

Importance of Organizational Commitment, Job Motivation and Front Liners Self Efficacy Towards the Marketability of Hotel Industry in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia

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Abstract

In most parts of the world, the hotel industry has become one of the prominent players that contribute substantially to a nation's economic growth and employment. As other service industry, hoteliers are highly relying on their contact employees known as front liners to deliver services to the customers. Therefore, the attitudes and behaviours of front liners can influence customers' perceptions of the service given by the hotel. In the context of hotel industry in particular, one way to improve the quality of services is through prompt and courteous service quality given by the front liners– i.e. by customer-orientation behaviour. Customer-orientation behaviour, which refers to an employee's tendency or predisposition to meet guest's need in the job context, has become a prime variable of interest for organizations wishing to market their products. Therefore, customer-orientation behaviour has been aggressively promoted by hotelier to enhance customer satisfaction. However, previous researches on this subject has stressed the need for a better understanding of the process customer orientation behaviour and its influencing factors. This paper investigates the influence of three personal factors on customer-orientation behaviour: organizational commitment, self-efficacy, job motivation. Hypothesized relationships are tested using survey responses from a sample of 148 hotel front liners in Malaysia. Results revealed positive relationships between each of the three factors and customer-orientation behaviour. Results are compared with earlier findings, and implications for future research are discussed.

Key words: customer-orientation, organizational commitment, self efficacy, job motivation hotel industry, Malaysia

1 Introduction

In the 21st century, most parts of the world have witnessed the domination of service industry as one of the key contributors to a nation's economic growth and the trend is predicted to continue in the future. Compared to the manufacturing industry, service industry exhibits distinct features. Due to the fact that the service industry hotel and hospitality is often perceived as the most "global" sector relative to others, substantial investment is made in designing and improving the hotels services continuously (Paryani, Masoudi and Cudney, 2010). At the same time, the main challenge for hoteliers is to ensure maximum level of customer satisfaction in an increasingly competitive market environment (Shahin and Dabestani, 2010). Thus, the hotel and hospitality industry have witnessed more competition for high service quality as well as getting and keeping customers. In hotel industry, customer-contact employees (hereafter referred to as front liners) are the first and primary contact that customers deal with throughout their service encounters. The front liners can therefore be considered as the "image maker" for the organization (Wang, 2009). Due to the nature of intangibility of service, customers normally rely on employee behavior to form judgments about the service that is being offered (Wang, 2009). Therefore, the way employees behave in a service setting actually become part of the service and consequently influences customer perception of the service organization.

Another key characteristic in service industry is inseparability where there is an implicit connection between service providers and their customers (Paswan, Pelton and True, 2005). Since inseparability is essential to customer service quality, the relationship between front line employees and customers is a prevailing concern across service organizations. In delivering services to customers, service organizations such as hotels entrust their front-line personnel with the responsibility of managing customer transactions. As front line employees is concerned, they are the "face people" for service organizations; they have direct, influential customer contact that may ultimately impact customers' perceptions of service quality (Daniel and

Miller, 1996). Consequently, it becomes crucial to the service organization to hire front-line personnel that able to deliver good quality of service to customers.

Consistent with the economic growth, the hotel industry nowadays has become very competitive and hoteliers are fighting intensely to get more guests. This creates a constant pressure on hoteliers to continuously innovate and develop new ways to improve the number of their guests (Poon and Low, 2005).

In the hotel industry, dependence on customer-contact employees or front liners to deliver service to their customers is probably the highest compared to other service providers. Apart from clean, comfortable, spacious and well-maintained room, safety, security and room facilities, prompt and courteous service of the front line employees is another contributor that guest considered when making hotel choice decision (Poon and Low, 2005; LeBlanc and Nguyen, 1996). It means that front line employees play an important role in building relationships between a hotel and its guests. Therefore, hotels must find ways to effectively manage their front liners in order to ensure that their behaviour is conducive to the delivery of quality service. One of the various ways which has been emphasized by hoteliers to improve quality of service is the adoption of customer-orientation among their front liners (Kim and Cha, 2002).

A review of work in the area of customer-orientation indicates only limited research has examined the influencing factors of this behaviour, particularly in service organization. To date, previous researches have focused on situational and organizational variables which have been shown to influence the adoption of a customer-oriented approach. For example, market-orientation of the organization in a business-to-business setting is positively related to customer-oriented behaviour (Boles *et al.*, 2001; Siguaw *et al.*, 1994). Unfortunately, managers do not yet have clear understanding of which, if any, personal factors that may influence customer-orientation behaviour among employees (O'Hara *et al.*, 1991). This is important because identifying this factors affecting customer-oriented behaviour can help managers in the recruiting and training of employees.

