CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW
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In this chapter, a comprehensive review of the extant literature on Frontline Employee Adaptability is presented. The review process commenced with studying previous research on adaptability. Subsequently, the review was directed to explore the extant research on the theoretical perspectives, significance of frontline employees and explore the FLE role theory. The review further moved to explore the customer oriented frontline employee behaviors to understand extant study of this behavior. Afterward, the review proceeded to conceptually ground the FLE adaptability behavior and tried to investigate the fertile ground for such behaviors. The FLE adaptability behaviors are than compared to other forms of existing performance behavior. In order to bring to light the literatures pertaining to the research setting, the service quality literatures in power sector was reviewed. At last closing comments on FLE Adaptability was offered after critically examining the reviewed literatures.

2.1 Previous Research on Adaptability

The review of extant literatures on adaptability led to recapitulate following viewpoint: (a) adaptability as a change in strategy, (b) Adaptability as a coping approach, (c) Adaptability as reacting to the organizational change, (d) Adaptability as a personality construct, (e) adaptability as a task performance and finally conceptualizing the behavioral aspect of adaptability. The figure 2.1 depicts the viewpoint diagrammatically.
2.1.1 Adaptability as Change in Strategy Selection

Adaptability as a change in strategy selection is unique (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006) because rather than focusing on individual differences in knowledge, Skills, Abilities and Other factors (KSAOs) etc, it focuses on individual differences in adaptive strategy selection and use. Adaptive strategy selection is defined in terms of, how well people can identify relevant situational cues, drawn from a repertoire of strategies, and chooses the best strategy for the situation (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006). Conceivably, the most well-known research in this domain has been conducted on the area of adaptive expertise (Holyoak, 1991).

Figure 2.1: Conceptualizing previous research of Adaptability

Source: Author Conceptualization
They explicate that employees who are adaptable use different ways of interpreting tasks and therefore choose different strategies to accomplish tasks. A limitation of the research reported by Ployhart and Bliese (2006), is that, it does not explain the rationale, why different employees choose different strategies, for example a novice employee or an expert employee might use different strategies to meet the demands of work. Lovett and Schunn (1999), through their research tried, to some extent answer this lacuna in part. They expounded and tested a model which is known as RCCL to explain the concept of strategy selection. RCCL stands for: 1) Represent the task, 2) Construct strategies appropriate for the task, 3) Choose a strategy with the best chance of success, and 4) Learn new success rates as the strategy is applied.

The model when put in plain words, describes how people use primary information and distinctiveness of the situation to make choices, and adapt these choices toward most successfully solving the problem. The effects of individual differences in strategy selection were illustrated, in various studies and prominent among them are Schunn and Reder (1998). The individual differences were found to be moderately related to cognitive ability, and further suggest that strategy selection is “something different”. What was lacking specifically in clear terms “something different”. Hence, the adaptability as a means of change in strategy selection is defined in terms of performance of an individual on a changing task, but it focuses more on the strategies individuals develop in responding to the changing task. Thus, this point of view regards adaptability largely in terms of strategy selection, and describes the processes through which it occurs. Recent research by Cameron and Quinn (2011) and Chung, Du, and Choi (2014), illuminate this view point while describing the process of organization change. Moon, Betts, and Anderson (2013), investigated the effects of individual differences and workload on adaptive strategies and proposed, that
individuals were also more likely to adopt the new strategy if their pattern of behavior exposed them more often to the potential of drifting with the wind. The results in their study further indicate that spontaneous changes in strategy occur when people are exposed to the potential of a new strategy and have the cognitive resources to understand its potential. This study shed light on the link between cognition and strategy selection.

2.1.2 Adaptability as Coping

There is a large amount of literature investigating how individuals cope with stressful events. The intention in this section is not to summarize these researches, rather, this section, see the sights of the obvious overlaps between coping with events which are stressful and adaptability. A number of forms of coping are conceptually similar to adaptability and therefore seemingly fit within a similar research framework. A rationale for this viewpoint stems from a research which suggests that coping presumably mediates the effects of stressors or appraisal of the event on various dependent measures (Aldwin, 2007). Keeping this research pedestal in mind, coping is described as how people handle stressful events, and is therefore fundamentally similar to individual adaptability. Previous research on coping has broken down the theory into distinct styles like active and avoidant coping (Taylor & Aspinwall, 1996). Active coping involves proactive responses to resolving or addressing stressful events. To cite an example, a frontline employee may quit a stressful and threatening job in favor of a job, the frontline employee feels is less likely to overcome his or her resources, as a form of active coping.

Avoidant coping involves a frontline employee trying to reduce the stress, but a fundamental difference here is to ignore the stress rather than eliminate it. The employee may start drinking or resort to drugs as a way to reduce the stress grounded
by a demanding job. Jex et al., (2001), report that active coping is reportedly more
effective than avoidant coping. Hence, it is important to highlight that much of the
coping-styles literature put forward, that they are dispositional in nature. It is pertinent
to distinguish these from coping strategies, which tend to be more problem- specific in
nature. Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989), identify that people exhibit a variety of
coping strategies, such as acceptance, humor, and behavioral disengagement, while
Pearlin and Schooler (1978), put forward that two general strategies, problem- and
emotion-focused are more dominant. It is relevant to consider that those with an
avoidant coping style might use different strategies than those with an active coping
style; hence the context- specific coping strategies may be affected by a dispositional
coping style. After reviewing some general literatures on coping, it is pertinent to
understand the conceptual resemblances between coping and adaptability.

Pulakos et al., (2000) documented that an ability to deal with stressful situations
as a form of adaptability. Previous research has put forward that individual differences
may influence what is perceived as stressful (primary appraisal), and how individuals
will cope with the stress (secondary appraisal) (Lazarus, 1995). Pearlin (1999), argued
the importance of one’s psychological resources, which are basically individual
differences; help determine the nature and type of coping. Kim and Agrusa (2011),
suggested a link between emotional intelligence (EI) and coping strategies (task,
emotion, and avoidance-oriented coping), thus, stressing the importance of
psychological resources in choosing coping strategies. Hence as suggested by Ployhart
and Bliese (2006) the coping strategies may be chosen just like strategy selection in the
RCCL model (Lovett & Schunn, 1999).
2.1.3 Adaptability as Reacting to Organizational Change.

