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The Effect of Management Commitment Towards Employee Commitment in Hotel Industry: A Conceptual Study

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ABSTRACT

A conceptual framework is proposed to examine the management-commitment-to-service (MCS) factors that affect employee service behaviour. First, the six management-commitment-to-service dimensions are discussed, which include: organizational support, empowerment, rewards, training, customer service orientation and leadership style. It is argued that these factors are unique to the hotel industry and as such, has an implication on the employee service behaviour. This paper is a review paper thus functions as an initial step of an exploratory study to determine factors of the management-commitment-to-service factors in defining the concept. Based on the review, an initial conceptualisation of the management-commitment-to-service factors is provided. It is argued that the proposed framework is not only assist in understanding the management-commitment-to-service factors, but also advances research fronts in areas of management quality to enhance employee service behaviour.

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INTRODUCTION

(Ahmed and Parasuraman 1994) defined management commitment to service as the conscious choice of quality initiatives as operational and strategic options for the firm and engaging in activities such as providing visible quality leadership and resources for the adoption and implementation of quality initiatives. The process of the effect of service quality initiatives by management on employee satisfaction and work performance is built on (Bagozzi 1992) attitude theory: appraisal → emotional response → behavior. This theory proposes that the cognitive evaluation of events, outcomes, and situation precedes affective reactions and responses, which in turn play a determining role in individual behaviours. Therefore, the assessment of management commitment to service leads to employee satisfaction, and this emotional response affects employee service behaviors. In other words, management commitment to service influences employee work attitude and ultimately organizational effectiveness (Bohlander & Kinicki, 1988; Babakus, 2003; Tavitiyaman, 2009).

Most of the previous researches have focused on the influence of the management commitment to service on employee performance from the managers' perspective (Ahmed and Parasuraman 1994; Hartline and Michael, 1996) exploring influence of management initiatives to improve service quality from the frontline employees' perspectives is still scant (Tavitiyaman, 2009; Gronross, 1983) found that when managers treat their employees well, employees in turn treat their customers well. As in the previous studies of (Fuller, Barnett, Hester & Relyea, 2003), employees are more likely to commit themselves to the company when they feel that the company is committed to them. Organizations must strive to deliver a message to frontline employees that the company is there to assist their job and they have an opportunity to be rewarded for their exceptional performance (Tavitiyaman 2009).

A. Problem Statement:

The emergence of tourism as a major business and the expansion of global businesses have been impacting the hospitality industry in Malaysia. Tourism's flows inbounds posts 25 million arrivals and 6% volume growth in 2013 and incoming tourists receipts reaches RM57.1 billion with 7.0% current value growth (Euromonitor International, 2013) This numbers explained the growth of hospitality industry in Malaysia. Service businesses have the challenge of creating satisfied customers in order to keep their business prospering (Zeitham, Berry,

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Leonard & Parasuraman, 1996). Maintaining the appropriate level of services from frontline employees has become a critical issue for the hotel industry because a service firm's success depends on the frontline employees' performance (Chebat, Babin, & Kollias, 2002). The satisfied employees from the management commitment will perform excellent service behaviors by delivering the hotel brand's promise, creating a good image, promoting its services and products, and providing better services than the competitors (Bitner, Booms, 1990; Schneider, & Bowen, 1985; Malhotra & Mukherjee, 2004). In contrast, if frontline service employees feel their work is insulting, demeaning and humiliating, they provide poor services to customers (Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991).

B. Purpose of Inquiry:

This conceptual paper is intended to identify and understand the factors that influence management-commitment-to-service that influence employee service behaviour. Therefore, the inquiry questions for this paper are:

- (1) What are the management-commitment factors that influence the employee service behaviour?
- (2) How to improve future employee service behaviour?

The answer to the inquiry questions will be based on an extended review and analysis of literature.

C. Significance of the Inquiry:

This conceptual paper is significant because it will explore a number of factors that influence the employee behaviour towards customers and co-workers in hotel industry. This paper will examine those factors and make recommendations for future research.

Literature Review:

A. Management commitment to service quality:

The importance of frontline, customer-contact employees to excellent hotel service cannot be overstated. Frontline employees are directly accountable for face-to-face customer service, service quality, and customer satisfaction—all of which are keys to strong performance (Parasuraman, & Zeithaml, 1985; Hartline & Barbara, 2003). Most industry observers and practitioners agree that frontline employees who are satisfied with and committed to their jobs share the firm's customer-oriented values, exhibit low levels of role stress, and deliver the highest level of service quality (Schneider, 1985; Hartline, 1996; Hartline & James 2000; Singh, 2000). For service employees to provide great service to customers, they must be satisfied, motivated, and able to do their jobs without organizational obstacles (Bowen & David, 1992). Finding in this study also contends that managerial behaviors critically shape organizational culture and that in world-class service operations managers leverage intangible aspects of employee coaching and development to help service employees better serve customers.

