



Hospitality employee knowledge-sharing behaviors in the relationship between goal orientations and service innovative behavior

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ABSTRACT

Goals are central to understanding motivated behavior, with each discipline emphasizing its consequences, levels, and types of goals. Because knowledge sharing is not mandatory in all organizations, individual personal motivation is critical for voluntary and active engagement in knowledge sharing. This study investigates the structural relationships among two distinctive forms of goal orientations as personal intrinsic motivators (learning goal orientation and performance goal orientation), two distinctive types of knowledge-sharing behaviors (knowledge collecting and knowledge donating), and employee service innovative behavior. The data were derived from 418 respondents working in five-star hotels in Busan, Korea. The positive relationship between learning goal orientation and knowledge collecting was stronger than that of the relationship between learning goal orientation and knowledge donating. The negative relationship between performance goal orientation and knowledge donating was stronger than the relationship between performance goal orientation and knowledge collecting. In addition, the positive relationship between knowledge collecting and employee service innovative behavior was stronger than the positive relationship between knowledge donating and employee service innovative behavior. The study concludes with discussions of the empirical findings, managerial implications, and strengths and limitations. Future research avenues are also offered.

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1. Introduction

In hospitality operations, knowledge can be defined as “that knowledge which is related to company’s customers, products and services, operational procedures, competitors and job associates” (Yang and Wan, 2004, p. 595). That is, services in the hospitality industry have complex work processes and guest interfaces that can be differentiated into four categories of knowledge: task-specific knowledge, task-related knowledge, transactive memory, and guest-related knowledge (see Bouncken, 2002, for a review). In the knowledge-based view of the firm (Grant, 1996), knowledge is seen as firm’s most important resource and precious asset; knowledge is crucial for an organization to sustain its competitive advantage and is the primary driver of a firm’s value (Bock et al., 2005; Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Suppiah and Sandhu, 2010). In the twenty-first century, one of the critical factors for sustainable competitive advantage is how to leverage knowledge resources to develop strategic plans for business. Organizations must therefore

manage or retain critical knowledge in effective ways (Bock and Kim, 2002).

In today’s highly competitive market environment, a hotel’s ability to innovate is essential to achieving sustainable competitive advantage (Tajeddini, 2010). Intense competition, rapid technological evolution and globalization, and rising expectations from savvy consumers have created unprecedented challenges for the hotel industry, and hotels’ ability to enhance service innovation is of interest to both scholars and practitioners. In particular, as superior service quality is a major factor in customer satisfaction and loyalty, hotels can work on their employees’ service innovative behaviors by enhancing employee knowledge sharing of customers’ sophisticated demands and preferences and tailoring their service accordingly (Hallin and Marnburg, 2008). Scholars have thus paid keen attention to individual knowledge-sharing behavior as a key factor in employee service innovative behavior in the hotel industry (Hu et al., 2009).

In the hospitality industry, the above-mentioned types of continuous knowledge management can promote organizational innovation and innovation performance (e.g., new service development, improvement of organizational performance, etc.), and play a key role in the organization’s success. In this sense, regarding guest-related knowledge sharing, Sveiby (2001) showed that knowledge

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sharing could be precisely applied to hotel operations, targeting Ritz Carlton Hotel, which has benefited from implementing knowledge management practices. For instance, all staff members at the Ritz Carlton Hotel are required to fill out cards about every encounter with a guest. These data and all guest requirements are stored and distributed to the staffs when the guest returns. Each guest thus receives personalized treatment and his or her satisfaction increases. Knowledge-sharing activities are therefore crucial for hotels' competitive advantage and enhance the ability to meet customers' diverse and rapidly changing demands. Specifically, this knowledge-sharing behavior is important in the hospitality industry due to the immense costs of knowledge loss caused by high rates of employee turnover (Kim and Lee, 2010, 2012; Yang and Wan, 2004). However, employees often refuse to share knowledge because they worry that doing so may reduce their opportunities for promotion or because doing so requires uncompensated time and energy (Bock et al., 2005). Factors promoting or impeding employee knowledge sharing within groups and organizations therefore constitutes an important research area and, specifically, understanding these factors is a cornerstone for managerial success in the hotel industry (Kim and Lee, 2010, 2012; Yang, 2007, 2010).

