. Investigating contingency effects in service operations requires accessing data that provides detailed insights into contingency factors, operational characteristics of the SRS and the recovery practices used. It involves building a robust evidence base for understanding and describing the SRS as well as for explaining relationships between the contingency factor and design characteristics. The case study methodology allows for the collection of rich operational and tactical data, both quantitative and qualitative, from diverse sources (Eisenhardt, 1989). This facilitates the development of a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being studied. Moreover, it is the desired approach when contextual circumstances are thought to influence the use of OM practices because it enables the detailed examination of the interactions between the research variables (Zomerdijk and de Vries, 2007; Sousa and Voss, 2001). Finally, the case method allows for controlling external factors that may otherwise affect the phenomenon of interest. Control is achieved by focusing the study on a single industry (retail banking) and conducting our investigation in retail banks that deal with similar types of complaints. Previous studies found that industry factors influence the use of OM practices and SR practices. For instance, Ponsignon *et al.* (2015) show that managing the customer's experience in financial services is markedly different than in the entertainment and leisure industry. De Ruyter and Wetzels (2000) show that customers'

perceptions of SR actions are industry-specific. This realisation has driven SR scholars to narrow their focus on single industries (e.g. Gruber and Frugone, 2011).

Research design and case selection

The organisations studied are two large Italian banks that are part of global financial services groups. Both organisations requested anonymity; we refer to them as "Case A" and "Case B". Table 2 provides background information on the two cases.

<Please insert Table 2 about here>

The principle of theoretical replication guided research design and case selection (Voss *et al.*, 2002). This involved choosing organisations that pursue opposite SR strategies. We used both qualitative and quantitative evidence to determine that Case A is focused on minimising costs and maximising efficiency, whereas case B's strategy is to solve the complainant's problem and to meet or exceed their recovery expectations. Case A's internal bank documentation states that the purpose of the SR function is to improve complaint handling in accordance with regulatory guidelines and to maintain high productivity levels. This statement is corroborated by evidence found in the bank's annual complaint management report which stresses the need to minimise the operational costs and legal risks associated with SR activities. The complaint management division is part of the 'quality compliance and controlling' department and see SR as a compulsory and mandatory activity. SR employees are described as 'processors' and staff productivity figures indicate that each employee deals with c. 250 complaints per year on average. Additionally, the head of the SR function described his job as: "*my mission is to run a highly efficient SR operation; we are always extremely mindful of keeping our costs within budget*". SR strategy is aligned to the bank's business strategy. Company documentation states that the bank aims at "*a sharp increase in profitability and efficiency while preserving a low risk profile*". In contrast, the predominant strategic priority of bank B as a whole is to "*enhance client focus and services*". From a SR perspective, case B focuses on providing a high quality experience to customers and on meeting or exceeding their expectations. According to the complaint management report, the role of the SR function is to "*ensure that all complaints are dealt with promptly and in a way that restores customer satisfaction*". This is achieved by a focus on removing the sources of customer dissatisfaction regardless of the costs involved. The complaint management division is part of the 'customer satisfaction' department and sees SR as a mission. SR

employees frequently interact with customers to understand and meet their needs. The scope of the role of SR employees is reflected in productivity figures. In case B, each employee handles an average of c. 95 complaints per annum. Interviews with SR managers revealed that: "*the SRS has been designed to provide high customer service levels*"; "*the bank always tries to satisfy complaining customers*"; and "*the bank works hard to make the complainant feel important and tries to go beyond SR expectations to increase brand loyalty*". Theoretical replication logic suggests that SRS design characteristics should present clear differences across the two cases.

Additionally, we selected exemplar cases based on known SRS performance. Organisations that exhibit high levels of performance are assumed to run well-designed operations (Sousa and Voss 2008). SR performance was assessed by two objective indicators that are directly comparable across the two cases. First, we used the percentage of complaints that were escalated to the Ombudsman, reflecting the proportion of customers unsatisfied with complaint resolution, as a proxy for response quality. Second, we used the average complaint turnaround time as a proxy for responsiveness (see Table 3). These performance indicators, along with above-average customer satisfaction and loyalty scores, suggest that the case companies operate highly effective SRS that deliver superior performance. Focusing on high performing (exemplar) organisations provides the opportunity to inform future (contingent) design and supports generalizability.

<Please insert Table 3 about here>

The unit of analysis is the SRS. This includes its design characteristics, activities, resources and practices. In each bank, the SRS is part of the complaint management division. The lead researcher contacted key account managers in each bank to arrange meetings with relevant personnel. In each case the research objectives and scope were presented to marketing managers and to managers responsible for operations. Both organisations expressed interest in the research and deemed the project valuable, feasible and compatible with internal compliance rules. This phase helped to build reciprocal trust and facilitate access to key informants.