Gronross (1983) found that when managers treat their employees well, employees in turn treat their customers well. As in the previous studies of Fuller, Barnett, Hester, and Relyea (2003), employees are more likely to commit themselves to the company when they feel that the company is committed to them. Organizations must strive to deliver a message to frontline employees that the company is there to assist their job and they have an opportunity to be rewarded for their exceptional performance (Tavitiyaman 2009). Previous studies indicate that training, empowerment, organizational support and rewards are the best indicators of management commitment to service (Babakus, 2003; Bowen D, 1995); Tavitiyaman, 2009). In addition, communication is often considered as the initiatives showing management commitment to service excellence. Research has shown that effective communication is a critical part of internal service quality (Back, Lee, and Abbott 2010).

B. Management-commitment-to-service-quality factors:

The review of the literature suggested several factors that might influence the employee service behaviour. They include: (a) organizational support; (b) empowerment; (c) rewards; (d) training; (e) customer service orientation and (f) leadership style. A number of previous studies recognised the influential management-commitment-to-service factors associated with the employee behaviour towards customers and co-workers. Drawing upon a critique of existing attitude theories (the theory of reasoned action, the theory of planned behaviour and the theory of trying) Bagozzi, (1992) framework reformulates attitude theory to posit a process.

i. Organization Support:

Organizational support is often considered as one of the initiatives showing management commitment to service excellence. Therefore, this study operationalizes management commitment to service using organizational support, rewards, training, and empowerment. Organizational support is the extent to which employees perceive that the organization is concerned about their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa 1986) and encourages, respects, and recognizes those who outperform (Scott, , & Bruce

1994). Research has shown that organizational support is positively related to job satisfaction (Kim., Leong., & Lee, 2005; Randall, Cropanzano, Bormann, & Birjulin, 1999; Susskind, Borchgrevink, Kacmar, & Brymer, 2000).

(Susskind *et al.* 2000) emphasized the importance of organizational support particularly in service organizations. The authors argued that when a service provider faces unsatisfied customers who vent their anger on the service provider regardless of the cause of the dissatisfaction, the employee is likely to create job dissatisfaction without a belief that management is a strong ally (therefore supportive). In other words, when problems arise, employees with high levels of organizational support believe that the company supports and appreciates their work. This psychological process helps build trust between service workers and the organization. Trust invokes high levels of affective commitment to the company on the part of the employees, thereby increasing work effort (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986) and extra-role customer service behaviors (Polly 2002).

ii. Empowerment:

Effective empowerment requires changes to management behaviors, organizational systems, and employees' view of themselves and their work (Cacioppe 1998). Rafiq and Ahmed, 1998 asserted that the more autonomy and empowerment employees exercise on the job, the higher their job satisfaction. Bowen, 1995 argued that employees who are empowered feel good about themselves and their jobs, and these feelings may enhance service performance and customer satisfaction. However, the effect of empowerment on job satisfaction seems to vary from one culture to another. Previous studies indicate that high interdependence and both high person and task orientated leadership styles are related to both high individual and team psychological empowerment (Tuuli *et al.* 2012) However, only high person orientated leadership style is related to more empowering work climate. This partially supports the findings of (Nauman *et al.* 2010) who report a positive and significant relationship between both task and person orientated leadership styles and empowerment climate.

Using (Hackman, 1975) survey, (Lee-Ross 2005) showed that Mauritian workers had a significantly lower score of CJDs (core job dimensions: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and job feedback) than their Western counterparts (i.e., Australian workers), but Mauritian workers reported a slightly higher rating of IWM (internal work motivation) than Australian workers (although there was no statistically significant difference). Referring to the study results, the author argued that a lack of employee autonomy may not be necessarily bad for Mauritian workers who are used to autocratic management styles influenced by the country's culture (high power distance, low individualism, and high masculinity), and Mauritian employees may possibly respond negatively to empowered jobs because they are culturally predisposed against such job structures.

iii. Rewards:

Perception of appropriate levels of pay and other compensation have a significant impact on frontline employees' job satisfaction and loyalty to their organization (Bowen, D.E., Gilliland, S.W. and Folger, 1999; Babakus, 2003) argued that management trying to build a strong service climate should establish and consistently implement rewards for exceptional service performance; such practices can be perceived by frontline employees as genuine commitments on the part of management, thereby creating a positive affective response from employees. According to (Karatepe 2012) frontline employees' appraisal of organizational support leads to an emotional response such as career satisfaction. Employees' feelings of satisfaction with the career in the current organization regarding pay, advancement, achievement of career goals, and development of new skills in turn determine their performance outcomes. Similarly, other researchers pointed out the significance of appropriate reward policies to encourage frontline employees to deliver high-quality services (Berry & Parasuraman, 1999).

iv. Training:

Job-related and behavioral training improves the ability to deal with customer needs (Bettencourt, & Gwinner 1996). (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault 1990) reported that more than 40% of unsatisfactory service encounters come from service providers' unwillingness or inability to respond to service failures. Training enhances employee motivation, knowledge, and skills to assist in fulfilment of the organization's goal. Training increases employee confidence and reduces role ambiguity. Knowledgeable workers are more likely to satisfy customers and have a significant impact on organizational success (Podsakoff, Todor, & Skov, 1982). Poorly trained employees fail to provide a high level of service quality and deal poorly with customer complaints (Bettencourt, & Gwinner, 1996; Yavas *et al.* 2003). It is not only important to have the right employees for the right jobs but also necessary to train these employees to deal with problems and situations that arise (Boshoff and Allen, 2000). Research also shows that employees able to benefit from customer service training programs are more committed to the organization (Sweetman 2001).