Organizational change has been widespread over the last 20 years, but astoundingly little of the research on organizational change has studied the employees within the organization (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). Some exceptions to this proposition are Judge et al., (1999) who examined locus of control, generalized self-efficacy, self-esteem, positive affectivity, openness to experience, tolerance for ambiguity, and risk aversion (dispositional antecedents) as a measure of coping with organizational change. Wanberg and Banas (2000) also inspected the factors which could be predictors of organizational change, such as dispositional (self-esteem, optimism, perceived control) and contextual (information participation, change self-efficacy, social support, personal impact) as predictors of openness to organizational change, and openness was expected to predict job satisfaction, work-related irritation, and intention to turnover. The micro process of how employees adapt to change over time was propounded by Van den Heuvel, et al., (2013) where they combined Conservation of Resources theory with insights from the organizational change literature to study employees in a Dutch police district undergoing reorganization. There the role of organization support while reacting to organization change was suggested by Cullen et al., (2013), whereas Van Dam (2013) suggests a multidimensional view of individual adaptability to organizational change. Tariq, Anwar, and Aslam (2011), study concerns to the human resource management and how the competitive advantages have a significant effect on training and development, empowerment in response to organizational change so that employee can be a valuable asset. Van den Heuvel et al. (2013) also stressed the relevance of meaning-making and change information as important predictors of adaptive behavior is emphasized.
2.1.4 Adaptability as a Personality Construct

Van Dam (2013) advocated multidimensional resources based view on individual adaptability. They consider three dimensions of individual adaptability: Cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions of individual adaptability. Ployhart and Bliese (2006) conceptualize adaptability and define it as an individual’s dispositional tendency to make active attempts to adjust employees to fit new tasks and new environments. This definition captures three key bare bones of adaptability. First, it stresses that adaptability is a type of individual disposition that forms people’s cognitive tendencies and behavioral tendencies in the context of facing new situations. Second, it stresses that the target of the cognitive and behavioral operations shaped by adaptability is of oneself, but not the new tasks or new environment. Third, this definition emphasizes the proactive nature of the behavioral tendencies characterized by adaptability. Based on these three key rudiments, the concept of adaptability can be distinguished from other personality constructs that have been until this time demonstrated to impact newcomers’ work-related outcomes such as proactive personality and Openness to Experience. To be specific, although both adaptability and proactive personality accentuate the self-starting nature of the behavioral tendencies they characterize, they differ in terms of the behavioral context and target. Proactive personality does not impose stress on the context, whereas the construct openness to experience could be both active and passive and does not imply a person’s tendency to effect changes in them (McCrae & Costa Jr, 1999). Another significant characteristic of adaptability is that it is considered to be multidimensional. This is because multiple aspects of the situation exist in the adaptation process (Pulakos et al., 2000) where as Ployhart and Bliese (2006) have proposed and empirically demonstrated that there are eight sub dimensions of adaptability. Further research by Wang et al., (2011) considers
only five adaptability dimensions while studying work role transition process, thus, leading to considerable amount of disagreement on the dimensions proposed by Ployhart and Bliese (2006).

2.1.5 Adaptability as Task Performance.

Some studies have reported individual adaptability on task as a response to changing environmental situations. For instance a participant will perform a task (e.g., fault finding in electrical systems or decision making) until they are reasonably skillful, and then some characteristic of the task will change and participants’ response to the change will be observed. Ployhart and Bliese (2006) defined adaptability as “how well an individual performs on a changing task”. In such a scenario, the antecedents of adaptability are the knowledge, skill, ability, and other characteristics (KSAOs) that related to the adaptive performance. Tucker, Pleban, and Gunther (2009), posit that adaptability is significant contributor of performance and that it mediates the effects of distal predictors on performance and discuss the need to further test the nomological network of KSAO–adaptability–performance relationships. LePine et al.,(2001), manipulated the rules essential to successfully complete a decision task, such that adaptability was defined by how well partakers responded to new rules. They established the effects of individual differences like cognitive ability, openness, and conscientiousness on performance which became stronger after the decision rules were changed. Research advocates that individual differences may be mainly important predictors of adaptive performance. Recent research by Thoresen et al., (2004) recognized the thought that specific individual differences may be mainly predictive of adaptive performance. The dissimilarity between individual difference antecedents of the performance between, (1) a transition groups of sales representatives forced to adapt to an entirely new sales product and (2) a maintenance group of sales
representatives working with a well-known sales product. The results showed that the personality characteristic of openness to new experience was antecedent of sales performance in the transition sample, but the same could not be confirmed in the maintenance sample.

This study has an important implication as an antecedent to adaptability varies as a function of tasks. Task-related adaptability is grounded in the training literature. It argues adaptation is seen as, how well individuals generalize and transfer knowledge in performance transition situations (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). Kozlowski and colleagues has revealed that transfer of knowledge and generalization may represent two forms of adaptability (Kozlowski, 1998; Kozlowski et al., 2001; Smith, Ford, & Kozlowski, 1997). To cite an example, Kozlowski et al. (2001) examined how individual differences and training goals predicted performance adaptability (through knowledge), where adaptability was conceptualized as generalization of knowledge and skills to a new task. Following studies have imperative implications, if one conceptualizes transfer of training as representing one form of task-related adaptability, then studies by (Brown, 2001; Phillips & Gully, 1997; Pieterse, VanKnippenberg, & VanDierendonck, 2013; VandeWalle et al., 1999). Performance has been defined in these studies in terms of cognitive, affective, and/or behavioral - outcomes on a changing task (Kraiger, Ford, & Salas, 1993). In these studies, various individual differences like the KSAOs are expected to interact or to be mediated by context specific factors which in turn will influence the dependent variable. However, the bulk of these studies examine only a few individual difference variables presumably most relevant to predicting the criterion construct and hence it is difficult to generalize results across the studies. That is, because the criterion construct in each of the study differs across studies and also the
KSAO predictors change as well. Thus, making it difficult to put together and summarize this literature into a combined perspective for analysis.