Data Collection

Data collection took place over a 12 month period. We used multiple data sources, and collected different types of data, to allow for triangulation (Denzin, 1978; Voss *et al.* 2002) and for resolving potential inconsistencies in the dataset. First, we developed and pilot-tested

our protocol with an additional informant; the complaints division manager of a (large) financial services organisation. His feedback led to some minor revisions to the protocol. We then conducted semi-structured interviews and ran focus groups with six key informants. Approximately 60 hours of direct contact with the Head of the Complaints Department and two middle managers in both banks provided the initial dataset. We developed interview reports and conducted follow-up interviews to clarify critical points and to resolve minor inconsistencies in the data. A researcher was subsequently involved in observing the work environment directly. He spent a total of 40 hours in each complaint division, observing employees from different seniority levels and in different departmental roles. This additional field evidence provided detailed insights at a more granular level into the actual operation of each SRS, their key activities and processes, design characteristics and resources. Finally, we gathered over 500 pages of internal company documentation including process maps, departmental performance reports, as well as 19 official documents issued by the Italian regulatory entities. We also retrieved documentation on IT systems and tools used in the SRS.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis took place concurrently and iteratively over five main stages. Figure 1 presents an illustration of the chain of evidence linking data and findings. First, interviews with managers focused on exploring the seven design characteristics and on identifying a set of sub-dimensions that inform these characteristics. These sub-dimensions provide the granularity required to comprehend the design and configuration of each SRS and permit the identification of commonality and difference in SRS design with respect to the contingency variable. We presented the definition of each design characteristic to managers. We asked them to explain whether (and how) these characteristics had been implemented. For example, interview questions included: do you consider this dimension to be an important design characteristic of the SRS? What is it designed for? What does it actually refer to in your SR operation? How is it implemented and managed? We analysed interview data using a theory-driven thematic coding procedure to derive meaningful themes that we allocated to the seven design characteristics (Ryan and Bertrand 2003), as depicted in Figure 1 (top left box). This led to the identification of 60 sub-dimensions. Subsequently, this set was reduced to 31 items based on the frequency at which each sub-dimension appeared in the dataset. The emerging framework was then revised through discussions with a second researcher, who did not take part in the data collection. We reviewed the coded data relating to each design characteristic and sorted the 31 sub-dimensions into categories. Several sub-dimensions were

merged, re-labelled or dropped. This data reduction task is illustrated (for the 'formality' design characteristic) in the bottom left part of Figure 1. Eventually, the sorting process generated 19 sub-dimensions which, together with the seven design characteristics, comprise the final SRS design framework (see Table 4).

<Please insert Figure 1 about here>

<Please insert Table 4 about here>

The second stage involved running focus groups with informants in order to validate the 19 sub-dimensions and explore emerging relationships between the strategy contingency and SRS design. We presented the design framework and used the feedback received to fine-tune the definition and description of each sub-dimension and resolve some minor inconsistencies. Additionally, we asked managers to explain the rationale for SRS design in each case. This facilitated the identification of conceptual linkages between strategy and design.

The third stage aimed to populate the design framework with evidence of the operational configurations of SRS found in the two cases. This involved document screening, process mapping and direct observations. We then organised follow-up focus groups to present the case evidence back to key informants. Consensus was built between the researchers and the managers regarding the data relating to each design characteristic and sub-dimension.

The fourth stage involved building cross case tables to highlight commonality and difference at the sub-dimension level allowing us to identify specific patterns of SRS design. The cross-case table presented on the right side of Figure 1 illustrates this activity. Four researchers independently reviewed the case evidence to identify similarity and difference across the SRS sub-dimensions. Similarity was indicated as '0' when substantial commonality was identified. A rating of '+/- 1' was used to indicate sub-dimensions that were markedly different across the two cases. Only a limited number of inconsistencies were identified in the independent rating. These inconsistencies were subsequently resolved by revisiting the coded data and collectively reviewing the evidence. Having four judges appraise the cases improves reliability and increases our confidence in the findings (Voss et al., 2002). We then presented the results, along with the relevant supporting evidence, to key informants for feedback on our analysis.

The final stage involved looking for inherent differences in the patterns of SRS design. This analysis involved: a) identifying the value of the increased specificity (sub-dimensions)

for discriminating between the SRS configurations; b) identifying characteristics at the sub-dimension level that can be explained by the differences in strategic orientation. Additional analyses were undertaken to explain commonality in sub-dimensions that did not correspond to strategic orientation. We then used the case evidence, existing literature and logic to develop propositions to explain the intellectual insights found.

FINDINGS

The findings are organised into three sections. First, we present the SR process at each bank. Second, we describe how the case data addresses SRS design, and finally, we present a comparison of the operational characteristics of each SRS.

The service recovery process

Figure 2 represents process models that display the main SR activities and their sequence of execution. Case A's process starts when customers complete a complaint form, which is subsequently sent to the headquarters. The branch acts as an intermediary between the customer and the central office. Headquarter-based employees analyse the complaint and formulate a response, which is then communicated to the branch. Case A's process is designed to offer a 'recovery service' to its branches. The recovery plan is determined by the central office, which charges the branch a €420 fee for processing the complaint. The branch then implements this recovery plan. In contrast, case B encourages customers to voice their concerns directly in the branch. In this case, branch-based employees engage with the customer to find an acceptable solution, although complex cases can require the involvement of SR employees based centrally. Case B promotes the on-site development and execution of recovery actions by allocating 'recovery and customer relationship' budgets to local branches. The headquarters' involvement in SR activities is limited to two activities: first, SR managers based in the central office sign the bank's official response letters to complaints. This is an administrative activity. Second, the central office supports branch employees in handling complex cases that require specific knowledge or may have major financial implications. In such cases, central SR employees interact with branch employees to gather data on the complaint and collegially determine the appropriate course of action. Complex cases represent a small fraction of all complaints.

<Please insert Figure 2 about here>

SRS design

The results of the cross-case analysis are reported in Table 5 and discussed below.

