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Antecedents and outcomes of migrant workers' sociocultural adjustment in the hospitality industry

Woo Gon Kim, Hyung-Min Choi*, Jun (Justin) Li

International Center for Hospitality Research & Development, Dedman School of Hospitality Management, The College of Business, Florida State University, 288 Champions Way UCB 4117, Tallahassee, FL 32306-2541, United States

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ABSTRACT

Migrant workers are an important part of the labor force for the hospitality industry in developed countries and emerging markets. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and dominant cultural orientation (DCO), sociocultural adjustment (SCA), job satisfaction (JS), life satisfaction (LS), and turnover intention (TI) of migrant workers. This research uses a respondent-driven sampling (RDS) method with a dual incentive system to attain hard-to-reach migrant employees. The findings demonstrate that both POS and DCO have a significant and positive relationship with SCA and, interestingly, that POS has a stronger impact on hospitality migrants' SCA than DCO. The findings also imply that although personal efforts of migrant workers are important for their effective socialization, positive support from a hospitality organization plays a far more important role. Furthermore, this study highlights the significant relationships between POS and JS and between DCO and LS. The findings also show that SCA had a significant and positive effect on LS and that hospitality migrants who adjust well in their host society tend to have a high satisfaction with their lives in the foreign country and are apt to stay longer in their positions.

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1. Introduction

The hospitality industry is facing a labor shortage, and some researchers have written on this emerging challenge (Choi et al., 2000; Meier, 1991; Taylor and Finley, 2010; Zopiatis et al., 2014). In addition, research from the United States Department of Labor (2015a) shows that employment rates in the industry of accommodation and food services in the United States have deeply decreased from 83.6% in 2005 to 69.4% in 2014 due to a lack of labor in the hospitality industry although the total job openings in this sector has increased from 5.4 million to 7.1 million. The above statistics clearly indicate that the hospitality industry has the challenge of filling the growing number of jobs since the labor supply pool is not deep enough to meet the demand of hospitality businesses.

The labor shortage issue in the hospitality sector is not only a major concern in developed countries but is also an issue in emerging markets, for example, in South Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. According to the statistics provided by the Ministry of Employment and Labor in South Korea (2015), the labor shortage rates have increased from 3.8% in 2009 to 6.4% in 2014. The hospitality industry has consistently had the highest labor shortage rates out of all industries since 2010. Moreover, research shows labor shortage will become more serious in the future because the working-age population (from 16 years old to 64 years old) will decline dramatically in the next decade due to demographic changes from aging and low birth rates (Bloom et al., 2011). Therefore, based on current and forecasted labor shortage issues, hospitality researchers need to propose various solutions for the labor shortage problem.

The hospitality industry can resolve its labor shortage problem by importing a foreign workforce, and migrant workers are a great alternative labor force. For example, in 2008, the number of foreign-born migrant workers (27% of total restaurant employees, 34% of restaurant and catering managers, 31% of chefs, and 26% of waiting staff) in the UK's hospitality industry was considerable (Baum, 2012). In the U.S., 22% of employees for food preparation and serving were born overseas (United States Department of Labor, 2015b). This phenomenon is also global, especially in other developed countries such as Luxembourg (44.6%), Switzerland (27.5%), Australia (21.1%), New Zealand (18.7%), and Austria (14.5%), which show much higher rates of migrant workers in the service sector than the average (7.4%) country (OECD, 2012). In South Korea, the proportion of migrant workers in the lodging and the restaurant industry has continuously increased (Statistics Korea, 2014). This

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* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: wkim@business.fsu.edu (W.G. Kim), hchoi2@fsu.edu (H.-M. Choi), jli13@fsu.edu (J. Li).

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statistical information shows that migrant workers have filled a workforce need in the contemporary hospitality industry because native workers cannot fill the labor demand.

Hospitality migrant workers include daily commuters, seasonal workers, and permanent migrants (Baum, 2012; Janta et al., 2012). Most of them can be classified as low-paid or casual workers (Baum, 2012; Manoharan et al., 2014). The primary reason why people migrate to other countries is for better employment opportunities (Baum, 2012). Even though many migrant workers have been employed by service firms for numerous years, they often remain at low skilled levels compared to native workers (Janta et al., 2011). Migrant workers also often face the challenge of adequate socialization—the process by which humans acquire the skills necessary to perform as a functioning member of their society or social group (Macionis and Gerber, 2010)—in their host society (Alberti, 2014; Taylor and Finley, 2010). Migrant workers tend to have higher turnover rates and job dissatisfaction due to maladjustment. From the labor cost perspective, HR departments carry the high cost of constant recruiting and training; as a result, those costs may outweigh savings from migrant workers' relatively low wages (Baum, 2012; Slavnic, 2013; Taylor and Finley, 2010; Zopiatis et al., 2014). Thus, considering the important role migrant workers play in solving the labor shortage problem, human resource managers need to pay attention to the sociocultural adjustment of migrant workers to mitigate high employee turnover rate.

