Developing a new hospitality industry organizational culture scale

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A B S T R A C T

Defining and measuring organizational culture is important, because a strong organizational culture could potentially yield sustainable competitive advantages to organizations. However, creating a strong organizational culture is often challenging due to the ambiguity surrounding this concept. A review of the organizational culture literature resulted in a wide range of definitions and measurements of organizational culture across disciplines and industries. This study argues that the diversity in scales that have been previously developed for assessing organizational culture may not be fully applicable or appropriate for use within the hospitality context. Therefore, by highlighting the key factors affecting the business environment and the unique characteristics of the hospitality industry, the purpose of this study is to identify the scope of organizational culture, specifically within the hospitality industry, as well as to introduce a tailored organizational culture scale, which is aligned with the hospitality context. Therefore, one of the purposes of this study is to identify hospitality industry organizational culture constructs. Another purpose of this study is to investigate whether the identified constructs unique and distinguishable from that of other industries. To fill these gaps, this current study employed a multidisciplinary and mixed-method research approach in order to develop a new hospitality industry organizational scale (HIOCS) particularly for the hospitality industry. The findings suggest that the hospitality industry has unique cultural characteristics that are distinguished from similar industries. The findings also suggest that cohesiveness is the most important cultural element of the hospitality industry. This study also makes recommendations with regards to how this newly developed scale can be used by the hospitality industry as a means to assess and strengthen organizational culture within organizations in this industry.

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1. Introduction

Businesses today operate in a globalized economy where markets are characterized by hyperactive competition (Sloan et al., 2013). This implies that businesses must be prepared to continually adapt to change, whether this be political, economic, social, technological, and/or environmental in nature. This adaptation must be balanced alongside of maintaining of focus on customer needs and wants, service quality and customer retention – all of which needs to be achieved within the limits of available resources. While seeking competitive advantage, corporations find that they must not only consider technological and physical elements but must also seek effective solutions in order to maximize the performance of their employees. An understanding of organizational culture is considered to be one of the most important ways for shaping employee behavior, which could contribute positively to delivering organizational effectiveness (Barney, 1986; Joyce et al., 1982; Lund, 2003).

This implies that developing a concrete understanding of organizational culture is vital for a company's management so that the goals of their employees may be more accurately aligned with those of the organization.

The importance of organizational culture has received considerable attention in the field of organizational behavior. Over the past three decades, much of this attention has been directed towards various debates with regards to its conceptualization and its measurement (see, Delobbe et al., 2002; Glaser, 1991; Schein, 1985a; Wallach, 1983; Weinzimmer et al., 2008). The main areas of research on organizational culture to date have focused on aspects of competitiveness, productivity, company sales, profitability, and growth of companies (e.g., Barney, 1986; Denison et al., 1995; Kotter and Heskett, 1992; Lund, 2003; Peter and Waterman, 1982). However, the importance of industry as a factor in defining organizational culture, has received considerably little attention (Tepeci and Bartlett, 2002). This holds especially true for the hospitality industry (which is one of the largest industries), where little attention has been paid to organizational culture. This is surprising because human involvement is considered an inherent and integral characteristic of the hospitality industry (Yavas and Konyar,

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2003). In other words, the relationships between hosts and guests are considered to be more fragile than those in other industries (Hemmington, 2007; King, 1995; Walker and Miller, 2009). The distinct characteristics of the hospitality industry make organizational culture an essential concern in this industry, as organizational culture potentially affects employees' behaviors. Hence, there is a discernible need for developing an effective tool for appropriately measuring organizational culture within the context of this industry (Dawson et al., 2011; Tepeci and Bartlett, 2002). The results of this study set out to provide a valid, reliable, and industry-specific organizational culture scale that uncovers the different layers of organizational culture and which combines approaches from the fields of anthropology, sociology, and psychology. The scale developed in this present study is hitherto referred to as Hospitality Industry Organizational Culture Scale (HIOCS). This study significantly contributes to the existing literature in a number of ways.

The most significant theoretical contribution of this study is the development and validation of a potentially new, reliable, and valid organizational culture measurement instrument that is uniquely suited to the hospitality industry. This provides a new theoretical insight regarding organizational culture, particularly in the hospitality context. The second major contribution of this study is the use of multi-methodological research methods. Although some previous studies have attempted to measure organizational culture in the hospitality industry (e.g., Dawson et al., 2011; Tepeci and Bartlett, 2002), certain pitfalls and limitations have been presented with the use of singular measures. This study, however, has merged the best of both quantitative and qualitative methods in its scale development and provided a new conceptualization that generates a more effective scale for the hospitality industry. Although it needs to be pointed out that, this contribution is specifically related to the hospitality industry, and not for other fields of study. Finally, hospitality industry research has often been characterized as a neglected area within organizational culture (Tepeci and Bartlett, 2002), and this study furthers our understanding of the hospitality industry and its associated organizational culture in different physical environments.