<Please insert Table 5 about here>

Regarding accessibility, Case A operates the SR function from a centralised location; located remotely from the customer. It employs 120 SR staff who are all based at the headquarters. Customers must complain in writing and address the complaint to the central office. It is the only way for them to inform the bank of service problems and failures. Virtually no assistance is provided to support complainants. Case B handles complaints in multiple locations across a distributed branch network. Eighteen SR employees are based in the central office and 50 employees are distributed across the branch network, situated near the customer. Case B prides itself on making it easy for customers to voice their concerns. It allows customers to use all available means of communication to lodge a complaint (i.e. text messages, helpdesk telephone line, in person, letter and fax). Customers are encouraged to discuss the problem directly with a SR employee in their local branch. Branch-based employees and a dedicated telephone helpdesk operated from the headquarters are available to customers who require assistance at any stage of the SR process.

In terms of comprehensiveness, both banks conduct detailed investigations into each service failure. Each individual complaint is analysed in full and responded to. Many complaints require in-depth analysis and the gathering of background information on the failure. Despite this similarity, the amount of effort invested in finding an appropriate response that matches customer expectations is very different across the two cases. Case B strives to understand customer motivations for complaining and endeavours to find the best possible solution to the customer problem. Managers stressed that their job was to exhaustively consider every possible recovery action after a failure has occurred and to select the action that would please the customer most. In contrast, Case A sees complaints as a mandatory task that must be performed because of regulatory pressures. Recovery actions are selected to ensure that the lowest compensation costs are achieved whilst ensuring full compliance with existing contracts and regulatory guidelines. Managers maintained that Case A is focused on producing technically flawless responses that minimise recovery efforts and economic impact.

As for empowerment, most of Case B's recovery activities are performed by branch employees, who are responsible for dealing with complainants face-to-face. Case B promotes

the resolution of complaints locally and allows its branch-based employees to adapt and implement the recovery action to accommodate customer needs. Employees are given the responsibility and authority to select and implement appropriate recovery activities without referring to supervisors or to the Head Office. In comparison, all of Case A's SR activities are carried out by headquarter-based employees under the strict supervision of team leaders. These employees are not permitted to use their own judgment in solving problems. They are instructed to follow well-defined standard operating procedures and to refer to supervisors whenever complaints fall beyond the scope of pre-determined responses and actions. SR decisions are made by managers in the headquarters. Branch employees are not allowed to respond to service failures directly. Case A's branch network has been built over the last 20 years through the acquisition of small local banks, each with distinct cultural norms and operations practices. Case A has reduced the autonomy of branches to a minimum to maximise the uniformity of actions and responses to service failures and to generate cost savings.

The degree of formality is similar in the two banks. Both banks have developed an extensive set of written procedures, policies and guidelines to inform and control the execution of SR activities. Both recovery processes are formally documented. For instance, employees of both cases mentioned the existence of internal standard operating procedures that define process steps in detail. These include instructions on the use of information systems; guidelines dictating data input standards as well as the font and size of characters to use when formulating the customer response letter; rules about transparency and privacy norms to respect in response letters. Similarly, both banks have put in place a range of control mechanisms to ensure that internal policies are complied with at all times. For instance, Case A performs a monthly review of processed complaints to ensure that compliance rules are strictly followed. Finally, procedures are periodically reviewed to maintain close alignment with regulatory guidelines and changes are communicated formally to all SR employees.

Cases A and B present similarities and differences regarding the human intensity characteristic. Both banks run a structured training programme on how to correct failures and systematically evaluate employees' SR performance. Employees are regularly kept informed of changes in regulatory guidelines, contracts, and the products and services offered to customers. Furthermore, Case A's SR activities are carried out by teams of specialists that focus on complaints relating to specific financial products and services. Their role is limited to handling product-specific customer complaints. This work is back-office only and does not involve interacting with customers. In contrast, Case B has a high concentration of employees

located in branches (Front Office) that are distributed across the country. They possess a breadth of technical knowledge and interpersonal skills, which enables them to deal with the vast majority of failure situations that are directly reported by customers in local branches. SR work is front-office and involves interacting with complaining customers face-to-face. Additionally, a smaller group of SR employees operate from Case B's headquarters. Their role is to provide telephone support for branch-based frontline staff in handling complex complaints, as well as to provide assistance to complainants.

Regarding the customer's influence on the SR process and practices, Case A operates a rigid complaint handling process and develops standardised recovery plans. The process is well-defined and deviations are not permitted. Customers do not provide inputs into the process other than the complaint form and have virtually no influence over the response to the failure. Case A's philosophy is to keep complainants outside the boundary of the SR process to protect it from customer-induced uncertainty and variability. It also aims to ensure that claims remain anonymous, that customer rights are protected and that all complaints are treated fairly. In contrast, Case B seeks to involve the customer in resolving the failure and to customise the recovery action. This often involves adapting the process (depending on the failure situation) and implementing solutions that go beyond actual contractual agreement. Customer participation is strongly encouraged to maximise the likelihood that the recovery action meets or exceeds customer expectations. On many occasions, Case B goes as far as compensating customers who lodge unjustified or unfounded complaints in an attempt to maintain loyalty and reap future benefits associated with the customer's long term value. Service failures, in this case, are regarded as an opportunity to develop the customer relationship.

Finally, both cases are characterized by a similar degree of system intensity. Both banks systematically collect and store all complaint-related information in dedicated databases. They analyse complaint data to identify process improvement opportunities and evaluate service recovery performance. Both cases employ similar time and quality metrics to monitor recovery performance. Key indicators include the average age of complaints, the number of out-of-date complaints, average turnaround time and the number of escalations. Using advanced IT systems is fundamental to maximise the accuracy and efficiency of complaint handling.

