



# A longitudinal analysis of an accelerating effect of empowerment on job satisfaction: Customer-contact vs. non-customer-contact workers



Gyumin Lee<sup>a</sup>, Peter Beomcheol Kim<sup>b,\*</sup>, Richard R. Perdue<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Hospitality Management, Kyung Hee University, Seoul, South Korea

<sup>b</sup> School of Hospitality and Tourism, Auckland University of Technology (AUT), Auckland, New Zealand

<sup>c</sup> Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, USA

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 2 September 2015

Received in revised form 6 April 2016

Accepted 17 May 2016

Available online 2 June 2016

### Keywords:

Longitudinal analysis

Empowerment

Job satisfaction

Customer-contact

## ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this paper is to examine whether the impact of empowerment on job satisfaction increases as time changes, and whether this impact is stronger for customer-contact employees than non-customer-contact employees. This study employs a Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) technique to test research hypotheses using a longitudinal dataset from an annual employee opinion survey conducted by a hospitality company in the United States for three consecutive years; 67 work teams consisting of 1534 employees are the unit of analysis. This study finds that the effect of empowerment on job satisfaction is more salient for customer-contact employees, and the effect of empowerment accelerates over the years regardless of the nature of work. Implications of the findings are discussed for researchers and industry practitioners alike.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Employee empowerment is regarded as an effective management practice for desirable work outcomes, as empowered employees are more likely to be satisfied with their job (e.g., Fock et al., 2011; Laschinger et al., 2004; Liden et al., 2000; Spreitzer et al., 1997), perform well (e.g., Chiang and Hsieh, 2012; Wu and Chen, 2015), and satisfy customers (Namasivayam et al., 2014). It is no wonder that employee empowerment is referred to as a core element of high performance work practices (Karatepe, 2013). In addition to enhancing structural efficiency by removing unnecessary organizational layers, employee empowerment is also believed to motivate the empowered as it promotes employees' self-efficacy (Conger and Kanungo, 1988) and trust in their management (Kim et al., 2012). In particular, Kim et al. (2012) argue that empowering employees has a motivational impact on work outcomes; empowered employees consider their management trustful and commit themselves to the organization.

Despite the number of empirical studies that report the benefits of employee empowerment, few attempts have been made to investigate whether the positive impact of empowerment on employees' response (e.g., job satisfaction) is differently mani-

festated by the nature of work. Specifically, little is known whether the extent to which empowerment influences job satisfaction differs for customer-contact employees as compared to their non-customer-contact counterparts. In addition, there have been few empirical studies to examine the impacts of empowerment on job satisfaction over time. As most organizational perceptions of individuals or group norms change over time (Boswell et al., 2009), both empowerment and job satisfaction most likely change over time as well. Nevertheless, little is currently understood concerning either how they change or, importantly, how the effect of empowerment on satisfaction changes.

To address these knowledge gaps, the purpose of this study is three-fold: first, we examine whether the impact of empowerment on job satisfaction is more salient for customer-contact service work groups than for non-customer-contact work groups. Second, this study investigates whether the effect of empowerment on job satisfaction increases or decreases across time, and lastly, utilizing a Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) technique, we examine whether the effects of empowerment on job satisfaction differ for customer-contact service work groups as compared to non-customer-contact work groups.

\* Corresponding author at: Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, New Zealand.  
E-mail address: [pkim@aut.ac.nz](mailto:pkim@aut.ac.nz) (P.B. Kim).

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Empowerment and work outcomes

The concept of employee empowerment first appeared in the management literature over thirty years ago (Kanter, 1977). Employee empowerment is necessarily implemented in organizations for improving organizational effectiveness (Conger and Kanungo, 1988). A majority of organizational researchers agree that the core element of empowerment is giving employees decision discretion or latitude over job activities (Bowen and Lawler, 1995; Conger and Kanungo, 1988). Since its introduction, a number of organizational researchers have examined the antecedents and consequences of employee empowerment. As an early proponent of empowerment, Kanter (1977) suggests that organizational characteristics determine the degree to which an employee feels empowered. For example, Klidas et al. (2007) find that a customer-oriented culture and management style enhance empowered behaviors among employees in European luxury hotels. Seibert et al. (2011) also report in their meta-analytical review for empirical studies that employees' perception of empowerment are more influenced by contextual factors (e.g., high-performance managerial practices and leadership) than by individual differences (e.g., gender, age and tenure).

