Service, politics, and engagement: A multi-level analysis

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines a conceptual model that employee engagement has mediating effect on the relationship between service orientation and job embeddedness. In addition, it also examines the perception of organizational politics as a moderator of the relationship between service orientation and job embeddedness. The sample was collected from 47 manager groups from 14 five-star hotels in north Cyprus. The data were analyzed using multi-level analysis following the hierarchical linear modeling of the manner the employees were nested in the departments. The results demonstrated that employee engagement partially mediates the effects of service orientation on job embeddedness. The results also indicated that the relationship between service orientation and job embeddedness was moderated by perceptions of organizational politics, which is an important signal to the hotels in the research context. The paper also identifies possible future directions.

1. Introduction

The employees are the most valuable assets in organizations. Indeed, happy employees will enhance customer satisfaction in hotels (Stershic, 2007). Hence, the role of service employees in the hotel industry has become of such a great significance today that hospitality managers have come to acknowledge their crucial role in delivering high-quality service and cultivating a longer-term relationship with clients. However, these managers should not forget that keeping skilled employees has a considerable role in enhancing the quality of services and improvement of customer satisfaction. Therefore, Job Embeddedness (JE) seems to be a likely countermeasure for retaining employees by managers. JE has "a broad set of influences on an employee's decision to stay on the job" (Lee, Mitchell, Sablynski, Burton, & Holtom, 2004).

When employees are embedded in their hotel-industry organizations, these employees have high intention to stay in their organization (Lee et al., 2004) and they feel highly attached to their hotels in comparison to employees who are not embedded in their jobs. Hereupon, in a competitive environment, it is important for hospitality businesses to support the engaged employees who are helpful and intentionally go beyond their job duties, which in turn affect organizations' success. Employee engagement as the involvement variable indicates the willingness of employees and their potential to enhance the success of companies (Perrin, 2003) which support enthusiasm for work in a sustainable situation and can help employees to reduce turnover

intention and increase JE. It means that employees that are engaged in their jobs become embedded in it when they find out that their plans and futuristic goals fit in with their job demands.

Regarding the extant hospitality literature, two of the most important strategies for increasing the number of embedded employees in an organization are providing service orientation (SO) and reducing the size of organizational political behaviors. For example, SO shows us some of the measures that organizations can adopt to influence the behavior and performance of employees, and serves as a platform for enhancing the productivity in the hospitality industry. SO also encompasses sets of organizational practices, which directly or indirectly influence the dispositions and conducts of employees and it can support and reward service-giving behaviors that they create and deliver service excellence (González & Garazo, 2006).

Another very important strategy in this regard is the perception of organizational politics (POP). It focuses on the escalation of short and long-term self-interests in the workplace and is the main cause of misbehavior in organizations (Vigoda, 2000). This concept comprises of members of an organization finding ways to achieve their group or personal goals (Poon, 2004) by influencing others as against the formal procedures or norms. The results of the performance of hotel managers have shown that uncertainty, threats, risks and a state of unfairness lead to weak SO of their employees and consequently a decrease in JE and difficulty in retention of skilled employees (Vigoda-Gadot, 2006).

This study develops and tests a research model that examines EE's mediating effect on SO's relationship with JE. Furthermore, it analyses

the moderating role POP plays on the effect of SO on JE. A limited amount of research and empirical studies has been conducted on JE within the field of human resource management (e.g., Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Karatepe & Ngeche, 2012). The current research, with its focus on, individual and group levels tries to demonstrate the levels of employee efficiency and highlighting their communication through hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). This type of analysis is scarce in the literature.

This research contributes to the hospitality management and human resource fields by focusing on the following issues. Firstly, the importance of EE through which SO influences JE has not been adequately examined in the hospitality sectors of north Cyprus. This study is necessary because service-oriented employees who are tightly connected to their organizations tend to deliver quality service and go beyond their expected role performance to satisfy customers. Indeed, the lack of focus on EE in management sectors within developing countries may decrease organizations performance and hotel managers have to realize that EE is one of the most important factors in fostering high quality service (Anitha, 2014). Hence, SO is treated as an antecedent to EE while JE is a consequence of EE.

Secondly, empirical research linking POP to SO and JE in the extant literature is sparse and there are shortcomings about POP in the hospitality industry. However, there is an empirical research on POP alluding that it can act as a buffer in the relationship between conscientiousness and job performance (Hochwarter, Witt, & Kacmar, 2000). Unfortunately, when normative guidelines for behaviors are not provided, there is a high tendency for the occurrence of political behaviors (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989). For instance, in a situation of unclear and uncertain organizational priorities and criteria, employees may adopt risk avoidance practices and adopt means of obtaining their perceived deserved share of the SO on hand. This subsequently results in dissatisfied employees and a higher intention to quit their jobs. However, studies on these apparent gaps have not been adequately conducted in developing countries. Following this, the essence of this study is to fill such gap in the human resource management literature via analyzing the moderating role POP plays on the relationship between SO and JE.