DISCUSSION

The results, presented above, provide some interesting insights into the design characteristics of SRS. These insights are organised into three distinct areas for further discussion: 1) the additional intellectual insights into SRS design that are facilitated by the increased specificity of Smith et *al.'s* (2009) original framework; 2) the identification of sub-dimensions which are contingent on SR strategy; 3) the identification of sub-dimensions not influenced by SR strategy but exhibiting commonality across both cases.

Increased specificity of dimensions

The design characteristics, presented by Smith *et al.* (2009), provide clear definitions of seven important SRS dimensions. Our empirical investigation has enhanced this extant framework through the identification of 19 sub-dimensions. In short, the sub-dimensions we have identified allow for the identification of similarity and difference both within, and across, SRS dimensions. For example, 'the provision of capturing the voice of the customer when failures occur' is the core characteristic of 'accessibility' in the Smith et al. framework. Our work extends this by identifying 'communication channel' to access the SRS to log a complaint, and the 'assistance' provided to capture the voice of the customer, as important sub-dimensions. Interestingly, both of these sub-dimensions allowed for clear discrimination between our two case companies. It would be interesting to explore whether the characteristics of 'single-channel/assistance' and multi-channel/no-assistance exist in other cases. Our explanation of the consistency found across the sub-dimensions for 'accessibility' is that both are contingent on SR strategy (see below). We identify sub-dimensions across 'accessibility', 'empowerment', and 'influence' that exhibit this consistency when applied to the SRS configurations of our case companies.

Furthermore, we find evidence of within-dimension difference in two of the Smith et al.'s characteristics: comprehensiveness; human-intensity. For example, our results indicate a similarity in both of the case company's SRS concerning the comprehensiveness of 'investigation' but differences in the comprehensiveness of possible recovery 'actions'. These sub-dimensions clearly show the possibility of within-dimension difference. We would suggest that the ability to discriminate between these sub-dimensions is important for the design and configuration of SRS. Interestingly, there are two of Smith et al.'s dimensions (formality; system-intensity) where no difference is found at the sub-dimension level. There are a range of possible explanations for this observation: 1) these dimensions are independent of SR strategy; 2) some additional contingency is affecting the uniform configuration across the cases; 3) these sub-dimensions do not adequately discriminate between the two systems.

Our research suggests that sector-wide regulation, in part, explains the commonality of configuration found across the two cases at the sub-dimension level (see below).

Dimensions contingent on SR strategy

In total twelve sub-dimensions can be identified which clearly discriminate between the configurations of the two SRS. Case A mandates a single communication channel where written complaints are sent to a centralised SR division. This design choice is driven by a desire to maximise efficiency limiting the variety and costs of handling customer complaints. Case B lets the customer choose among a variety of convenient channels for reporting failures. This includes direct inter-personal interaction with the SR employee. Consequently, this mode of engagement allows for assistance to be provided to complainants; consistent with providing a superior customer experience. A clear distinction can also be made regarding the comprehensiveness of the 'actions' considered in response to a complaint. Case B is committed to selecting recovery actions that are effective and satisfactory from the customer's perspective. This approach resonates with Smith *et al.* (2009, p. 168) who argue that "service companies need to have knowledge of the range of solutions that are possible, practical, fair, and understood by customers". Case B's recovery actions, however, go far beyond these recommendations to implement a plan that matches or exceeds customer expectations. Case A does not permit the consideration of a range of possible actions and hence cannot be regarded as 'comprehensive' in this sub-dimension. Moreover, the nature and degree of employee empowerment varies substantially across the two banks. In case A, decision-making is centralised in the head office and the power to respond to failures resides with managers. In comparison, case B empowers branch employees to respond to failures reported by customers in order to restore customer satisfaction. Employees are trusted to select and implement an appropriate recovery action. Empowerment to 'make decisions' and to 'implement actions' are sub-dimensions that provide some discriminant value between the cases. While the SR literature broadly advocates empowering front-line employees to respond to service failures in a way that satisfies the complainant (Hart *et al.*, 1990; Tax and Brown, 1998), our findings provide a degree of support for Bowen and Lawler's (1992) claim that empowerment is contingent upon the service context. It also resonates with Ponsignon *et al.* (2011) who find that customer-oriented service providers rely on an empowered workforce whilst cost-focused providers do not delegate decision-making authority to front line employees.

Furthermore, data analysis reveals that the banks make different design choices regarding work allocation and employee specialisation. Case A's employees work in the back-office, are grouped in product-oriented teams and possess comprehensive technical skills on specific products and services. SR tasks are highly specified and back-office specialists become proficient in handling a narrow range of written complaints. In contrast, Case B employs generalists who possess a mixture of technical and communication skills. These front-line employees are able to deal with a high variety of failure situations. This design contributes to maintaining high levels of customer service. This finding resonates with Ponsignon *et al* (2011), who find that customer-focused organisations employ front-line generalists while cost-oriented firms rely on back-office specialist workers.