v. Customer service orientation:

Customer service orientation is a culture in the organization stemming from policies and procedures that support behaviors of employees geared toward delivering service excellence (Lytle *et al.*, 1998). Theoretically, Jaworski and Kohli (1993) have argued that employees who work in a market-oriented organization will develop a sense of pride as the organization works towards the goal of satisfying customers and will feel that they are contributing to something worthwhile, will have a sense of belongingness and, therefore, commitment to the organization. Empirically, frontline employees perceptions of service organization customer orientation have been shown to positively influence their affective organizational commitment (Karatepe 2012). Thus, employees supported by such a culture will be more committed to the organization and are likely to be more satisfied in their employment.

vi. Leadership Style:

By definition, managers who are committed to service quality will provide visible leadership to help ensure employees' acceptance of service quality initiatives (Ahmed and Parasuraman 1994). The appropriate leadership style for hotel managers is one that increases their ability to translate their own commitment to service quality into employee actions that are conducive to excellent service. As a result, the most appropriate leadership style in the context of managing frontline hotel employees is likely to be transformational. This argument is consistent with the precepts of leading by example, where leaders can instill and reinforce the appropriate customer-oriented responses among frontline employees (Bowen 1995; Hartline and Michael 1996). We next discuss the three specific leadership styles that most appropriate in managing frontline hotel employees which are, directive, participative, and empowering (Clark, Hartline & Jones 2008)

Directive leadership is defined as telling subordinates "what they are expected to do, how to do it, when it is to be done, and how their work fits in with the work of others" (Clark *et al.* 2008). Directive leadership has been described as autocratic, task-oriented, and persuasive and manipulative (Muczyk *et al.*, 1987). Though it can be effective in communicating a clear and concise vision of the organization's strategic goals, directive leadership is transformational only by coercion (Clark *et al.* 2008).

Directive leadership falls short of being truly transformational due to its lack of employee participation and empowerment. Employees may be less likely to adopt management's vision or values if they are excluded from the decision-making process. (Bowen, David E. 1992) cited several studies that indicate that directive leadership results in lower acceptance of managerial decisions than a more participative leadership style. Employees' failure to espouse management values may be a particular problem in hotels, since frontline employees are often required to make decisions and customize service on the fly (Hartline, Michael D., Barbara Wooldridge 2003). Service scholars have long held that the service environment must be flexible enough to allow employees to respond creatively to customers' needs (Bowen, David E., 1992; Hartline and Ferrell 1996). For these reasons, a manager who is committed to providing quality service to customers is less likely to employ a directive leadership style, because that style will not give employees the latitude they need to perform their jobs well.

Participative leadership in contrast to directive leadership, participative leadership involves consulting with subordinates and considering their opinions and suggestions (Nauman, Mansur Khan, & Ahsan 2010). Participative leadership is associated with consensus, consultation, delegation, and involvement (Clark *et al.* 2008). In keeping with a basic tenet of transformational leadership theory, participative leadership has the potential to enhance the dissemination of organizational and managerial values to employees. Employees who work for a participative leader tend to exhibit greater involvement, commitment, and loyalty than employees who work under a directive leader. Participative leadership is particularly fitted to the hotel industry because frontline hotel employees are often more cognizant of customer needs than are managers, given the employees' direct contact with guests. Therefore, management stands to benefit by allowing employees to participate in the decision-making process. Participative leadership allows frontline employees to serve as liaisons between guests and management. Participative (Bass 1981). Consequently, employees who are allowed to participate in the decision making process are likely to be more committed to those decisions.

Empowering leaders give their employees the latitude necessary to perform their jobs. In the process, however, those managers provide less direction and feedback regarding employees' responsibilities and roles (Muczyk, 1987).

Methodology:

The original sample for our study will be from a report from the Malaysian Government's Tourism Board that contained all "star" hotels in Malaysia. All hotels then will be contacted to confirm their "star" status and to inquire about their willingness to participate in the survey. Based on that, this study plans to collect data by means of self-administered survey at ten green certified hotels in Malaysia. The measuring instrument is a structured questionnaire. Questionnaires will be designed in two languages which are English and Malay. All The target population for the study will consists of all hotel managers and employees. In order to establish the content validity of the questionnaires, the instrument will be pilot-tested with a small group of hotel managers

and employees. Data analysis using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) will be utilized to verify the research framework and hypotheses, and applies AMOS 21.0 to obtain the empirical results.

Conclusions:

More effective management-commitment-to service factors that will influence the employee service behaviour can be recommended. Further research should be conducted to test whether the MSC factors conceptualised in this paper acts as an influential factor on the employee behaviour towards customers and co-workers. The findings from such study should be of value to the management of hotels and hospitality related bodies in terms of improving the employees' behaviour and eventually enhancing customer service.

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