In order, to conceptualize adaptability, in terms of changing task demands warrants that adaptability is defined in task-specific terms. Such an exercise makes it hard to determine whether the same KSAOs contribute to adaptability across various tasks and different contexts. The KSAO involved in adaptation for decision task will be different than physical task. Hence it is very much not possible that the same KSAOs will be equally, or even similarly, important across different tasks and contexts and therefore the findings in such research are to some extent confounded with task and performance context. In order to generalize across task and context setting it is imperative to identify the underlying dimensions of tasks and performance that require adaptability across all major tasks and contexts. To solve this problem Pulakos et al. (2000) provided the first comprehensive study of adaptive performance. While examining critical behavioral incidents from 21 different jobs that, they identified eight latent dimensions of adaptive performance. This was further supported by eight-factor structure using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Pulakos et al. (2002) then developed tool to measure individual differences in adaptability on these eight dimensions. The eight-factor structure was confirmed in the individual difference suggested by Ployhart and Bliese (2006), and the measures assisted explain performance in adaptive contexts. There is a effect of culture and its effect of adaptation and task performance (Ang et al., 2007) and there is a suggested link, that perceptions of organizational politics and individual differences in conscientiousness constitute contingencies of the adaptive performance–task performance relationship (Shoss, Witt, & Vera, 2012).
2.1.6 Behavioral Model of Adaptability

Pulakos et al. (2000) developed taxonomy of adaptive job performance in work settings and examined this taxonomy for understanding, predicting, and training employees for adaptive behavior. They identified eight dimensions of adaptive performance as: 1) handling emergencies, or crisis situations, 2) handling work stress, 3) solving problems creatively, 4) dealing with uncertain and unpredictable work situations, 5) learning work tasks, technologies and procedures, 6) demonstrating interpersonal adaptability, 7) demonstrating cultural adaptability and 8) demonstrating physically oriented adaptability. The Job Adaptability Inventory developed by Pulakos et al. (2000), attempts to measure adaptive performance. Further research by Hall (2002), support the critical dimensions identified by Pulakos et al. (2000). According to him, the adaptive abilities are defined as developing appropriate behavioral responses to environment, for example dealing with unique or stressful external demands (Baltes, Baltes, & Baltes, 1990) and positive adaptations which is maximizing gains over loses in functioning (Featherman, Smith, & Peterson, 1990; Parent & Levitt, 2009). Adaptive performance is defined “in general terms as an individual’s ability to adapt to dynamic work situations” (Hesketh & Neal, 1999). Employees display adaptive performance by adjusting their behaviors to the requirements of work situations and new events (Pulakos et al., 2000). Many researchers have shown the importance of a variety of adaptive behaviors (Hesketh, Allworth, & Considine, 1996; Hesketh & Neal, 1999; Hollenbeck, Lepine, & Ilgen, 1996; Ilgen & Pulakos, 1999; LePine et al., 2001; London & Mone, 1999), however, Pulakos et al. (2000) were the first to propose a global model of adaptive performance. A few renowned researchers have conceptualized adaptability as role flexibility (Murphy & Jackson, 1999), and competence to manage new learning experiences (London & Mone, 1999; Savickas, Brown, & Lent, 2005).
This resulted in adaptability being “indefinable concepts that have not been well defined in the literature, and therefore, difficult to measure, predict and teach effectively” (Pulakos et al., 2000). Adaptability basically involves adjusting to vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and personal traumas by solving problems that are usually unfamiliar, often ill-defined, and always complex (Savickas et al., 2005). Hall (1996) and Hall (2002) proposed that adaptability as a higher order quality which is termed as a meta competency which is basically a capacity that enables a person to master many more specific skills, when he or she masters this meta competency. This construct was treated by Pulakos et al. (2000), as mainly performance or behavioral oriented. Nevertheless, what is important that all researchers endorsed that the definitions of adaptability is quite complicated due to involvement of multiple elements. As a component of overall employee performance, Charbonnier-Voirin and Roussel (2012) stated that adaptive performance refers to the ability of an individual to change his or her behavior to meet the demands of a new environment. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, they develop and evaluate a 19-item scale measuring five dimensions of adaptive performance. The dimensions unearthed are creativity, reactivity in the face of emergencies, interpersonal adaptability, training effort and handling work stress.

2.2 Previous Research on Frontline Employees

This section reviews literature of frontline employees. The review is performed as follows, a) the literatures regarding significance of frontline employees, b) Literatures regarding the role of frontline employee, c) Literatures on customer oriented boundary spanning behaviors, d) Frontline Employee Adaptability literature is studied e)conceptual grounding of FLE adaptability behaviors f)Fertile grounding for such
behaviours g) comparison of adaptability with other performance behavior h) service quality in power sector and at last the closing comments are offered.

2.2.1 Significance of Frontline Employees

Robertson (1995) stressed that Frontline employee is basically any employee who “engages in a job-related interactions with a person who is considered part of the environment and who is not a member of the organization”. Particularly, in the services literatures like (Chung-Herrera, Goldschmidt, & Hoffman, 2004; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Yoon, Seo, & Yoon, 2004), the Frontline employee is also identified as a boundary spanners or customer-contact employee. The number of employees in Frontline positions is increasing and the proportion, of Frontline to non-Frontline is an expanding proportion of many organizations’ labor forces (Babin & Boles, 1996; Edmondson, 2008; Korschun, Bhattacharya, & Swain, 2014; Stamper & Johlke, 2003). They, include employees like salespeople, customer service representatives, service technicians, retail employees, delivery personnel, teachers, nurses, customer service engineers, etc (McNeilly & Russ, 1992; Sony et al., 2009; Russ et al., 1998; Singh, Verbeke, & Rhoads, 1996). Conventionally, frontline employees have been charged with three roles in the organization. First, Frontline employees disseminate information coming from the external environment and relay it to the organization. Particularly, the Frontline employee provides information about the customer’s needs to the organization or they act as sensory mechanism of the organization (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996; Schneider & Bowen, 1993). Secondly, Frontline employees represent the firm to outsiders. Especially, this external representation of the organization is the second responsibility of the Frontline employee by which they are charged with being the face of the organization to the customer (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996; Schneider & Bowen, 1993). This is an important responsibility to discharge as the customer may
only interact with the organization through that one employee. As a result, the
Frontline employee must make certain to manage the image of the organization.