Finally, our results indicate a clear distinction in sub-dimensions associated with 'Influence'. Case B encourages the customer to actively participate in determining the best course of action to resolve the failure. This involves carrying out SR activities in local branches where SR employees deal with complainants face-to-face. This often involves adapting the SR process, adapting solutions, and through inter-personal awareness, exceeding expectations (going the extra mile). In contrast, case A entirely insulates its SR activities from customers and produces highly standardised recovery plans; an approach characteristic of protecting the 'technical core' of operations (Thompson, 1967). On a general level, this distinction supports previous operations design studies that emphasise an association between strategic intent, customer involvement and customisation (Frei 2007; Silvestro 1999). Accordingly, firms pursuing a service-oriented strategy engage with customers to co-produce a solution that matches their specific needs, whilst a cost-focused strategy is characterised by low customer contact and high standardisation. This resonates with Smith *et al's* (2012b) observation that organisations offering customised recovery plans tend to involve customers in the process. This facilitates the identification of a solution that accommodates customers' needs. This argument also resonates with Michel *et al.* (2009) who suggest that a SR strategy focused on customer satisfaction involves attending to special requests and needs. Conversely, a cost-centric SR approach relies on the provision of standardised responses.

In sum, twelve sub-dimensions provide discriminatory insights into the SRS design, and correspond with the SR strategy of each case. We can therefore suggest the following design schemes dependent on SR strategy. These have been labelled 'S-Type' for a configuration associated with a service strategy and 'C-Type' for a configuration associated with a cost-focused strategy:

1) An 'S-Type' SRS configuration includes:

- Multiple communication channels to access the SRS
- Assistance in lodging a complaint
- Consideration of multiple actions to meet or exceed customer expectations
- Adopt a visible workforce in the front-office comprised of a team of generalists to deal with a range of complaints
- Empowered front-line employees to make recovery decisions and implement recovery actions.
- The capability to adapt standard SR processes
- The ability to customize solutions to meet or exceed customer expectations

2) A 'C-type' SRS configuration includes:

- Single (or limited) communication channels to access the SRS
- No assistance in lodging a complaint
- Adopt pre-determined actions to resolve customer complaints
- A back-office workforce of product specialists to investigate complaints
- Standardized processes with predetermined recovery solutions.

In response to our formulated research question the following propositions can be formulated:

P1 – The adoption of an S-type SRS configuration matches a service-oriented strategic context.

P2 – The adoption of a C-type SRS configuration matches a cost-oriented strategic context.

These findings suggest that organisations align the structure of their SRS with their strategic context to maximise performance. This perspective is consistent with the main tenets of structural contingency theory (Donaldson, 2001) and provides support for the contingency view found in the operations management literature (Sousa and Voss, 2008). In the SR area, achieving fit involves implementing a specific SRS configuration based on design choices that match the organisation's strategy. The 'S-type' configuration adopted by Case B fits with its strategic intent to focus on customer service. We observe close proximity between this configuration and the 'customer intimacy' archetype put forward by Treacy and Wieserma (1993) as these systems are designed for flexibility and the provision of a superior customer experience. Additionally, the results resonate with an organisation's service concept

(Goldstein *et al*., 2002). This involves specifying "what" the customer requires and "how" the organisation delivers these requirements. Our study suggests that an 'S-Type' SRS aims to provide suitably-personalised SR solutions that meet customers' expectations ("what"). Highly-skilled and empowered front-line employees provide the capability to adapt the SR process and to identify and implement the most appropriate recovery action ("how"). In contrast, the 'C-Type' SRS is designed to achieve high levels of efficiency in accordance with Case A's cost-oriented business strategy. The SRS is configured to deliver efficient SR solutions ("what") whilst maintaining low-cost processing through limiting SRS accessibility, standardising back-office processes and adopting pre-determined recovery actions ("how") (Goldstein et al. 2002). This approach resonates with the 'operational excellence' strategy archetype (Treacy and Wieserma, 1993). In sum, consistent with structural contingency and operations strategy theory, this study suggests that organisations pursuing different strategies must implement appropriate SRS design choices to achieve fit between SRS task configuration and strategic orientation. This achievement of fit allows superior SR performance outcomes.

Dimensions not influenced by SR strategy but exhibiting commonality

In total the results indicate commonality (no difference) in seven sub-dimensions of the SRS studied. In particular, no difference was identified for all sub-dimensions within 'system intensity' and 'formality'. Commonality was also found in sub-dimensions concerned with the comprehensiveness of 'investigation' and in the 'training' associated with the human intensity dimension. In explaining these commonalities, it is interesting to note the set of rules, imposed by the Regulator, which requires the banks to: provide clear explanation and accurate information to customers; to treat all customers fairly; and to gather background information on each complaint. Regulatory pressures therefore drive banks to analyse each complaint in detail and to provide clear explanations to complainants. This would explain the commonality found in the sub-dimension 'comprehensiveness: investigation'. Both SRS rely on the application of procedures and guidelines to inform the handling of service failures. The benefit of having a well-defined SR process is recognised in the literature (Hart *et al.*, 1990; Tax and Brown, 1998). For example, Homburg and Fürst (2005) show that SRS with formal policies and procedures achieve superior organisational and customer outcomes. The case data suggests that 'formality' is associated with documenting rules and procedures, carrying out compliance checks that control the accuracy and thoroughness of the complaint handling process as well as with maintaining the currency of procedures with regulatory