In general, empowering employees is expected to bring forth desirable work outcomes. Employee empowerment is particularly desirable in the hospitality industry as it allows workers to use more of their own judgment in promptly dealing with customer service challenges created by the simultaneous production and consumption of service experience (Bowen and Lawler, 1995; Ottenbacher and Gnoth, 2005). According to Carson and King (2005), the practice of employee empowerment may enable organizational members to be self-directed and perceive they are entrusted with genuine responsibility for work process and outcomes. Some research, however, argues that not every employee wants to be empowered. Yagil (2006) suggests that managers need to determine whether employees desire a high level of decision latitude and responsibility prior to implementing an empowerment program. Notwithstanding, empowerment, in general, is linked with positive employee outcomes. The meta-analysis of Seibert et al. (2011) demonstrates that empowerment has a stronger relationship with attitudinal consequences (e.g., job satisfaction and organizational commitment) than with behavioural consequences (e.g., task performance and contextual performance). The hospitality literature also attests that employee empowerment is positively linked to job satisfaction (Chiang and Jang, 2008; Fock et al., 2011), organizational commitment (Kim et al., 2012; Namasivayam et al., 2014), job performance (Chiang and Hsieh, 2012; Wu and Chen, 2015), and customer satisfaction (Namasivayam et al., 2014).

### 2.2. Impact of empowerment on job satisfaction for customer-contact versus non-customer-contact employee groups

Among the attitudinal consequences of empowerment, job satisfaction has been most frequently investigated in the service context. Locke (1976, p. 1300) defines job satisfaction as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job experience." A number of organizational studies find that empowered workers are more likely to be satisfied with their job (e.g., Laschinger et al., 2004; Liden et al., 2000; Spreitzer et al., 1997). To explain the empowerment-job satisfaction relationship, researchers postulate that empowerment has a motivational effect on workers. For example, Conger and Kanungo (1988) posit that empowerment plays an intrinsic motivator role in elevating employee self-efficacy which in turn influences employee attitudes. On the other hand, Kim et al. (2012) suggest that empowered

employees are more likely to consider their management trustworthy and to devote themselves to the organization.

Hospitality researchers also report that empowerment has a positive effect on job satisfaction for Taiwanese hotel workers (Chiang and Jang, 2008), U.S. restaurant employees (Gazzoli et al., 2010) and U.S. hotel managers (Salazar et al., 2006). These researchers contend that empowering employees is of particular importance for customer-contact work groups as it allows them to utilize their own judgment in providing customer services (Chebat and Kollias, 2000; Chiang and Jang, 2008; Gazzoli et al., 2010; Salazar et al., 2006). This research posits that the relationship of an individual's perception of empowerment with job satisfaction is stronger for customer-contact employees than non-customer-contact employees.

As boundary spanners, hospitality customer-contact workers often engage in a variety of service encounters with customers (Brownell, 1990); they are often required to promptly provide diverse customers with diverse and high quality services. More specifically, Boshoff and Allen (2000) point out that frontline employees should be empowered in the service recovery process. In addition, customer-contact employees are more likely to provide heterogeneous services to adapt their performance to various service encounters (Chebat and Kollias, 2000). Consequently, it is theoretically more important for customer-contact employees to feel sufficient decision latitude than for their non-customer-contact counterparts. In other words, insufficient levels of empowerment are more likely to lead to lower levels of job satisfaction for customer-contact employees as compared to non-customer-contact employees. Therefore, the following hypothesis is presented to be tested.

**H1.** The positive effect of empowerment on job satisfaction will be stronger among customer-contact employee groups than their non-customer-contact counterparts.

### 2.3. Accelerating impact of empowerment on job satisfaction over time

The effects of empowerment on job satisfaction have typically been studied using cross-sectional designs (e.g., Chiang and Jang, 2008; Fock et al., 2011). Obviously, it is more desirable to investigate how employees experience and respond over time and how the changes in employee perceptions influence their attitudinal and/or behavioural outcomes (e.g., Bentein et al., 2005; Boswell et al., 2009; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2005; Steel, 2002). In particular, Boswell et al. (2005) suggest that the level of job satisfaction changes across time in accordance with changes in job characteristics.

However, few studies in the hospitality literature examine the influence of time on organizational perceptions. This study suggests that the effect of empowerment on job satisfaction will increase as time passes. Being empowered is a more critical issue for experienced workers, given that the majority of empirical studies have reported a positive relationship of empowerment with organizational tenure (e.g., Koberg et al., 1999; Seibert et al., 2011). In other words, more decision latitudes are expected for individuals with more tenure; lack of decision latitude at later periods should therefore have more detrimental effects on employees' affective response such as job satisfaction. Given that empowerment can be perceived by employees as signaling management's willingness to nurture their career (Kim et al., 2012), we posit that the impact of empowerment on job satisfaction perceived by an employee would be stronger for old-timers, who expect more decision latitudes than their junior counterparts.

The notion that empowerment/decision-making authority has a stronger influence on satisfaction as time passes is also conceptually supported by the norms of accountability literature. In this

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1009167>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1009167>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)