



The dark side of feeling trusted for hospitality employees: An investigation in two service contexts



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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Feeling trusted
Organization based self-esteem (OBSE)
Felt obligation
Compulsory citizenship behavior (CCB)

ABSTRACT

Emerging research appears to suggest that feeling trusted by management can facilitate employees' organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). However, it is possible that feeling trusted can have negative effects on hospitality employees. In this paper, we draw on social exchange theory and self-determination theory to examine how feeling trusted can lead to potentially negative consequences for hospitality employees. We tested the hypotheses using data from two different studies. Study 1 used a time-lagged research design to collect a sample of 349 employee-supervisor dyads in a chain of six economy hotels. Study 2 was designed to generalize the results by examining a sample of 509 employees in healthcare hospitals. The results show that employees' feeling trusted has a direct effect on employee compulsory citizenship behavior (CCB). Furthermore, feeling trusted has an indirect effect on CCB mediated by employee organization based self-esteem (OBSE) and felt obligation, with the latter having a stronger effect. Our research contributes to the literature by examining the dark side of feeling trusted and the mechanism of how feeling trusted influences employee outcomes.

1. Introduction

In the hospitality industry staff are important for providing good service and building guest loyalty (Chi and Gursoy, 2009). Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), in particular, has been considered to be an important factor needed by the hospitality industry to build customer satisfaction and loyalty and enhance service quality. Recent research suggests that, in the hospitality context, trusting the employee is crucial to enhance OCB, and trust has naturally been a managing strategy used to motivate the actions of employees (Six and Sorge, 2008). Different from trusting, *being trusted* – defined as the perception that management willingly accepts its vulnerability to the subordinate's actions (Baer et al., 2015; Lau et al., 2014) – has received great attention in recent years.

Although the existing research has explored the intuitive relationship of how being trusted affects employee behavior, available research so far ignores the possible dark side of feeling trusted (Baer et al. (2015) found that feeling trusted is unwelcome in certain circumstances and can become a 'poisoned chalice' for one or other of the parties involved (Skinner et al., 2014). Thus, it is not clear whether feeling trusted is related to negative outcomes and, if so, how. Feeling trusted is normally realized through the perception of reliance and disclosure by supervisors, for example, delegating important tasks and sharing sensitive

information (Lau and Lam, 2008).

Now if managers' trust in service employees is demonstrated by additional assignments and responsibilities, such trust might not be a welcome addition to the already stressful job of those employees. In this case, service employees may still choose to reciprocate the management's trust with OCB, not because they want to, but because they feel they have to do it. After all, they don't want to be laid off by the management. Despite the growing acknowledgement that employees can feel compelled by external forces to go the extra mile for their organization, it is possible that employees engage in OCBs, not because they want to but because they feel they are obliged to. In other words, employees may feel compelled to engage in OCB by external forces leading in turn to potential negative consequences, which is conceptualized as compulsory citizenship behavior (CCB) (Bolino et al., 2010; Yam et al., 2014).

CCB is one of such relatively neglected phenomena, defined as employees' engagement in extra-role activities which are often against their will, and it reflects a negative aspect of the social structure of organizational life (Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). However, the effect that feeling trusted has in pressuring employees into performing CCBs is not well understood nowadays (Yam et al., 2014). The literature has relied on two major mechanisms to explain the effects of feeling trusted: the social-exchange mechanism, based on the norm of reciprocity (Brower

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Fig. 1. Conceptual model of the Study.

et al., 2009) and the self-evaluative mechanism, based on the self-concept (Lau et al., 2014), through which people decide to be proactive and engaged or, alternatively, passive and alienated from certain behaviors (Ryan and Deci, 2000a, 2000b). Our paper draws on self-determination theory (SDT) (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Ryan and Deci, 2000a, 2000b) to integrate both the working self-concept ‘employees’ organization based self-esteem’ (OBSE) and social-exchange explanations of how employees feeling trusted may lead to CCB via felt obligation. OBSE, which is “the degree to which an individual believes him/herself to be capable, significant, and worthy as an organizational member”, has been identified as a significant and consistent performance driver (Pierce et al., 1989, p. 593).