As a matter of fact, the Frontline employees can positively or negatively impact
the image of the organization (Bettencourt, Gwinner, & Meuter, 2001; Streukens &
Andreassen, 2013). In order to handle the image of the organization, these employees
are often necessary to demonstrate organizationally preferred emotions or behaviors
during interactions with customers (Arnold & Barling, 2003); occasionally, even if
these emotions do not reflect the employee’s true feelings (Adelmann, 1995). A failure
to display the proper emotions or handle the image of the organization during the
service encounter may cause the customer to develop less favorable temporary or
permanent impressions about the organization. For the reason, it has been said that the
Frontline employee is the linkage between the organization and the outside world
(Aldrich & Herker, 1977). Research has shown that Frontline employees are steadfastly
responsible for service quality (Bitner, 1990; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996). A service
encounter in simple terms has been defined as any interaction between the customer
and the organization. It is during the service encounter where the customer develops
permanent impressions about the organization (Bitner, 1992; Bitner, Booms, & Mohr,
1994), because this is where service quality is most important (Bitner et al., 1994). In
addition, the moment of truth regarding whether the service received is satisfactory
occurs, when the customer interacts with the frontline employee (Bitner, 1990; Bitner et
al., 1994). Because of the intangibility characteristics of services, service quality and
satisfaction are considerably more difficult for the consumer to evaluate than product
quality (Hong & Goo, 2004). Consequently, consumers use the attitudes and behaviors
of the Frontline employees to positively or negatively impact their perceptions of
service quality and satisfaction (Bitner, 1990; Yoon et al., 2004). Research has shown
that the attitudes and actions of Frontline employees are one of the most important factors in the determination of service performance by the customer (Harris & Ogbonna, 2002; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996). A vital aspect of Service firms is service delivery failure, because they are required to depend on Frontline employees to deliver this service to the customers (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996).

This is especially true since Frontline employees must exhibit organizationally desired emotions or behavior during interactions with customers (Arnold & Barling, 2003). The customer may develop less favorable impressions about the organization if the customer observes that the employee failing to show the proper emotions during the service encountered (Howard & Gengler, 2001). In addition, frontline employees also work without close supervision (Schwepker & Hartline, 2005); therefore, it calls for a frontline employee to be competent in his work. On one side the customer needs are ever increasing (Shahin et al., 2013) and on the other side organization stresses on efficiency and productivity (Schneider & Bowen, 2010), hence, the frontline employee is caught in the middle between the customer and organization. This imposes further stresses on the frontline employee. Another factor to consider is the inherent characteristics of services and that may be characterized along three dimensions: 1) the degree of emotional labor expended in delivering the service; 2) proximity (degree of close physical and intimate contact with the customer); and 3) extended duration (the length of time and frequency of the service encounter). Services which are high on each of the above dimension place an especially high burden on the skill and emotional labor on the frontline employee’s (Erickson & Grove, 2008).
2.2.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Frontline Employee Role Theory

The frontline employee concept is based on two theoretical perspectives 1) open systems theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Thompson, 1996) and 2) role theory (Kahn et al., 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Johnson and Duxbury (2010) stated that the open systems perspective portrays organizations as interdependent with their task environments, relying on exchanges with the environment to supply inputs to their internal productive systems, and to absorb its outputs. To survive as open systems, organizations need both to maintain the stable functioning of their internal system or maintenance function, and to detect and respond to any fluctuations in the external environment that might pose a threat to the system which is an adaptive function (Katz & Kahn, 1978). The site of the adaptive function is the organization’s external boundary, where boundary-spanning subsystems perform transactions that control the movement of inputs and outputs, and buffer environmental disturbances to protect the organization’s core technology (Katz & Kahn, 1978). The adaptive function thus occupies a bidirectional movement. In the event of environmental fluctuations, the adaptive function may either exert outward flow to modify external forces, or it may exert inward flow to modify the organization’s own structures or processes in response to the needs of a changing world. Role theory provides a conceptual bridge for linking boundary spanning at the macro-level to the micro-level boundary-spanning activities of individual organizational members. Role theory depicts organizations as social systems, wherein the behaviors of system members are constrained and directed by the expectations of the various constituents with whom individuals interact in performing their jobs. According to role theory, the expected pattern of behavior for an individual occupying a given organizational position comprises his or her role. The salient constituents with whom the individual interacts in performing the role comprise the role set. An
individual occupying a position for which some members of the role set are located in a different organizational system are said to hold a boundary-spanning role. Role theory thus locates the organization’s adaptive function in the activities of individual boundary-spanning employees whose jobs bring them into contact with external agents for the purpose of effecting a transaction. Effective transactions are those which maintain the organization’s viability in a complex or shifting task environment (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Johnson and Duxbury (2010) stated that unfortunately, 40 years of research inspired by role but theory has not moved in the direction of further examining the nature of the individual boundary role. Instead, researchers in the micro domain have pursued a line of inquiry focusing on boundary spanners’ stress response to the simultaneous and conflicting demands emanating from role senders within and outside of the organization (Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Tubre & Collins, 2000).

Johnson and Duxbury (2010) further declared that the preoccupation with the stress construct appears to have diverted attention from further specifying the boundary-spanning construct itself (i.e., just what is it that boundary spanners do at the boundary, and how might their activities contribute to organizational adaptation?). There have been few attempts to empirically examine the activities in which the boundary spanner engages. Miles (1976), asked respondents to rate from a list of job activities the extent to which each activity comprised an important part of the job. Factor analysis of the job items yielded a boundary-spanning factor, which included activities directed at external agents. However, none of the activities reflected direct contact with an external agent, so the classification was not able to shed light on the nature of transactions at the boundary, thus, leaving the research gap open.
2.2.3 Customer Oriented Frontline Employee Behaviors

Bettencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie (2005) investigated three types of behaviors, the FLE may perform that are associated with linking the organization to its potential or actual customers (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Bettencourt et al., 2001): (1) external representation, being vocal advocates to outsiders of the organization’s image, goods, and services (Bowen & Schneider, 1985), (2) internal influence, taking individual initiative in communications to the firm and co-workers to improve service delivery by the organization, co-workers, and oneself (Schneider & Bowen, 1984; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1988) and (3) service delivery, serving customers in a conscientious, responsive, flexible and courteous manner (Zeithaml et al., 1988). The three dimensions are basically customer-oriented boundary-spanning behaviors (COBSBs) that are likely to be considered relatively more role-prescribed and those that are likely to be considered relatively more extra-role. For the majority of FLEs, service delivery behaviors are likely to be relatively more role-prescribed due to their frequent specification in job descriptions, training materials, and performance evaluation forms whereas external representation and internal influence behaviors are likely to be relatively more discretionary (Organ, 1990). This assertion is reinforced in the service context and they are studied the presence of service delivery behaviors in internal documents such as job descriptions, training materials, and performance evaluation forms. Further, recent reviews of the citizenship literature include behaviors such as external representation and internal influence among an expanded list of extra-role behaviors (Podsakoff et al., 2000). They emphasized the relative degree to which each customer-oriented behavior is role-prescribed versus extra-role because recent research suggests that, it may be more appropriate to view a variety of pro social organizational behaviors, including traditional citizenship behaviors, as existing on a
discretion continuum from entirely role-prescribed to entirely extra-role with the
majority of behaviors lying somewhere between the two extremes (Tepper, Lockhart, &
Hoobler, 2001). Further, they state the role-prescribed /extra-role distinction is likely
to be especially fuzzy in customer service contexts due to the difficulty in precisely
specifying FLE behaviors as they interface with customers (Zeithaml et al., 1988).