2 Literature Review

One of the influencing factors which have been frequently cited in customer-orientation behaviour studies is personal related factors. According to Brown and Peterson (1994), personal related factors include both demographic and personality variables related to individual employees. As customer-orientation behaviour involves individual employees, there are substantial number of studies that have examined the influence of personal-related factors such as gender (Busch and Bush, 1978; Levy and Sharma, 1994; Palmer and Bejou, 1995; Siguaw and Honeycutt, 1995), job tenure (O'Hara *et al.*, 1991; Shoemaker and Johlke, 2002; Widmier, 2002), level of education (Boles *et al.*, 2000; Lamber *et al.*, 1990), job satisfaction (Hoffman and Ingram, 1992; Pettijohn and Pettijohn, 2002; Stock and Hoyer, 2002), motivational levels (Boles *et al.*, 2000; Deci and Ryan, 1985; Hoffman and Ingram, 1992; Kelly, 1992; Pullins *et al.* 2000; Sujan, 1986) and various types of personality factors (Brown *et al.*, 2002; Davis, 1983; Hogan *et al.*, 1984; Hurley, 1998; Spivey *et al.*, 1979) as factors that influencing customer-orientation behaviour.

From demographic perspective, Busch and Bush (1978) for instance have shown that women when compared to their male counterparts place greater value on their relationships with customers. Women are regarded to be better listeners and better at developing interdependent and ongoing relationship (Levy and Sharma, 1994) and are found more likely to serve as problem-solving consultants and to assist their customers in achieving their goals rather than just attempting to make the sale regardless of customers' needs (Siguaw and Honeycutt, 1995). Beside gender, job tenure defined as the length of time one has worked for his or her current company (Ingram and Bellenger, 1983) has also been linked with customer-orientation. They found that the longer the employee's job tenure, the more experienced the employee has with the company. With such experience, they are better able to "read" the working environment and adjust their behaviour and developed greater product-related knowledge that they can utilize with customers.

Compared to gender and job tenure, studies that examined the educational level and customer-orientation behaviour relationship have received less attention. Boles *et al.* (2000) have shown that employee who were university graduates develop better interaction with customers, frequently exchanged information with buyers, adopt cooperative style, and gain more respect and trust from customers. However, the study by Lamber *et al.* (1990) found that highly educated employees tend to be frustrated with repetitive work procedures, which therefore reduce their focus on customers. Overall, the influence of demographic factors such as gender, job tenure and education level has been under-research and therefore not much evidence can be used to support the demographic factors and customer-orientation behaviour linkage. Demographic factors seem to be discounted because previous studies have not found consistent relationship between these factors and performance of the employees (Busch and Bush, 1978; Dubinsky and Hartley, 1986; Dwyer *et al.*, 1998).

Other studies on personal factors concern with the influence of personality on customer-orientation behaviour. Studies such as Brown *et al.* (2002); Frei and McDaniel (1998); Hogan *et al.* (1984); Hurley (1998) and Spivey *et al.* (1979) have explored the relationship between several personality traits such as emotional stability, extroversion, agreeability and need for activity and customer-orientation behaviour. For example, Spivey *et al.* (1979) and Hurley (1998) found that service workers who are high in emotional stability were found to perform higher customer-orientation behaviour and willing to spend time dealing with customers' needs and satisfaction. Beside that, employees who are extrovert are also reported to reveal higher customer-orientation behaviour (Brown *et al.*, 2002; Hogan *et al.*, 1984; Hurley, 1998; Spivey *et al.*, 1979). Such employees enjoy working with customers and are willing to work with customers long enough to identify and satisfy their needs.

Apart from the variables discussed above, this paper focuses on other personal factors such as organizational commitment, self-efficacy and job motivation as potential factors influencing customer-orientation behaviour.

Organizational commitment is defined as an individual belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values and his or her willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization (Porter *et al.*, 1974). It is a global and stable in nature (Hartenian, Hadaway and Badovick, 1994) and is regarded as individual attitudinal component. Considerable work has shown that commitment to one's organization is usually accompanied by greater work motivation (Lee, 1971) and a desire to make the firm more effective and prosperous (Lawless, 1979), as well as to exert visible effort beyond what is traditionally expected in their jobs (Mowday, Porter and Steers, 1982). In particular, highly committed members of the organization work harder to achieve goals (Angle and Perry, 1981; DeCotiis and Summers, 1987). Consistent with company practices that actively encourage employees to focus on customer service (Dubinsky and Staples, 1981; Dunlap *et al.*, 1988), studies undertaken have found that those who are committed provide greater effort to satisfy their customers. For example, in a study among business-to-business salespeople, Siguaw *et al.* (1994) demonstrated that the degree of organizational commitment salespeople exhibits influence his/her orientation toward the customer. Similarly, O'Hara *et al.* (1991) found increased level of organizational commitment among the salespeople working in industrial and advertising setting led them to embrace customer orientation in their day-to-day dealings with customers.