guidelines. Our investigation revealed that regulation makes several SR activities mandatory and that fines are imposed on non-compliant organisations. For instance, banks are forced to implement control points to monitor the level of adherence to internal procedures, to submit a bi-annual report providing an overview of complaints processed or being processed and to appoint individuals who take responsibility for complaints (Banca d'Italia, 2012). These requirements are reflected in the extensive set of detailed internal SR policies and guidelines used by both banks and explain the commonality found. Regulation also stipulates that banks must demonstrate corrective action to address break points in the service delivery system and demonstrate that they "close the loop" (Hays and Hill, 2005). This requires the careful management of service failure information and promotes the adoption of IT systems for managing the data. The regulator issues a set of guidelines requiring banks to guarantee data safety, to store complaint data reliably and to be able to retrieve complaint histories. This contributes to explaining why the measurement and improvement of SR performance is routinized and systematised in both banks. Furthermore, regulatory guidelines indicate that all complaint and failure data must be accessible and that banks must be able to justify the nature of the recovery actions taken (Banca d'Italia, 2012). This creates a need for implementing robust information management systems to collect, store and retrieve relevant data. In addition, both banks recognise the importance of training employees on how to address customer complaints. This aspect of SR is well established in the literature (Boshoff and Allen, 2000). Given the differences in generalist-specialist, differences in empowerment, and differences in front-office/back-office orientation we expected a clear distinction between the two cases regarding the training sub-dimension. This was not observed in the data. A possible explanation is that informants emphasise the mechanisms most closely associated with attaining competence to achieve regulatory compliance. We would suggest further work is required to corroborate or reject this finding.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper explores the contingencies and characteristics of SRS design. The theoretical contributions of our study are threefold. The first contribution is to extend the work of Smith *et al.* (2009) by empirically developing a framework comprising the original seven design characteristics and 19 new sub-dimensions. The design framework offers a more detailed view of the SRS. The increased specificity in SRS characteristics afforded by this granular approach contributes to the identification of commonality and difference in these systems, which would otherwise be overlooked. The second contribution of this research is to identify

and explain the influence of SR strategy on SRS design. An identifiable set of 12 sub-dimensions, contingent upon service-focused and cost-focused strategic orientations, has been identified and two distinct SRS configurations (S-Type; C-Type) have been proposed. Our findings emphasise the level of granularity required to understand and explain SRS design from a strategy contingency perspective. Third, in addition to the 12 sub-dimensions which correspond to SR strategy, we have identified seven sub-dimensions which are common to both SRS. This set of common characteristics, independent of strategic orientation, can be, in part, explained by each organisation's attempt to meet regulatory requirements. The total framework of 19 dimensions, and their associated configurations, extends current theory, provides practical guidance for managers, and identifies areas for future theoretical development.

Implication for managers

Dealing with customer problems effectively is a highly desirable competency for all organisations. This study provides useful guidance for SR managers and executives. First, we provide a detailed understanding of SRS configuration. The 19 sub-dimensions identified provide a useful framework to assist evaluation and design. Important aspects to consider when structuring the SRS include: the required type and level of employee skills and their degree of autonomy, the importance of data analysis to capture complaint information, measure performance and identify the root-cause of problems, and the extent to which the SR process and solution should be adapted to suit specific customer needs. Second, our findings highlight distinct patterns of SRS configuration that correspond with SR strategy. These S-Type and C-Type configurations provide useful guidance to managers that are pursuing a cost-focused or service-oriented strategy. We suggest that organisations seeking to offer a customer-centric SR experience, as part of a service-oriented strategy, configure their systems incorporating: multiple communication channels, guidance on how to complain, deploy SR activities locally, consider multiple recovery actions to meet or exceed customer expectations, staff the front-office with generalists to deal with a range of complaints, allow local employees to take ownership of complaint resolution, develop the capability to manage the role of the customer in the SR process, and customize recovery solutions to accommodate customer requirements. Finally, it is important for managers to recognise that several key SRS design decisions are independent of the SR strategy adopted. Our study suggests that regulation acts as a coercive pressure that impacts SRS configuration in a number of dimensions. Managers should carefully review these dimensions to both ensure both

regulatory compliance and consistency with strategic orientation. These issues are likely to be pertinent for other highly-regulated industries (e.g. healthcare, telecommunications, etc.).

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. First, the findings are derived from two case studies in retail banking. Examining additional cases in this industry to compare SR characteristics against a range of performance attainment would strengthen the findings and increase generalisability. Additionally, exploring the proposed SRS framework in other industries, including other highly regulated sectors and/or countries, is required to confirm, challenge or extend our work. Second, the 19 sub-dimensions identified are the result of a conscious effort to build theory in this area. Theory testing should be undertaken to further validate the dimensions and configurations identified and to explicitly identify their relationship to varying levels of performance. Third, we found support for the existence of relationships between the SR strategy contingency and SRS design. We cannot, however, exclude the possibility that other design configurations may lead to superior SR performance or that other contingencies exist. For instance, Smith et al. (2012b) found that SRS are contingent on the degree of service customisation and labour intensity. They also suggest that organisational culture is an interesting candidate, since cultural norms influence how organisations operate. Fourth, the research design involved selecting high-performing (exemplar) organisations to derive theoretical insights into the contingencies and design characteristics of SRS. We do not examine the relationship between SRS design and performance. Future research could address this limitation by investigating the performance implications of adopting S-Type and C-Type SRS configurations. Finally, an additional research avenue would be to identify SRS that deviate from the proposed S-Type and C-Type configurations and ascertain whether these variations result in reduced performance. This would help to determine whether some natural patterns exist among design characteristics and to explain the performance implications of these patterns. For instance, is it possible for high-performing SRS to simultaneously exhibit high influence and low empowerment, or high system intensity and low formality?