Despite significant advances in identifying the factors that affect employees' engagement in knowledge-sharing behavior and understanding their outcomes, several specific research issues remain in the literature. The first has to do with the fact that knowledge sharing can take place at both individual and organizational levels. All levels of knowledge-sharing behavior require individuals' participation (Yang and Wan, 2004), so they are influenced by individual-level characteristics such as goal orientation as crucial individual intrinsic motivators. For individual employees, knowledge sharing entails talking to colleagues to help accomplish a task better, more quickly, or more efficiently. Motivation is a key factor in knowledge flow within organizations. Drawing from research on achievement motivation (McClelland, 1961), Dweck (1986) and Elliott and Dweck (1988) posited that individuals maintain goal orientations that reflects their goals, and that these goal orientations, learning goal orientation and performance goal orientation, are strong predictors of individual behavior and performance. Specifically, goals are central to understanding motivated behavior, with different research disciplines emphasizing different consequences, levels, and types of goals. Despite the strong empirical support for the motivational models of knowledge-sharing behavior, the influence of goal orientations as intrinsic motivational determinants of individuals' knowledge-sharing behaviors has been largely unexplored with the exception of Matzler and Mueller's (2011) empirical research for a sample of employees of an internationally engineering company.

The second issue in the research pertains to the two distinctive types of individual knowledge-sharing behaviors: knowledge collecting and knowledge donating. Knowledge sharing includes employees' willingness to communicate with colleagues (i.e., donate knowledge) and to consult with colleagues to learn from them (i.e., collect knowledge) in the development of new capabilities. However, with only a few exceptions (e.g., Lin, 2007; Tohidinia and Mosakhani, 2010; Van den Hooff and De Ridder, 2004; Van den Hooff and Hendrix, 2004), most studies have used knowledge sharing-behavior as a unidimensional construct. Most studies, therefore, do not fully explain the relationship between determinants of knowledge-sharing behavior, knowledge-sharing behavior itself, and its consequences.

The third research issue concerns employee service innovative behavior. Despite the importance of employee service innovative behavior for organizational service innovation and new service development, its role has been largely ignored, as has employees' knowledge-sharing behavior as a prerequisite for their service innovative behavior (Hu et al., 2009).

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this study is to develop and test a model that takes into account individual factors—goal orientations (learning goal orientation and performance goal orientation) as personal intrinsic motivators—in explaining employees' willingness both to collect knowledge from (knowledge collecting) and donate knowledge to colleagues (knowledge donating), and in explaining whether more willingness leads to superior employee service innovative behavior in hotels. Based on a survey of 418 employees from ten five-star hotels in Busan, Korea, this study uses a path analysis to investigate the research model and hypotheses.

In addressing this purpose, the current study contributes to knowledge sharing, goal orientations, and service innovation research by clarifying the ways in which goal orientations are and are not essential for individual knowledge-sharing behaviors, and by clarifying which types of knowledge-sharing behaviors are instrumental in enhancing employee service innovative behavior. From a managerial perspective, the findings of this study would improve understanding and practices of organizational management of employees' knowledge sharing and service innovative behaviors in the hospitality industry.

2. Conceptual model and hypotheses

2.1. Conceptual model

The conceptual model representing the proposed relationships is depicted in Fig. 1. The model investigates employees' two distinctive forms of knowledge-sharing behaviors (knowledge collecting and knowledge donating) in the relationships between two distinctive types (two primary classes) of goal orientations—learning goal orientation and performance goal orientation—as personal intrinsic motivators and service innovative behavior in hotels. This study thus tests hypotheses about ways that learning- and performance-oriented individuals apply goal orientations to two distinctive types of employees' knowledge-sharing behaviors. Specifically, our model contends that employees with learning goal orientation collect knowledge from and donate knowledge to colleagues, but employees with performance goal orientation do not. Our model also proposes that employees' knowledge collecting and knowledge donating enhance employee service innovative behaviors.

2.2. Goal orientations

The concept of goal orientations was first introduced by educational psychologists in the 1970s (e.g., Dweck, 1975; Eison, 1979). Dweck (1986) observed that individuals tend to pursue two different dispositional goal orientations, either learning (mastery) or performance goals, in achievement situations. Recent research has revealed a strong interest in linking the concept of learning goal orientation with performance (e.g., Dweck, 1986; Dweck and Leggett, 1988; Elliott and Dweck, 1988; VandeWalle et al., 1999). Learning goal orientation reflects a desire to engage in challenging activities, an eagerness to improve oneself, and a tendency to evaluate one's performance relative to past performance (Button et al., 1996). Learning-oriented individuals therefore focus on the development of new skills and the mastery of new situations and value the process of learning itself. They know that in order to develop new practices, a certain amount of effort is required (Nicholls, 1989). Performance goal orientation, however, is characterized by avoiding challenges and deteriorating performance in the face of obstacles (Button et al., 1996). Although performance-oriented individuals strive to outperform others, demonstrate their competency, and achieve success, they tend to make minimum effort for their performance in challenging situations. Consequently, performance-oriented employees avoid situations showing a lack of competence. Learning-oriented individuals tend to view

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