2. Literature review

2.1. Measuring organizational culture

Over the last three decades, a range of organizational culture scales have been developed and applied in various industries. However, like its definition, the measurement of organizational culture varies according to industry (Chatman and Jehn, 1994; Gordon, 1991; Gregory, 1983; Jelinek et al., 1983; Morey and Luthans, 1985; Ouchi and Wilkins, 1985; Scott et al., 2003; Xenikou, 1996). Despite the fact that there are several studies measuring organizational culture, two basic 'typological' and 'dimensional' approaches are presented in the literature.

The typological approach examines culture by means of classifying organizational culture according to various characteristics. Based on this approach, each organization is an amalgamation of different cultural dimensions and usually, one type of culture being noticeably more powerful or influential, compared with other culture types. For instance, Harrison (1972) typology defines organizational culture as 'organizational ideologies' that associate with employee behaviors and organizational change. Based on this cultural profile, the culture of organizations consists of four categories: power orientation, task orientation, person orientation, and role orientation. On the other hand, in Wallach (1983) typology, organizational culture is defined as "the shared understanding of an organization's employees" (p. 26). This typology is also known as the 'organizational culture index', which focuses on values, beliefs,

and ethical behaviors and classifies culture as bureaucratic, innovative, and supportive forms.

Despite the fact that typological studies help to define organizational culture and present a particular type of employee behavior (Lim, 1995), several studies have argued that such studies are mainly descriptive and therefore, there is a potential to stereotype, categorize, and pass judgment on different types of culture. Therefore, the interpretation and implementation of models in the more diverse industries are limited or problematic (Barley, 1983; Gregory, 1983; Henri, 2006; Jamieson, 1982; Smircich, 1983). For example, according to Henri (2006), typological studies are not theory-driven and focus on beliefs about how to manage rather than on beliefs about how to compete. Correspondingly, and consistent with these views, Xenikou (1996) similarly reported that classification of cultural elements does not provide detail beyond the descriptive level of organizational culture. The potential problem is that organizational cultures may be misclassified, or necessary aspects may be ignored (Barney, 1991; Henri, 2006; Schein, 1990). The reason is that organizational culture "is ubiquitous [as it] covers all areas of group life [and that a] content typology is always dangerous because one may not have the right variables in it" (Schein, 1988). In a similar vein, Meyer et al. (1993) argued that "the allocation of organizations to types often is not clear-cut [and] their *a priori* nature and frequent lack of specified empirical referents and cutoff points, typologies are difficult to use empirically" (p. 1182, sic, in original). Therefore, typologies of organizational culture make it complicated for researchers to choose the types of categories that researchers should use in an analysis (Jamieson, 1982).

The second type of approach is dimensional. In this approach, the main focus is finding organizational culture profiles by identifying cultural dimensions of organizations. To achieve this, the operationalization of scales in related studies focuses on scale validity and reliability. Therefore, these studies preferred using standardized questionnaires to gather data. However, several authors (e.g, Alexander, 1978; Amsa, 1986; Chatterjee et al., 1992; Cooke and Rousseau, 1988a; Glaser et al., 1987; Meglino et al., 1989; Tucker et al., 1990; Webster, 1993) have reported a diverse set of dimensions, ranging from one to fourteen and which create variation in the dimensional scope. Some studies focus on the one or more specific dimensions of organizational culture (see Amsa, 1986; Schall, 1983), while others present a more comprehensive range of dimensions (see Alexander, 1978; Christensen and Gordon, 1999; Gordon, 1979; Tucker et al., 1990). For example, Webster (1993) revealed 34 items and 6 dimensions derived from factor analysis, with the 6 dimensions being service quality, interpersonal relationships, selling task, organization, internal communication, and innovation. On the other hand, Alexander (1978) reported 42 items and 10 dimensions, concerning; organizational and personal pride, performance excellence, teamwork and communication, leadership and supervision, cost effectiveness and productivity, associate relations, citizen relations, innovation and creativity, training and development and candor, and openness.

Scott et al. (2003) indicated that the empirical formulation of organizational culture dimensions are inconsistent with those dimensions that might be included in organizational culture models. The probable reason behind such inconsistency is that some organizational culture dimensions are unipolar while some are bipolar. For example, some studies paired up a communication dimension with teamwork or openness (see Alexander, 1978; Tucker et al., 1990), whereas some researchers split communication into two dimensions, i.e. 'communication and openness' and 'communication and teamwork' (see Christensen and Gordon, 1999; Glaser et al., 1987; Gordon, 1979). Therefore, studies explore different levels of organizational culture, resulting in different dimensions (Delobbe et al., 2002). In this sense, existing scales are