In general, the above studies suggest that in retail setting, business-to-business organization and banking institution, greater efforts to engage in customer-orientation behaviour are shown by employees who are committed to the organization. One plausible reason is because those who value organizational membership are willing to exert considerable effort, which in turn translates into high level of focus more on meeting customers' needs. Hence, based on the literature above, this study investigates further the impact of organizational commitment as one of the predictor variables for employee's customer-orientation behaviour by looking into the hotel industry environment. Therefore, we hypothesized that:

H1: Organizational commitment is positively related to customer-orientation behaviour of hotel front liners.

The motivational factor of the employees has also been conducted with respect to customer-orientation behaviour. Kelly (1990) in his study among bank personnel found that employees that exhibit higher levels of motivation provide more customer-oriented service. Deci and Ryan (1985) noted that individuals with motivational orientations toward their jobs initiate and regulate job-related activities autonomously. They select job tasks and strategies that are consistent with their own, personal conceptions or how to do a job well rather than being controlled by outside forces (Condry and Chambers, 1978). By this definition, the level of motivation orientation in employees is related to the extent to which they perceive their work, inherently interesting and rewarding and the extent which they treat their work as a means for obtaining rewards, such as money, recognition and promotion. Given these findings, greater levels of motivation can be expected to lead to behaviour emphasizing a greater customer orientation. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

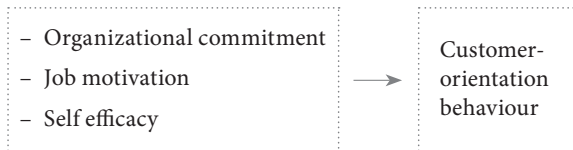
H2: Job motivation is positively related to customer-orientation behaviour of front liners.

As a key part of Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, self efficacy refers to an employee's belief in his or her ability to perform job-related tasks. Self efficacy grows stronger over time as the employee successfully performs tasks and builds confidence necessary to fulfil his or her role in the organization (Hartline and Ferrel, 1996). As self efficacy among the employees increase, they exert more effort, become more persistent and learn to cope with task-related obstacle (Bandura, 1977; Gist, 1987; Hartline and Ferrel, 1996). It is therefore reasonable to predict that employees with high self efficacy are more likely to create favourable service delivery and able to cope with demanding situations that arise during the service encounter. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H3: Self efficacy is positively related to customer-orientation behaviour of front liners.

From the discussions in the literature review, the following framework has been constructed. Figure 1 shows that organizational commitment, job-related motivation and self efficacy will lead to greater front liner's customer-orientation behaviour.

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework



3 Research methodology and data

Our sample consists of full-time front liners working in various 4 star hotels in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Twenty major 4 stars hotels were sent a brief explanation of the study. This was followed up by a telephone call to obtain their cooperation with the research. Of the hotel contacted, eleven were willing to participate in the study. The 400 questionnaires, along with a cover letter were sent to front liners through each hotel. Of these, 154 were returned representing a response rate of 39 percent. In total, 148 questionnaires were deemed useful for data analysis. The front liners were primarily female (72.0%), less than 40 years old (66.4%), acquired the Malaysian Education Certificate (SPM) (83.2%), and have had working experience of less than 3 years in the hotel industry (60.2%).

4 Measuring Instruments

The operationalization of each construct consisted of multi-item scales based on scales typically used in the past studies. Cronbach's alpha is most used to test the reliability of a multi-item scale (Kim and Cha, 2002). The cut off point is generally 0.6 (Hair *et al.*, 1998).

For the purpose of this study, a customer-orientation scale by Thomas *et al.* (2001) consisting of 10 items was used, but with minor modification in order to fit with the front liners and local setting. The Cronbach alpha (α) of 0.65 was found in the present study, confirming its reliability for this study. Organizational

commitment was assessed through the use of nine-item scale developed by Porter *et al.* (1974). In our study, scale reliability for the instrument, as measured by coefficient alpha was found to be .77 and reliable for use in this study. Job motivation was measured using a six-item scale developed by Paswan *et al.* (2005). The alpha coefficient obtained in this study (.83) demonstrates that the scale is reliable for use in this study. The self efficacy is measured by eight item scale developed by Jones (1986). A reliability coefficient alpha of .87 was found in the present study. To ensure consistency, all the measurements used 5-point Likert scale. The means, standard deviation and reliabilities of these scales are reported in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD) and Reliabilities of Measures (RM)

Variable	M	SD	RM
Customer-orientation behaviour	4.45	.45	.65
Organizational commitment	4.30	.41	.77
Self efficacy	3.58	.57	.87
Job motivation	4.61	.43	.83

Note: N=148

5 Results

The stated hypotheses regarding the impact of independent factors on customer-orientation behaviour were tested using multiple regressions following the guidelines established by Hair *et al.* (1998). Prior performing the actual hypotheses tests, correlations between the constructs were derived. Table 2 below shows the correlation structure of the data used in this study.