2.3 Conceptual Grounding for Frontline Employee Adaptability
Behavior

Since the precise nature of a service job changes with every customer or
situation or event, the successful FLE’s are expected to be adaptable to the differing
demands of the situation. Thompson (1989) elucidates that adaptability as an employee
characteristic may be defined as: the altering of behaviors during a customer
interaction or across customer interactions based on perceived information about the
nature of the selling situation. Adaptable FLE’s would amass information about each
customer and use that information to adjust the service offering to the needs, desires,
mood, and frame of mind of the customer. For example, some customers want speed
and efficiency, while others want friendliness and conversation. If the FLE’s realizes
this and accommodate each customer's needs, both the customers will be better
satisfied. While the effort required by FLE’s to make these adjustments varies with
each situation, properly motivated employees can reap long-lasting rewards for the
business. By practicing adaptability, employees also practice listening to customers and
responding to it. If management rewards this characteristic in employees, then even the
inexperienced and untrained workers begin asking themselves questions, such as: What
is this customer really asking for? What is the customer's real problem or concern?
What can I do to satisfy him or her? The adaptive employee in such a context will
exhibit adaptive service behavior. Gwinner et al., (2005) describes the primary
difference between OCBs and adaptive customer service behavior is that OCBs are
generally described in terms of extra-role behaviors that are related but are not central to an individual's job. These service behaviors are intricately linked to the daily job performance of the frontline service employee being examined. In the marketing and management literatures, these types of behaviors have been viewed from one of two perspectives.

(a) Modifying one's interpersonal behavior

(b) Modifying the good or service delivered.

Modifying services along interpersonal dimensions to achieve a customized service are proposed by many authors, some prominent among them are (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996) who analyzed service employee adaptability and defined as "the ability of contact employees to adjust their behavior to the interpersonal demands of the service encounter". The thought of adapting interpersonally entails being "personal" if the customer desires a personal interaction and being "non personal", when the customer desires that type of interaction was promulgated by Clark and Mils (1993). Interpersonal adaptive behavior focuses on the communal aspects of the transaction rather than the exchange aspects. A useful metaphor to consider is Vilnai-Yavetz and Rafaeli (2005) skeleton-tissue distinction. Skeleton aspects of an interaction consist of the very basic and essential content of the interaction. Tissue aspects of an interaction are the social behaviors that accompany the skeleton aspects of the interaction and either enhance or damage the experience. Interpersonal adaptive behaviors are tissue elements in an interaction, and it is the successful adaptive employee who can perceive what the appropriate tissue behavior is for a particular customer. Surprenant and Solomon (1987) examined different levels of service personalization each designed to individualize the encounter for the customer to varying degrees. The importance of enjoyable interpersonal behavior and how it adds value to the customer was discussed
by Chan, Yim, and Lam (2010) through the seminal article in the Journal of marketing. Prentice and King (2011) also discussed about the importance of FLE to have adaptability along interpersonal dimension in a service encounter and they provide evidence in a casino setting that such adaptability assumes paramount importance. McCance (2011) called for employees to be adaptable in verbal and non-verbal aspects and display a broad range of such behaviors. Cote and Hideg (2011) also called for displaying emotional behaviors and called for FLE to adjust their displays of emotions depending on the demeanor of customers leading to better service experience.

As regards to modifying the content of service offering, it is significant to observe (Lovelock, 1983), where he elucidate that service businesses are often able to substantially adapt the service offering itself (beyond the interpersonal interaction) to meet consumers' individual expectations. This is principally due to the high interpersonal contact and simultaneous production-consumption aspects related with many services. Siehl, Bowen, and Pearson (1992), illuminate more distinctively that high levels of employee-customer interpersonal contact allow for the sharing of information regarding customer expectations and provider capabilities. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985), argue that many services are produced and consumed during the encounter; frontline employees have the opportunity to customize the service offering at the point of purchase. Oliver, Rust, and Varki (1998) use the phrase “real-time marketing” to describe an approach in which customized services are continuously updated according to changing customer needs. Franzak and Pitta (2011) while discussed the dominance of service dominance logic called for the strategy of customization of service offerings. Moon et al., (2010) develops a manner for designing customized families of services using game theory to model situations involving dynamic market environments. Ulkuniemi and Pekkarinen (2011), topical
study explores how modularity makes services visible and how it enables the customers to participate in service co-creation. Verma (2010) stressed the use of transactional data for customizing service offerings modifications. Li (2004), while retorting that service product has the characteristics of intangibility, co-production, simultaneity, heterogeneity, and perishability, etc. He adds that service product usually correlative with service delivery system, physical, personnel and organization, and calls it service package.

Service package includes four features: explicit services - benefits that are readily observable by the senses and that consist of the essential or intrinsic features of the service, implicit services - psychological benefits that the customer may sense only vaguely or the extrinsic features of the service, facilitating goods - material purchased or consumed by the buyer or the items provided by the customer, and supporting facility - the physical resources that must be in place before a service can be offered.

They called for modularization in each of this features to attain an economical and efficient customization. In the model described by Storey and Easingwood (1998), it is argued that the Augmented Service offering comprises three parts: (1) the service product, (2) service augmentation, and (3) marketing support. The core of the service offering is the "service product."

As the service product does not completely represent, the total offering that customers perceive when purchasing and consuming services, hence the augmented service offering include factors like distribution strength, staff – customer interaction and reputation. Sony and Mekoth (2012b) furthered the work on frontline adaptability to propose a typology of Frontline Employee Adaptability as shown in figure 2.2.
Plug adaptability are services low in service offering dimension and interpersonal dimension. This form of adaptability involves a performance that is rigid and highly planned so as to deliver minor adaptations of a standardized service in an effective and efficient manner. It represents the lowest level of adaptability in our typology. e.g., consider a teller at a bank or receptionist in a small hotel or a telephone operator or a car parking assistant.