Social exchange theory implies that if an organization offers support and reciprocity to facilitate employees' job domain or their well-being, the likelihood employees will leave the organization declines (Kim et al., 2005; Kraimer et al., 2001; O'Neill and Davis, 2011). Most migrant workers are generally facing the challenge of adjusting to the mainstream culture of the host country (Au et al., 1998; Janta, 2011; Taylor and Finley, 2010). When an organization provides a strong support system to facilitate migrant workers' successful adjustment to the host society, migrant workers are likely to show higher loyalty to the company and not leave the organization, reducing the turnover rate (Taylor and Finley, 2010). On the other hand, acculturation theory explains the process of cultural and psychological changes that migrants experience during their cultural adjustment process in the host country (Berry, 1997). In this process, they endeavor to adjust to life by interacting with people who are a part of mainstream culture and changing their behaviors; as a result, they face acculturative stress caused mainly by experiencing cultural differences between their society of origin and their settlement (Ben-Shalom and Horenczyk, 2003; Gui et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2012). Migrants can accomplish long-term adaptation primarily by their individual effort to reduce stress (Au et al., 1998; Berry, 1997). A study based on acculturation theory also demonstrates that managing migrant workers' socialization (or sociocultural adjustment) to the host culture is one of the important strategies for reducing their turnover intention (Taylor and Finley, 2010). Hence, the above two theories insinuate that organizational support and migrant workers' orientation to the dominant culture are important drivers for reducing their TI because they promote migrant workers' adjustment.

The importance of migrant workers' SCA, including their quality of life in their host countries, has been ignored or not well understood, specifically, in the field of hospitality research. A limited amount of research addresses the importance of migrant workers as an alternative workforce in the hospitality and tourism sector (e.g., Choi et al., 2000; Janta et al., 2012; Loi et al., 2014; Shen and Huang, 2012). Several studies contribute to hospitality migrants research by stating that hospitality migrant workers suffer from their precarious life and job (Alberti, 2014; Rydzik et al., 2012; Slavnic, 2013) and suffer from racial discrimination based on their skin color (Parutis, 2011). However, these previous studies are rather exploratory (or qualitative) and have not quantitatively dealt with migrant workers' SCA, which can be an important factor for JS, LS, and TI. Moreover, the studies do not explain how migrant workers can effectively socialize into the host society nor what can be expected from their socialization. To fill this gap, this research examines which factors influence hospitality migrant workers' ability to adjust to their social and cultural environment and whether one can expect positive outcomes, such as improved job and life satisfaction and decreased TI, from their SCA. Thus, this study aims to examine the relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) from hospitality organizations and dominant cultural orientation (DCO), SCA, JS, LS, and TI of migrant workers.

2. Literature review

2.1. Social exchange theory and perceived organizational support

Over the past five decades, researchers have viewed social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958) as ideal for explaining the relationship between an organization and its members and, therefore, applied it to many studies (Aryee et al., 2002; Wayne et al., 1997). POS is the most typical construct this theory explains. Many researchers perceive the employment relationship as a social exchange relationship (e.g., Etzioni, 1969; March et al., 1958), and the concept of POS developed from social exchange theory (Settoon et al., 1996; Wayne et al., 1997). Researchers define POS as the collective belief members of an organization have about how much value the organization places on job contribution and member achievements and how much the organization is interested in its members' wellbeing as a means of compensation for their contribution and achievements (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Numerous studies (e.g., Allen et al., 2003; Walters and Raybould, 2007) have reported that members of an organization spend their energy and time on the organization and will remain in the organization in exchange for the financial and social support the organization provides.

2.2. Acculturation theory and dominant cultural orientation

In addition, many researchers have used the bi-dimensional acculturation model to analyze bicultural people's attitudes (e.g., Ben-Shalom and Horenczyk, 2003; Berry, 1997; Ryder et al., 2000; Stephenson, 2000). One of the unique characteristics of this model is it purports that migrants do not change by only the means of simple learning, but they change strategically to adjust. One dimension of the model is migrant's orientation toward the dominant culture, and the other is migrant's orientation toward the non-dominant culture (Ben-Shalom and Horenczyk, 2003; Berry, 1997; Stephenson, 2000). The majority of studies in the field of cross-cultural psychology, regarding the bi-dimensional acculturation scales, have used the terminology of dominant cultural orientation and non-dominant cultural orientation in general, though a few researchers (Ryder et al., 2000) used heritage (or minority) culture and mainstream culture identification as the concepts of these dimensions. However, there is not much difference in meaning between dominant (or non-dominant) cultural orientation and mainstream (or heritage) cultural identification (Berry, 1997). DCO refers to an individual's efforts to acquire dominant or mainstream culture, and the dimension of non-dominant cultural orientation refers to an individual's willingness to maintain their heritage culture and identity (Ben-Shalom and Horenczyk, 2003; Ryder et al., 2000). Berry (1997) explains that the framework of acculturation attitudes is defined by four types of strategies: integration (high orientation toward both dominant and non-dominant culture), assimilation (high orientation toward dominant culture, but low orientation toward non-dominant culture), separation

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