



The influence of restaurant co-workers' perceived warmth and competence on employees' turnover intentions: The mediating role of job attitudes

Diego Bufquin (Ph.D) (Assistant Professor)^{a,*}, Robin DiPietro (Ph.D) (Professor)^b,
Marissa Orlowski (Ph.D) (Assistant Professor)^a, Charles Partlow (Ph.D) (Professor)^b

^a Rosen College of Hospitality Management, University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL, United States

^b School of Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, United States

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ABSTRACT

The current study examines the influence of co-workers' perceived warmth and competence on employees' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions in a casual dining restaurant setting. The warmth and competence dimensions represent two fundamental social dimensions that people often use to evaluate other individuals or groups. The current findings determined that co-workers' perceived warmth and competence had significant effects on employees' job satisfaction, which in turn improved their organizational commitment.

Furthermore, job satisfaction and organizational commitment mediated the relationships between co-workers' perceived warmth and competence and employees' turnover intentions. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

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1. Introduction

The restaurant industry is projected to employ 14.4 million workers in the U.S. in 2016, or almost 10% of the country's workforce according to the National Restaurant Association (NRA, 2016). The U.S. foodservice industry should also create 1.7 million new jobs by the year 2025, and generate a total of approximately \$782.7 billion in sales in 2016, representing a 5% increase over 2015's sales volume (Maze, 2016). Out of the \$745.6 billion in sales volume that were generated in 2015, the full service restaurant segment produced approximately \$220 billion, or almost 30% of all U.S. foodservice revenue (Statista, 2015). Full service restaurants provide complete and varied menus along with a wide selection of food and beverage items, as well as full table service, and are comprised of the following sub-segments: Fine dining, casual dining, and family dining restaurants (NRA, 2010).

Of these three full service restaurant sub-segments, casual dining restaurant operators find it the most challenging to recruit and retain employees (NRA, 2015). More specifically, 23% of casual din-

ing restaurant operators believe that the recruitment and retention of employees constitute a significant challenge, representing the third most significant challenge after food costs and the uncertainty of the economy (NRA, 2015). Because casual dining restaurants are such an integral part of the U.S. economy, it is imperative for hospitality researchers to resolve some of the problems that casual dining restaurant operators face, such as the recruitment and retention challenges mentioned earlier. The goal is to help restaurateurs reduce their excessive turnover rates, which have been linked to increasing financial costs, lower productivity and service quality (Tews et al., 2014).

Although a variety of reasons could explain why people quit their jobs in casual dining restaurants, such as long hours and work on weekends and holidays, there are likely other issues, possibly related to the work environment, which could be negatively influencing employees' intentions to continue working in the restaurant industry. Indeed, studies have shown that high staff turnover is often the consequence of a poor working environment (Hinkin and Tracey, 2000), and that relationships with supervisors or managers and other staff members constitute one of the most significant determinants affecting staff turnover (Collins, 2010; Lashley, 2000). Hence, subordinates are affected by their superiors and co-workers (Susskind et al., 2007).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: diego.bufquin@ucf.edu (D. Bufquin), rdipietro@mailbox.sc.edu (R. DiPietro), marissa.orlowski@ucf.edu (M. Orlowski), partlow@hrsm.sc.edu (C. Partlow).

This finding is in accordance with a systematic review of the literature that examined the contribution of work-related psychosocial risk factors to stress-related disorders (SRDs) (Nieuwenhuijsen et al., 2010). The analysis of 2426 studies revealed that low perceived co-worker support represents one of the seven most significant predictors of the incidence of SRDs. The other predictors of SRDs are high job demands, low job control, low supervisor support, low procedural justice, low relational justice, and a high effort–reward imbalance (Nieuwenhuijsen et al., 2010). Perceived co-worker support refers to the extent to which employees have confidence in their co-worker's willingness to assist them, and includes the sharing of knowledge, providing encouragement, and supporting one another while helping one another in assigned tasks (Susskind et al., 2003; Zhou and George, 2001).

When employees perceive that their co-workers offer enough support, they tend to develop lower turnover intentions. This finding was confirmed by a study from Manning et al. (2005), which found that constructs such as leader facilitation and support, professional and organizational esprit, workgroup cooperation, friendliness, and warmth explain 9.18% of the variation in employee turnover intentions and 43.70% of the variation in employees' perceptions of customer satisfaction. In other words, when employees perceive that there are warm feelings and cooperation among employees, lower turnover intentions develop as a consequence of such social perceptions in the workplace (Manning et al., 2005).