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Stage 1a: Coding excerpt – 'Formality' – Case A:

"Our bank pays high attention to the quality of complaint processing and recovery plan formulation. Supervisors *control that each processor strictly follows compliance requirements* **(coded as 'compliance appraisal'),** even in terms of characters' font and formatting used in customer communications. Another important point is the *substantial volume of formal procedures* (**coded as 'procedures')** that have been created by internal audit teams and whose respect is continuously monitored. Furthermore, these procedures and guidelines require *reviewing and updating on an ongoing basis* (**coded as 'review policy')** since they have to be aligned with national regulation, at all times". (Head of SR - Case A)

Stage 1b: Excerpt of data reduction table - 'Formality' – Cases A and B

Items (31)	Freq	A	B	Dim	Final sub-dimension
COMPLIANCE	5	3	2	FOR	COMPLIANCE APPRAISAL
MANUALS	4	2	2	FOR	RULES AND PROCEDURES
PROCEDURES	5	2	3	FOR	RULES AND PROCEDURES
REVIEW POLICY	6	3	3	FOR	PROCEDURE UPDATES
RULES	4	2	2	FOR	RULES AND PROCEDURES

Stage 4: Excerpt of a cross-case table synthesising field evidence ('Human intensity

Case A	Case B
Managers indicated a narrow set of technical and diagnostic skills are necessary to perform SR activities	Managers indicated a range of technical, diagnostic and communication skills are required to deal with customers effectively
No complaint managers or employees are deployed over the branch network. SR personnel is based at the headquarter.	Most of recovery personnel is distributed over local network branches. A small team is based at the headquarters.
In order to map the SR process and explore SR activities, the research has to be carried out at the headquarter	Field work was carried out in several branches to meet recovery personnel and observe how the SRS operates
The researcher followed SR employees, who are divided in different specialized teams and are completely devoted to recovery practices	The researcher worked with employees, who are not just recovery personnel, and are engaged also in other activities such as surveys, promotion, assistance
The organigram shows that the SR function is a part of the compliance and control division	In the organigram, the function is positioned within the customer satisfaction division
Interviews and direct observations suggest that the SR work space is a back-office type of operation	Interviews and direct observations suggest work consists of both front-office and back office activities

Figure 1: Chain of evidence

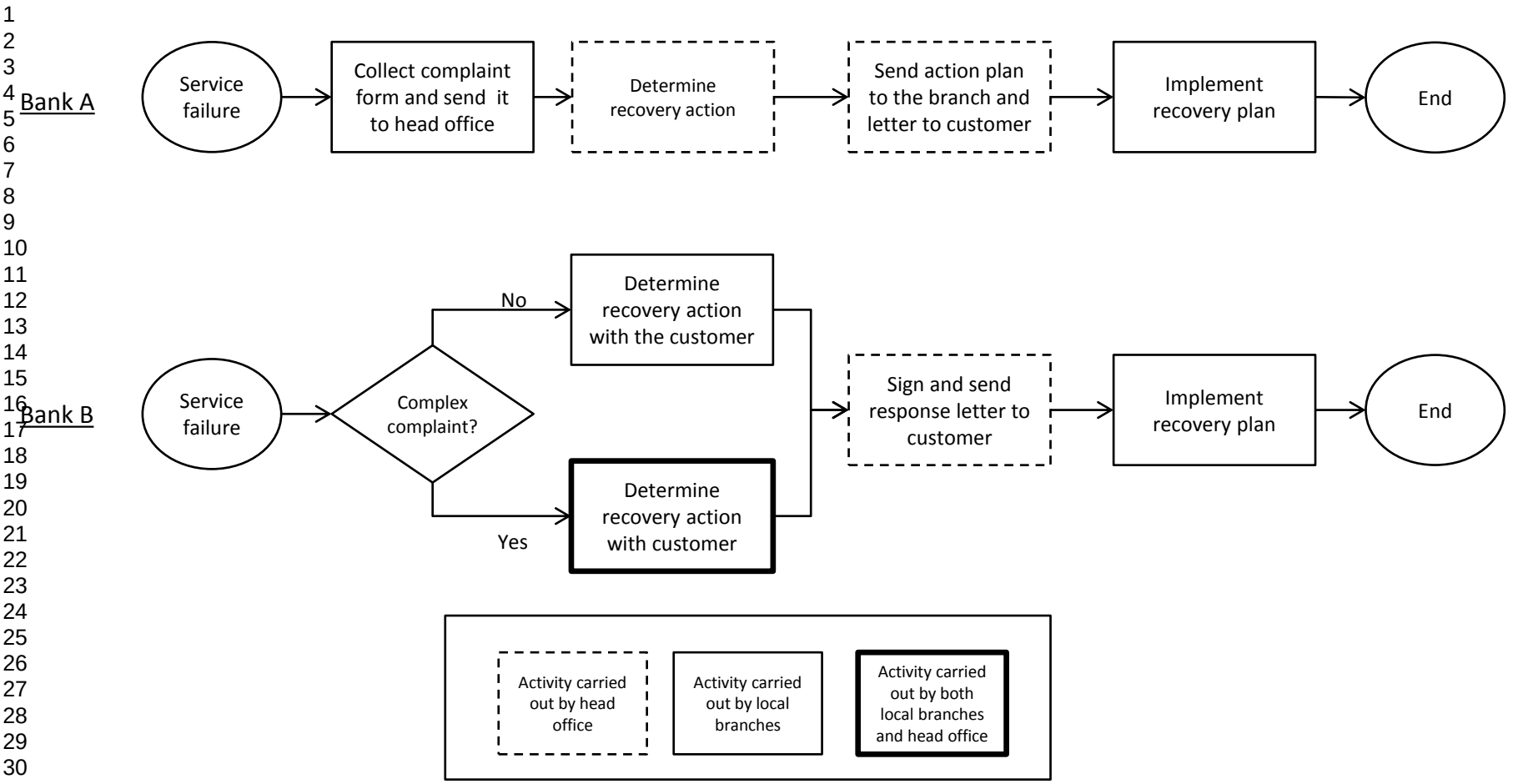

Figure 2: SR Process Maps

Table 1 – SRS design characteristics (adapted from Smith *et al.*, 2009)