Thirdly, other areas including structural problems and skill mismatching in hotels need more empirical research. Lack of focus on training in management sectors within developing countries may end up producing fumbling employees. Subsequently, hotel managers have to try to retain skilled employees in order to maintain competitive advantage, service quality and increase JE. The theory of JE as introduced by Mitchell, Holtom, and Lee (2001) highlights a way of detecting the reason employees do not leave an organization. However, despite its significant role in employee retention, there has not been enough empirical research on JE in the hospitality management field in developing countries.

Fourthly, north Cyprus was the chosen location for this study because it has potential to improve tourism industry in a large scale but the reliance of its hospitality industry on Turkey has caused limitation in having qualified employees and investors (Altinay & Bowen, 2006). Although there is an increasing unemployment rate in north Cyprus according to Cyprus Turkish Chamber of Commerce in 2015, the owners and the managers of hotels in north Cyprus prefer to recruit their workers from Turkey (Farmaki, Altinay, Botterill, & Hilke, 2015). Hence, high rate of political behaviors and misbehavior by the managers are evident in these organizations. Moreover, the implications of our study will prove that POP has a significant influence in the hospitality industries of developing countries. It will also show that to have high productivity, hotels need to develop better ways of improving and increasing the level of engagement and decreasing the rate of organizational politics among the managers and employees.

Finally, the lack of contemporary management approaches and high level of employee turnover in hotels of north Cyprus are obvious (Özduran & Tanova, 2017a). This problem is related to faulty HR

practices (e.g. training, recruitment and employee performance). Thus, the findings in this study will provide relevant implications and be of huge significance to the hospitality management sector, especially in the HR practices by promoting the importance of employee development and improving the standards of service in five-star hotels. Nevertheless, some successful hotels may perceive that all hotel department managers and not just the human resource departments should be involved in the development of employees.

2. Literature review and hypothesis formulation

2.1. Service orientation (SO)

At the individual level, SO has been described as the behaviors and attitudes influencing the relationship between the customers of an organization and their employees (Hogan, Hogan, & Busch, 1984); simply put, SO is the individual predispositions of a polite and pleasant character when delivering service. SO has been conceptualized as an organizational variable measured using the SO scale (Lynn, Lytle, & Bobek, 2000; Lytle, Hom, & Mokwa, 1998). Indeed, SO present as a variable with the objective of recognizing the opinions and beliefs of employees regarding procedures, practice, and policies focused on the support of service delivery in the organization.

According to Lee, Park, and Yoo (2001) SO can be summarized into four different components: the first is the practice of service leadership with the servant leadership dimensions comprising of management styles and behaviors, as well as a service vision saturating the entire organization. The second component is the service encounter practices which refer to the interaction between employees and customers, consisting of dimensions like employee empowerment and customer treatment. The third component is the service system practices which concerns aspects associated with the creation of the system of service, recovery of service failure and usage of technology in the service sector to deliver the best worthiness to consumers, as well as the communication of the standards of service which are all required for efficient operation of the service system. Finally, the fourth component has the dimensions of reward systems and service-oriented training of the human resource management practices.

2.2. Employee engagement (EE)

Currently, a generally accepted definition of employee engagement does exist. This is obvious from the different definitions three renowned research organizations in the field of human resource management has for EE, not to talk of those proposed by several scholars. Some of the definitions are discussed below:

Perrin (2003) described EE as the capability and inclination of employees to support their organization to succeed, mostly by sustainably offering discretionary effort. Based on their study, employee engagement is influenced by a number of rational and emotional factors related to employees' general experience at work and the work in particular. Gallup organization describes Employee Engagement as the immersion in, and zest for work. Dernovsek (2008) cited Gallup's definition as employees' positive emotional attachment and commitment to work.

Robinson, Perryman, and Hayday (2004) described Employee Engagement as positive attitude employees hold towards their organizations as well as its values. An employee that is engaged is fully cognizant of the business' situation and is willing to enhance performance on the job to the advantage of the organization. Organizations ought to make effort to cultivate and foster engagement and this entails a mutual relationship between employee and employer. In addition, although it seems that engagement overlaps with the concepts of organizational citizenship behaviour and commitment, according to Robinson et al. (2004) these two concepts do not sufficiently mirror employee engagement's two-way characteristics, as well as how well-engaged