Offering Adaptability occurs when the interpersonal adaptable behavior is low, and the service offering adaptive behavior is high. In other words, low levels of social behaviors that accompany the core aspects of the interaction, and a high degree of variation, in offering of both service product and service augmentation. This configuration is named as offering adaptability, because this combination of dimensions operationally suits a performance that involves significant customization of

![Figure 2.2: Frontline Employee Adaptability Matrix](source: Sony and Mekoth (2012b))
the service content. For example, consider the service customization delivered by small financial advising firms or small legal advice firms or maintenance advisors.

Soft Adaptability the third service customization configuration occurs when the dimension of interpersonal adaptive behavior is high and the level of service offering required is low. In other words high levels of social behaviors that accompany the core aspects of the interaction and low degree of variation in offering of both service product and service augmentation like counseling services etc.

The final FLE Adaptability configuration is complex adaptability as it occurs when both dimensions i.e. interpersonal adaptive behavior and service offering adaptive behavior is high. Professional services such as law, medicine, accounting, firefighter, architecture fall within this category.

2.3.1 Fertile Ground for Front Line Employee Adaptive Behaviors

The importance of FLE adaptive behavior is evidenced in previous research and some excerpts from previous study is depicted to emphasis on the fertile nature of such behavior among the frontlines.

Table 2.1: Excerpts from previous literatures on importance of FLE adaptive behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Excerpt from previous literatures on importance of FLE adaptive behaviors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aldrich and Herker (1977)</td>
<td>“Service quality perceptions and customer satisfaction are largely dependent on FSE service delivery behaviors such as courtesy, personal attentiveness, responsiveness, and keeping promises”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubinsky and Skinner (1984)</td>
<td>“Frontline service employees also often hold unstructured jobs, frequently facing customers with quite diverse needs, implying that they need to be innovative”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowen and Schneider (1985)</td>
<td>“Frontline Service Employees play an important part in representing the organization to outsiders (including customers) and enhancing the firm’s image and legitimacy through their</td>
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</table>
### Table 2.1: Excerpts from previous literatures on importance of FLE adaptive behaviors

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<tr>
<td>Surprenant and Solomon (1987)</td>
<td>“There appears to be consensus among service providers that personal service is something their customers want, but little consensus about just what personal service means. In many cases it seems to mean a smile, eye contact, and a friendly greeting. In other cases it means offering to customize the basic service to suit the customer's needs and tastes.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zeithaml et al. (1988)</td>
<td>“The boundary-spanning position of FSEs provides them many opportunities to share information internally about evolving customer needs and possible improvements in service delivery.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thompson (1989)</td>
<td>“Greater adaptability better equips employees to tailor-make services to individual needs of customers, thus giving them an advantage in dealing with the myriad of situations that arise daily in service businesses. Employees who are willing to change customer contact styles as situations dictate, who exhibit flexibility in different circumstances, and who are not locked into a certain behavioral style represent the most potential for service businesses.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hart, Heskett, and Sasser Jr (1989)</td>
<td>&quot;In addition to following rules, sticking to a routine, and treating every situation alike no matter what, frontline workers must be able to do the opposite: bend the rules, take initiative, and improvise.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tansik (1990)</td>
<td>“Despite the role theory repertoire nature of the service encounter, a high contact worker's job is often unique and not easily classified with or compared to another's. For example, uncertainty introduced by diverse demands often necessitates behavioral adaptations and unique outputs by individual service worker.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault (1990)</td>
<td>“The capacity of the frontline employee to customize the service to each customer’s unique needs determines customer satisfaction”</td>
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<td>Grove, Fisk, and Bitner (1992)</td>
<td>&quot;While some service organizations want their employees to perform identical behaviors for all customers, others expect their employees to be able to adapt to the needs of the customer. Both circumstances require training; however, as a general rule, more complex services necessitate improvisation by the service actors.&quot;</td>
</tr>
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<td>Grove et al. (1992)</td>
<td>“A second hazardous connotation of the drama metaphor is that of canned performances. Many dramas are rigidly scripted and may convey the image of a fixed product. Managers should consider the need for adaptability and experience. Service organizations can best fulfill the marketing concept by striving to maintain the adaptability of an ethic of service rather than the precision of an ethic of efficiency. Whenever possible, rather than following a fixed script, the service worker should be encouraged to adapt the performance to the needs of the audience”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blancero and Johnson (2001)</td>
<td>“The behavior of customer contact employees during customer service encounters, which we describe as discretionary service behavior (DSB), is a crucial factor in ensuring good customer service. DSBs are cognitive, predetermined behaviors that customer contact employees have the “discretion” to enact, as these employees are often not directly observable. For example, in a restaurant, a server can provide a “free” cup of coffee, which can be a DSB. Such behavior is distinct from nondiscretionary behavior that may be scripted or is undeniably part of the job, such as serving the customer overall.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Wang and Netemeyer (2004)</td>
<td>“The role of frontline employees in ensuring organizational innovation is of particular importance in service firms. As boundary workers, they occupy a privileged position to collect first-hand market information. Thus, frontline employees hold an important creative potential that could be incentivized”.</td>
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<td>John, Grove, and Fisk (2006)</td>
<td>“To provide satisfying performances, adaptation by the service employees is likely to be needed to accommodate or respond to the uncertainties introduced by the nature of services. While employees may be carefully selected and well trained, the excellence of their role in the service performance is sometimes compromised because of the many uncontrollable factors that affect service quality. Often, standardized or tightly scripted service processes are simply not possible and service delivery must be modified, and done so in real time. Indeed, exceptions frequently become the rule in service delivery. Furthermore, even in unlikely circumstances, customers often expect service providers to learn each individual customer’s needs or wants, respond to their special requests, and treat their service circumstance as unique”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grewal, Levy, and Kumar (2009)</td>
<td>“Creative employees are more likely to uncover customers’ latent needs, to develop a good rapport with customers, and to solve their service problems creatively and effectively, ultimately creating a superior experience”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilder, Collier, and Barnes (2014)</td>
<td>“For most organizations, the ability to adapt a service experience is the responsibility of frontline employees”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streukens and Andreassen (2014)</td>
<td>“Starbucks and Nordstorm, a US coffee chain and departmental store chain respectively share a passion for service. While their service is complex in nature it can be decomposed into three parts. Tangible component (coffee or shoes etc) in a store with the assistance of frontline employees who posses both hard and soft skills.FLE performance during this moment of truth is most important for customer experience and ultimately to sales”</td>
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2.3.2 Comparison of Adaptability Behavior with other Performance Behavior

Previous researches have explicated that job performance as behaviors that have implications for organizational effectiveness (Shoss et al., 2012). There are four component of performance 1) task performance, 2) contextual performance or organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), 3) counterproductive work behavior, and 4) withdrawal behavior. Task performance refers to behaviors explicitly mentioned in the job description. Contextual performance or OCB refers to behaviors that “support the organizational, social, and psychological environment in which the technical core must function” (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). Counterproductive work behaviors involve actions done with the intent to harm the organization or individuals within it (Sackett & DeVore, 2001). Withdrawal behavior refers to tardiness, absenteeism, and voluntary turnover (Johns, 2001).