This paper makes two important contributions to the literature. *First*, it enhances our understanding of the mechanism of linking feeling trusted with CCB as an employee outcome by combining social exchange theory and self-concept perspectives. Specifically, it examines the mediating effects of felt obligation and organization based self-esteem as the mechanism linking feeling trusted and CCB. The available research so far has relied on the self-driven mechanism to explain the effects of feeling trusted (Salamon and Robinson, 2008; Brower et al., 2009; Lau et al., 2014; Baer et al., 2015) whereas our research extends the literature by adding a social exchange mechanism to explain how feeling trusted can result in CCB. *Second*, it complements the existing research on positive outcomes of feeling trusted by looking at the dark side of trust on employees (Baer et al., 2015), i.e., subordinate’s compulsory citizenship behavior (Vigoda-Gadot, 2007), or forced OCB (Bolino et al., 2013; Bolino et al., 2010). Examining feeling trusted through the dark side perspective provides a fuller understanding of the potential consequences of the supervisor-subordinate trust relationship, which may be relevant to controlled motivation in the workplace (Gagné and Deci, 2005).

2. Theoretical background and hypothesis development

Human beings’ behaviors are regulated by different motivations. According to the self-determination theory (SDT), people engage in motivated behaviors, like OCBs, in terms of either autonomous or controlled motives (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Ryan and Deci, 2000a, 2000b). Autonomous motives are shown to be important for people’s goals and values because they are intrinsically interesting and enjoyable (Ryan and Deci, 2000a, 2000b). Controlled motives, in contrast, are triggered by an external source of motivation such as meeting a supervisor’s expectations (Gagné and Deci, 2005). Following this framework, we will argue below that, for employees, feeling trusted, OBSE and felt obligation can facilitate the processes of self-motivation in engagement with CCB, although against their will.

Since Organ and colleagues introduced the term *organizational citizenship behavior* (Organ, 1988), scholars and practitioners have shown a particular interest. Broadly defined, OCB refers to employee behavior that contributes to the effective functioning of the organization with in a way which is often discretionary and not rewarded relative to in-role

job performance (Organ, 1997; Organ et al., 2006). However, in recent years, research has demonstrated that employees are being pressured to perform citizenship behavior an extra role (Bolino et al., 2010; Yam et al., 2014), and a feeling that they *have* to (Bolino et al., 2013) or *ought* to (Organ et al., 2006), but not that they *want* to, becomes the main reason that triggers this extra role (Vigoda-Gadot, 2007; described in terms such non-voluntary OCB and compulsory citizenship behavior CCB).

Since CCB is (often) against employees’ will, it would appear unnatural to link employees’ feeling trusted to CCB. Nevertheless, in the service organizational context, given the stressful environment service employees face, and the basically hierarchical nature inherent in the relationship between an employee and an immediate supervisor due to the differences in power, status, and control, it is likely that employees will be more vulnerable to the actions of immediate supervisors (Pfeffer, 2013; Lapidot et al., 2007; Shamir and Lapidot, 2003). Theories of power in an organizational context hold over time and across contexts, despite attacks on hierarchical work arrangements by various management movements (Pfeffer, 2013). Therefore, an employee’s immediate supervisor is perhaps one of the most influential people in his or her work life. Accordingly, CCB may be viewed as another means by which those with authority and power, such as an employee’s immediate supervisor, take advantage of an employee, who is less powerful and simply cannot resist or say “no” to the supervisor’s trust or expectation (Vigoda-Gadot, 2006). Although service employees are already stressed when coping with the customers’ requirement, for service employees working in an unbalanced supervisor-subordinate environment, the additional tasks and responsibilities imposed as a signal of trust are difficult to refuse. See Fig. 1.

2.1. Feeling trusted and CCB

Trust becomes salient in this context – coupled with a degree of uncertainty about the potential risk for one or both parties. In the supervisor-subordinate context, trust hereafter reflects a willingness of the giving party (the supervisor) to take risks on the basis of “the expectation that the subordinate will perform a particular action important to the management, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that subordinate” (Mayer et al., 1995; Mcallister and Lewicki et al., 2006). Feeling trusted or felt trust by the subordinate reflects his or her perception that management is willing to accept vulnerability by engaging in risk taking action (Baer et al., 2015). Two signals which can help employees to realize they are being trusted are reliance by a supervisor, for example when an employee is delegated with important task, and disclosure, for example when sensitive and privacy information is shared with an employee by supervisors.

Although the construct of feeling trusted has received far less attention than that of trusting, increasingly studies have suggested that subordinates feeling they are trusted by their superiors is very powerful in motivating those subordinates to improve their performance and extra-role behavior (Salamon and Robinson 2008; Baer et al., 2015; Lau

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