Accordingly, two of the most significant constructs governing the social evaluations of individuals and groups are known as warmth and competence (Fiske et al., 2002). Warmth and competence perceptions are so predominant that when people have to describe others, over 75% of their social perceptions tend to fall under the warmth and competence constructs (Wojciszke, 1994). Persons or groups perceived as warm typically demonstrate social and moral behaviors (Fiske et al., 2007). Warmth also involves cooperation among individuals and is mainly associated with service orientation and caring for others (Brambilla et al., 2013). On the other hand, competent persons or groups are considered to be more autonomous and individualistic, and have a tendency to lead, dominate, and control their own environment (Abele et al., 2008).

While various sociological and socio-psychological studies have examined the influence of warmth and competence perceptions on people's emotional and behavioral outcomes (Fiske et al., 2002, 2007; Rosenberg et al., 1968; Wojciszke, 1994), no study in the areas of organizational psychology and hospitality management has measured to date the influence of warmth and competence perceptions, as related to co-workers, on employees' job attitudes and turnover intentions. Co-workers are an interesting population to study, as previous research has shown that hotel and restaurant employees' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions significantly improve when employees feel that they receive some kind of support from their co-workers (Gjerald and Øgaard, 2010; Guchait et al., 2014).

As a result, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the influence of social perceptions, as held by employees with regard to their co-workers, on employees' turnover intentions, mediated by job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Through this, the present study will allow casual dining restaurant operators to better understand the role that co-workers can play towards the satisfaction and commitment of employees, so that the latter can have longer job tenures and therefore improve the financial and operational performance of their organization (Ghiselli et al., 2001; Huang, 2003). In the section that follows, key constructs contained in the proposed model are described and theoretical and empirical works in the areas of social perceptions, job attitudes, and turnover intentions are reviewed, following which research hypotheses are developed for the present study.

2. Literature review

2.1. Warmth and competence perceptions

Social perceptions or evaluations started to gain scholars' attention in the 1940s and 1950s (Allport, 1954; Asch, 1946; Bales, 1950). Asch (1946) analyzed the importance of two significant social attributes that personality impression formation often involves, namely people's perceived warmth and competence. Similarly, Bales (1950) was the first to differentiate socio-emotional (i.e., warmth-oriented) from task (i.e., competence-oriented) leadership styles, observing that perceptions of individuals or groups can vary along task and social constructs. A few years later, Allport (1954) confirmed that the content of stereotypes could be ambivalent, meaning that a person could be perceived as warm and incompetent, or as cold and competent, and that the competence and warmth constructs could be used not only in the perception of broad social groups, but also in the perception or evaluation of single individuals.

The warmth and competence constructs are so widely used that when people describe other individuals or groups, almost 80% of their impression formations tend to fall under these two constructs (Cuddy et al., 2011). People are perceived as warm if they have good intentions and do not represent a threat towards others, and if they strive to establish close relationships with others (Cuddy et al., 2011). Warm individuals are typically considered as empathetic and understanding, and usually exhibit strong moral behaviors, as well as cooperation and caring for others (Abele et al., 2008). In contrast, competent persons or groups strive to be independent and control their environments, are capable of high performance and tend to lead and dominate other people (Abele et al., 2008). Hence, one could say that warm persons are more socially-oriented, while competent individuals or groups are more individualistic and task-oriented (Cuddy et al., 2011).

Such warmth and competence perceptions were found to induce different emotional and behavioral outcomes in a variety of sociological, socio-psychological, and marketing studies (Fiske et al., 2002, 2007; Rosenberg et al., 1968; Wojciszke, 1994). On the other hand, few organizational behavior and hospitality studies have examined the influence of social perceptions in the workplace. Due to the significance of co-workers and the intense social and professional interactions that occur among casual dining restaurant employees (Nieuwenhuijsen et al., 2010; Susskind et al., 2007), hospitality researchers need to further examine how restaurant co-workers' perceived warmth and competence could affect employees' turnover intentions through their job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which represent two job attitudes that were found to significantly reduce turnover intentions (DiPietro and Bufquin in press; Kang et al., 2014; Karatepe, 2009).

Before examining these relationships, the aforementioned job attitudes and behavioral intentions need first to be defined. As such, job satisfaction is often described as a positive emotional state, such as happiness or pleasure, which results from the appraisal of one's own job or job experience (Edward and Scullion, 1982; Locke, 1976); while three types of organizational commitment are widely accepted and portrayed in the literature: Normative, continuance, and affective commitment. Affective commitment, which is the most prevalent approach to organizational commitment in the literature, and which will be taken into consideration in the current study, is considered to be an affective or emotional attachment that employees develop towards their organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990). When employees are not satisfied with their jobs or committed to their organization, turnover intentions slowly build up, leading employees to adopt withdrawing behaviors (e.g., being

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