Scholars have argued that this classification of performance behaviors reflects a static view of performance and have called for a focus on behaviors that reflect the extent to which individuals are responsive to changes in task requirements and in their work environments (Allworth & Hesketh, 1999; Campbell, 1999; Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007; Hesketh & Neal, 1999). Adaptive behaviors reflect altering behaviors as per the requirement of demands of customer, situation, and environment. Adaptive performance encompasses a set of behaviors rather than ability or intent. The primary difference between OCBs and adaptive behavior is that OCBs are generally described in terms of extra-role behaviors that are related but are not central to an individual's job. In contrast, the adaptive service behaviors are intricately linked to the daily job performance of the frontline employee being examined (Gwinner et al., 2005).

Although some aspects of adaptability may look similar to routine technical performance, adaptation may involve doing the same activity to a greater degree, with
greater intensity, or in a substantially different way (Dorsey, Cortina, & Luchman, 2010). Thus, FLE employee adaptive behavior is purposeful, situationally appropriate, important to other stakeholders satisfaction, difficult to perform, in role and multifaceted.

2.4 Service Quality in Power Sector

The challenge of power utilities is to increase the quality of service to its customers. A power service provider’s quality-of-service applies to the delivery of services to the end user. The quality concerns in this regard are customer and technical services for example timely installations or connections, prompt responses to customer complaints, efficient billing practices, safeguarding of customer accounts, accuracy of customer information, and network reliability etc. (Holt, 2005).

In order to decide on the desired quality level, the utility must weigh competing objectives, such as expanding basic service to geographic areas to meet universal service objectives versus improving services to customers already served. Therefore, the optimal level becomes a political decision, since customers already served may resist both lower service quality and increased cost for existing quality to accommodate an expanding customer base. “As quality increases it becomes more expensive to raise it further; hence the marginal cost of quality improvement rises as quality rises. In contrast, as quality rises, the extra benefit consumers get from a further increase in quality declines. The two factors determine an optimal level of quality. This is determined at a value where marginal benefit (to the customer) and marginal cost (to the utility company) are equal (Baldwin, Cave, & Lodge, 2012). Not all providers will incur the same marginal costs in improving quality. Utilities in urban and rural areas will have different marginal costs for service quality. Typically, it costs more to
provide the same degree of service quality to rural customers than to urban customers, even if both sets of customers have identical preferences and marginal willingness to pay (Holt, 2005).

The service quality in power sector is multidimensional; however, customers perceive certain attributes of quality greater value than others. For example, service reliability is likely to be valued more than the availability of payment options. After reviewing literature on what is meant by service quality in power sector let us examine what is the plight of existing power utilities in India. Totare and Pandit (2010), suggest that the Indian economy is considered to be one of the world’s fastest growing economies and availability of electrical energy is one of the accelerating factors to the economic growth of the country and its citizens’ social lives. Economic growth is desirable for developing countries, and energy is essential for economic growth. However, the relationship between economic growth and increased energy demand is not always a straightforward linear one. For example, under present conditions, 6% increase in India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would impose an increased demand of 9 % on its energy sector. In this context, the ratio of energy demand to GDP is a useful indicator. A high ratio reflects energy dependence and a strong influence of energy on GDP growth. The developed countries, by focusing on energy efficiency and lower energy-intensive routes, maintain their energy to GDP ratios at values of less than 1, while in developing countries like India it is more than one (BEE, 2004). Totare and Pandit (2010) suggested that over the past decade, India has been known as a power deficit country. Inappropriate addition of power generating capacity is the main factor causing this status (Bhattacharyya, 1994). The structure of the Indian power sector is that of a vertically integrated monopoly power market. The utilities have enjoyed government patronage and much political interference over a long period of
time. This has led to poor performance of the SEBs, amounting to huge commercial losses (Totare & Pandit, 2010). In other words the customer wants quality power supply whereas as power utilities are not in a position to deliver the same due to lack of power etc.

Load shedding is a common phenomenon in India. The capital city of Delhi itself has been reeling under long power cuts ranging from one to six hours (PTI, 2014) and the state of Indian villages is worse. For the block of April 2014 to July 2014 (CEA, 2014) reports that almost all Indian states are power deficit and Uttar Pradesh topping the list with 23% power shortage. Due to this shortage sometimes the frontline employees are beaten up because power utility cannot supply power. Even riots are stirred up due to massive power cuts and agitated residents have attacked power department offices and held officials hostage, often manhandling them in their frustration (TNN, 2014). Besides, employees are also beaten up by customers even when they carry out routine jobs in power sector like disconnecting electricity supply due to nonpayment of electricity dues (Reporter, 2013). Most of the times customers contact frontline employees being the first interface between the customers and organizations (Wilder et al., 2014) and are often the primary targets for such abuse physical and mental by other stake holders leading to adaptability issues at Job.

2.5 Closing Comments on FLE Adaptability

Frontline employees (FLEs) are an integral part of the service experience (Singh, 2000) and play a salient role in the customers' satisfaction and perceptions of service quality. Service judgments are based primarily, on the specialized skills, techniques, and experiences of the employee with whom a customer interacts (Paulin, Ferguson, & Payaud, 2000). Frontline employees are perhaps, the most critical link in
the provision of superior service to customers and their actions (Alexandrov, Babakus, & Yavas, 2007). However, they are caught in the middle between discerning customers’ service excellence demands and management’s productivity and performance requirements or constraints. Most often, they need to participate in unscripted and challenging interactions with customers (Zablah et al., 2012). This leads to altering of behaviors in response to interactions with customers (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996). Different employees respond to such situations differently (Gwinner et al., 2005; Ployhart & Bliese, 2006) hence, some employees may be good at it and some aren’t. Thus, adaptability of frontline employees attains a perennial dimension, as usually, such behaviors being purposeful, in role and organizationally desired behaviors. Gwinner et al. (2005), explicates that besides, adapting to customer interaction, there would be other factors which may lead to Frontline Employee Adaptability. There is no specific work of adaptability on frontline employees and previous research on adaptability had diversity in approach and conceptualization. Adaptability is an amorphous construct that can be viewed from numerous perspectives and is thought to be applicable to a gamut of situations (Stokes, Schneider, & Lyons, 2010).