As the Table 2 shows, a significant correlation exists between customer-orientation behaviour and organizational commitment ($r = .24$; $p < .01$), job motivation ($r = .37$; $p < .01$) and self-efficacy ($r = .47$; $p < .01$), suggesting supports for all the hypothesized relationship. The individual hypotheses were then tested using a multiple regression prediction model (Hair *et al.*, 1998) with customer-orientation behaviour as the dependent variable.

Table 2: Construct Correlation Matrix

Factors	Customer-orientation behaviour	Organizational commitment	Self-efficacy	Job motivation
Customer-orientation behaviour	1.0			
Organizational commitment	.24**	1.0		
Self efficacy	.47**	.22**	1.0	
Job motivation	.37**	.44**	.16**	1.0

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

The results obtained as shown in Table 3 revealed that all the three constructs were found to be significant in the prediction model. The results provide support for hypothesis H₁, H₂ and H₃, that is the relationship between organizational commitment ($\beta = .14; p < .01$), job motivation ($\beta = .25; p < .01$) and self efficacy ($\beta = .20; p < .01$) and customer-orientation behaviour.

F value of 17.93 indicates that all the three independent variables significantly influence customer-orientation behaviour. However, the model is weak with all the independent variables explaining only 27 percent of the variation in customer-orientation behaviour.

Table 3: The influence of individual differences factors on Customer-orientation behaviour (N=148)

Antecedents	B	SEB	B
Organizational commitment	.15	.56	.14**
Self efficacy	.19	.04	.20**
Job motivation	.27	.05	.25**

Note: $R^2 = .27$; $F = 17.93$; $Sig. F = .00$; ** $p < .01$

6 Discussions

Several important conclusions emerge from these findings. First, it can be concluded that the factors influencing customer-orientation behaviour are diverse in their nature. In this study, level of customer-orientation behaviour among front liners is influenced by the level of organizational commitment, job motivation and self efficacy. The increased level of organizational commitment is significantly related to more customer-oriented approach. This supports earlier study by O’Hara *et al.* (1991); Kelly (1991) and Darby and Daniel (1999). This indicates that managers hoping to increase the customer-orientation behaviour of their employees should strive to increase the level of organizational commitment among them. As noted by Darby and Daniel (1999), without attention given to develop

commitment to the organization among employees, programs related to developing customer-orientation behaviour may fail.

The present study found that job motivation is positively related to the adoption of customer-orientation behaviour. This indicates that front liners with job motivational orientation have higher tendency to adopt customer-orientation behaviour in their jobs. This supports Weitz *et al.* (1986) and Boles *et al.* (2000) that people with motivational orientation reported somewhat higher tendency to learn more about customer’s needs by varying their behaviour from customer to customer in an attempt to adapt effectively to customer needs. This is an important finding for organization that aims to promote customer-orientation approach. Employing only such people would be beneficial for companies to represent them. Therefore, there is an

important implication for the managers acting in hospitality industry: they should consider differences in desired rewards, compensation structure, career advancement, recognition, conducive work environment and other motivational factors that may influence motivational orientation.

This study also found significant relationship between self efficacy with customer-orientation behaviour. This means that front liner with high self efficacy tends to perform high customer-orientation behaviour. This is probably because those with high self efficacy tend to become more confident in their ability to serve customers, they become more proactive and persistent, and they put forth greater effort (Hartline and Ferrel, 1996). Consequently, those with high self efficacious may be better able to face the difficulties inherent in their daily jobs, fact which leads to better performance in delivering services to customers.

7 Limitations of the Study

From a methodological standpoint, data in this study were obtained from full time front liners in selected hotels in Kuala Lumpur. Future studies would benefit from a nationwide sample of front liners which also include part-timers. This would minimise any potential bias in the data. Furthermore, this study did not control the characteristics of the job. O'Hara *et al.* (1991) suggest that customer-orientation behaviour may vary based on other characteristics of the job. Although limitations clearly exist, this study does provide insight into some of the relationships that may predict the predisposition of front liners to engage in customer-orientation behaviour. The findings also provide insight for hotel managers regarding the ways to encourage their front liners to adopt customer-oriented approach in their job. This study employed a cross-sectional design to test the relationships in the research model. In future research, longitudinal design is recommended to be used to determine the causal relationships among the variables.

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