Design characteristic	Definition
Accessibility	The provision for capturing the voice of the customer when failures occur.
Comprehensiveness	Attempts are made to be exhaustive or inclusive in considering all potential recovery actions once a failure has occurred
Empowerment	Employees are given the authority and responsibility to handle the recovery activities
Formality	Explicit rules, procedures, and norms dictate recovery activities
Human intensity	Magnitude of resources committed to recovery as evidenced by the provision for employee training and the extent of employee evaluations
Influence	Ability of the system to adapt depending upon the situation and customer's expectations and demands
System Intensity	Resources dedicated to the alteration and improvement of the recovery system

Table 2 – Background information on the case organisations

	Case A	Case B
Main lines of business	Retail banking products and services (e.g. current and savings accounts, credit cards, online banking, mortgages and loans etc.)	
Number of branches	5,200	1,000
Customer base	11 million	3 million
Headcount	66,000 employees	14,500 employees
Complaints processed	Between 30.000 and 33.000 p.a.	Between 6.500 and 7.000 p.a.

Table 3 – SR performance

Performance Metrics	Bank A	Bank B	Comment
Responsiveness (i.e. average complaint turnaround time)	23 days	10 days	A and B meet their internal 30 day target for complaint turnaround time
Quality (i.e. % of complaints escalated to Ombudsman)	2,21%	2,36%	A and B are among the top 4 performers out of 14 comparable retail banks[1]

[1] Our sample comprises 14 large retail banks that operate in Italy and compete with A and B by offering a similar portfolio of products and services. Data were gathered from each bank's annual reports and cross-checked with official Ombudsman's reports to maximise validity.

Table 4: SRS design framework

Accessibility: 1. Communication channels: multiple channels are available to the customer to report service problems. 2. Assistance: possibility for the customer to obtain help in the course of the SR process. 3. Centralisation: physical proximity to customers of the SR operation
Comprehensiveness: 4. Investigation: ability to conduct a detailed investigation into the causes of failures. 5. Action: a commitment to provide an adequate response and take the most appropriate recovery action from the perspective of the customer.
Empowerment: 6. Make decisions: employees are able to choose the recovery action that should be taken. 7. Implement decisions: employees have the authority to implement the recovery action without authorization.
Formality: 8. Rules and procedures: SR activities are well-defined and formally documented. SR guidelines are known by all employees. 9. Compliance appraisal: internal control activities ensure that rules and procedures are followed and that policies are respected. 10. Procedural updates: rules and procedures are regularly reviewed and their currency is maintained.
Human intensity: 11. FO concentration: SR work is carried out in the front-office (i.e. in direct contact with customers) 12. Training: investments in and availability of training mechanisms on service recovery. 13. Specialists: breadth of skills and knowledge of employees.
Influence: 14. Adapt the process: ability to deviate from standard process activities. 15. Adapt the solution: ability to adapt recovery actions to solve customer problems. 16. Go the extra mile: capacity to implement a recovery action that goes over and beyond what the customer would normally expect.
System intensity: 17. Data capture and storage: ability to deploy IT systems to collect and store failure data. 18. Performance management: ability to implement appropriate performance measures. 19. Improvement: ability to learn from failures and implement process improvements.

Table 5 – Cross-case comparison of SRS design

Characteristic / Sub-Dimension	Rating CASE A	CASE B	Supporting Evidence
Accessibility • Communication channels • Assistance • Centralised	 -1 -1 +1	 +1 +1 -1	B distributes SR activities across multiple branches situated near the customer base, provides multiple communication channels and assist customer in making their complaints. A performs SR activities from a single central location, merely accepts written complaints and does not offer any assistance to customers.
Comprehensiveness • Investigation • Action	 0 -1	 0 +1	A and B analyse all incoming complaints. B is committed to providing SR responses and taking actions that fully meet or exceed customer expectations.
Empowerment • Make decisions • Implement decisions	 -1 -1	 +1 +1	B employees are given the responsibility and authority to make and implement recovery decisions for most complaints without referring to supervisors or to the head office.
Formality • Policies, rules, procedures • Compliance appraisal • Procedural updates	 0 0 0	 0 0 0	Extensive official guidelines, instructions and policies dictate SR activities, which are closely and regularly monitored. Procedures and policies are periodically reviewed and updated.
Human intensity • FO concentration • Training • Specialists	 -1 0 +1	 +1 0 -1	A employs specialists focused on back-office work. B relies on generalists who deal with complainants and handle failures face-to-face. Similar training mechanisms exist in both banks.
Influence • Adapt the process • Adapt the solution • Go the extra mile	 -1 -1 -1	 +1 +1 +1	B customers are involved in co-producing the recovery action with employees. They influence how the complaint is handled and the failure fixed. A's customers' inputs into the SR process are limited to sending written complaint forms.
System intensity • Data capture and storage • Performance management • Improvement	 0 0 0	 0 0 0	Failure data is collected and stored in dedicated databases. Information is used to measure SR performance and identify process improvement opportunities.