Earlier research on adaptability in the workplace has been conceptualized and investigated as an outcome, such as strategy selection or adaptive expertise, task or job performance, and as a stable individual difference construct. A theoretical model developed to understand individual differences in the context of adaptability posits that individual differences contribute to aspects of job performance – task, contextual, and counterproductive (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006). This theory shed light on our understanding of individual adaptability as a predictor, in terms of dispositions and various KSAAs (knowledge, skills, and abilities), but it does not consider adaptive
performance as an outcome or criterion as it is in the Frontline Employee Job Performance domain. Explicating adaptive performance as a criterion has import for and ascertaining the usefulness of frontline employee job performance models, used by practitioners at the forefront of the dynamic service setting. Researchers have recognized that adaptability is a sizeable component of the job performance domain (Allworth & Hesketh, 1999).

Business and military settings alike stress the need for their personnel to be agile and adaptable (Ilgen & Pulakos, 1999). In response, a plethora of research projects have been directed at identifying predictors of adaptive performance for training and selection purposes. However, limited attention has been directed at clarifying the criterion side or exploring the attributes of adaptive performance, exacerbating the bemoaned criterion problem (Austin & Villanova, 1992). Thus, adaptability of frontline employees attains a perennial dimension, as usually such behaviors being purposeful, in role and organizationally desired behaviors (Sony & Mekoth, 2014b). Pulakos et al. (2000) were the first to propose a global model of adaptive performance. The advantages of the model were that it was the first time an eight dimensional model of adaptive performance was proposed. Those eight dimensions were dependent on the type of job being considered (Gwinner et al., 2005). Also there was disagreement on the number of dimensions and Johnson (2003) criticized that four out of eight dimensions can be viewed as a single dimension. They argued that dealing effectively, with unpredictable and changing work situations and learning new tasks, technologies, and procedures uniquely reflects adaptive performance, as opposed to task performance or citizenship behaviors. This model was more parsimonious and predicted adaptive performance. However, when Pulakos et al. (2002) asked supervisors to rate employees’ adaptive performance using similar items,
they found that a single factor best fit the data (Shoss et al. (2012). Subsequently, researchers have conceptualized adaptive performance as a one-dimensional construct, but one that encompasses adaptation to changes occurring at the task, team, and organizational levels (Griffin, Parker, and Mason (2010) and Griffin et al. (2007)).

Prominent limitations of previous research on adaptability are reported by Charbonnier-Voirin and Roussel (2012), that none of the other existing scales replicate the full underlying dimensionality of adaptive performance. They further cite that Han and Williams (2008) developed a 12-item measure (in Korean) based on Pulakos et al. (2000, 2002), but they retained only four of the original eight dimensions (handling emergencies, solving problems creatively, handling work stress, and dealing with uncertainty), and did not present the items or the associated factor analyses. They further reported that some of the fit indicators that were disclosed did not meet the usual standard. Griffin and Hesketh (2005) also developed a scale based on Pulakos et al. (2000, 2002). It has between 18 and 20 items (depending on the sample) relating to how employees perform a number of tasks requiring adaptability.

Charbonnier-Voirin and Roussel (2012) reiterated that the items have not been published and in terms of psychometric properties, only Cronbach’s alpha was presented and the underlying dimensionality of the scale was not discussed. The need for context specific research on employee adaptability was evidenced from research of Spiro and Weitz (1990). Jong and De Ruyter (2004) developed a six-item scale to measure the ability of bank employees to adjust to their customers. Chen, Thomas, and Wallace (2005) assessed the adaptive performance of pilots as demonstrated in a flight simulation, while Joung, Hesketh, and Neal (2006) used war games to investigate the number of problems identified and viable responses generated by participants. Charbonnier-Voirin and Roussel (2012) developed a five dimensional adaptability
performance scale, however there is disagreement on number of dimensions proposed by (Pulakos et al., 2000) besides, the research was not conducted among the frontline employees and hence cannot be used in this research.

Frontline employees are distinct from other employees. The three distinctive functions reported by previous researches are first, Frontline employees disseminate information coming from the external environment back to the organization (Rafaeli, Ziklik, & Doucet, 2008). Second, they represent the face of the organization to the customer (Karatepe & Kilic, 2007). Lastly, they must display organizationally desired behaviors during interactions with customers (Arnold & Barling, 2003) even if these behaviors are not a reflective of their true feelings (Adelmann, 1995). It is prudent to also consider the context specific nature prevailing in a developing country power sector, in addition to these three factors. Frontline employee being the interface, between the customer and the organization, has to bear the brunt of the customer and other stake holders, due to the inherent inability of the power sector to meet needs of the customers. Power, being an essential service, it caters the basic needs of customers, hence, there is a narrow zone of tolerance for the customers as the expectation of desired service is high. Frontline employees play an important role being the first interface between the Power utility and customers.

Hence the front line employees in addition to actually offering the technical service like attending complaints etc, the FLE has to exhibit an in role, organizationally desired behavioral requirement, wherein they need to change their behavior in response of customer outrage or dissatisfaction, political interference, capacity constraints etc. Power utilities in India are a subject to ridicule by the politicians and general public alike due to shortage of power, load shedding, brown outs, blackout, political interference, inefficiency etc (Min, 2011). There are reports of customers and other
stake holders like politicians etc verbally and physically abusing the frontline employees ("Engineer assault case: Pacheco sentenced to one year imprisonment," 2013; "MSEDCL employees beaten up in Gondia," 2011; TNN, 2012; Yadav, 2013).

Under such circumstances the previous research model of employee adaptability needs further confirmation and research, in order, to confirm its applicability in assessing adaptability of frontline service employees, in Power sector and previous research of employee adaptability cannot be generalized for power sector. Besides the assessment methods for adaptive performance have differed largely along the academic and applied divide (Stokes et al., 2010). The literature stands divided on dimensionality (uni- vs multidimensional), assessment format objective task scores vs subjective ratings), and sample (military vs non military setting). Thus the earlier research on adaptability cannot be generalized on the adaptability spectrum of frontline employees warranting a revisiting on exploring the attributes of adaptability.

This chapter reviewed extant literatures on Adaptability, Frontline employees, and FLE adaptability and critically examined the gap in knowledge. The next chapter is titled research design and methodology which will explain the methodology used in the research.