Do Managerial Strategies Influence Service Behaviours? Insights from a Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Based on a review of the extant literature, a conceptual framework for analyzing the associations between managerial strategies (internal communications, empowerment, supportive leadership and professional development), employee job attitudes (organizational commitment and job satisfaction) and prosocial service behaviours (PSBs) is developed. The authors explore the relevance of the proposed conceptual model and testable propositions regarding the associations between managerial strategies, employee attitudes and PSBs by conducting in-depth interviews of FLEs in a travel service organization. Based on the findings of the in-depth interviews, the relationships between managerial strategies, job attitudes and PSBs in the conceptual framework are largely supported.

Keywords: Empowerment, Internal Communication, Job Attitudes, Leadership Support, Professional Development, PSBs

INTRODUCTION

Much research in services marketing has focused on the concepts of customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and customers’ perception of service quality. These concepts are some of the key services marketing concepts that have all been positively linked to the long-term survival and profitability of service firms (e.g., Babacan, Yavas, & Ashill, 2009; Heskett, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1997; Liao et al., 2009; Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1997). From research conducted into these key concepts, it is clear that the behaviour and performance of frontline employees (FLEs) during service encounters is important to service quality and customer satisfaction in the eyes of customers (Heskett, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1997; Liao et al., 2009; Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1997).

Much research on employee behaviour has been published over the past four decades, but the focus has been on behaviours directed at the organization, such as organizational citizenship behaviours (OCBs). Podsakoff and MacKenzie (1997) suggested that additional employee behaviours directed at customers should be researched to improve our knowledge of drivers of organizational performance. Few studies have been published that focused on such customer directed service behaviours, which may also be referred to as prosocial service behaviours.
PSBs (see Bettencourt & Brown, 1997; Bettencourt, Gwinner, & Meuter, 2001).

PSBs are defined as “the helpful behaviors of employees directed toward the organization or other individuals” (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997, p. 41). The extant literature suggests that organizations should value and promote the performance of PSBs, because of the positive link with work unit effectiveness and customer relationship performance (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997).

The aim of this paper is to develop a conceptual framework that aims to address current gaps in our knowledge of the drivers of PSBs. More specifically, we endeavour to shed more light on the relationships between managerial strategies on employee job attitudes and PSBs by conducting in-depth interviews with front-line employees (FLEs).

In the following sections, we first offer a literature review on PSBs and what we propose to be key antecedents. We also develop research propositions based on extant literature. Next, the methodology that we adopted in this study is discussed. We then discuss the findings of the study. The paper concludes with a discussion of the study’s limitations and implications for theory and practice, as well as suggestions for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

PSBs

Bettencourt and Brown (1997) posit PSB as a three dimensional construct comprising: role-prescribed customer service, extra-role customer service and helping behaviours. Role-prescribed customer service is defined as the performance of expected service behaviours by employees in serving customers (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997). Role-prescribed behaviours consist of regular duties and responsibilities that are required and tend to be outlined in job descriptions (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bommer, 1996). In contrast, extra-role customer service refers to the discretionary service behaviours that employees perform (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997). Discretionary behaviours go beyond formal role requirements and are valued by firms as these have been found to be positively associated with organizational effectiveness and performance (Netemeyer, Boles, McKee, & McMurrin, 1997; Organ, 1988, 1997; Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1997).

The helping behaviour dimension consists of co-operative and helping behaviours directed at colleagues. Although these helping behaviours are directed towards the organization, they have a strong flavour of service orientation (Bowen & Waldman, 1999) as they involve assisting co-workers to avoid or solve work-based problems (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Ahearne, 1998). PSBs are important to study because of their potential to influence organizational performance (Babacus, Yavas, & Ashill, 2009). Moreover, in view of the capacity of PSBs to enhance service employee delivery outcome, it makes sense to understand more fully the factors that encourage or precipitate PSBs. A review of the literature suggests a number of antecedents of PSBs. The next section reviews some of the literature on employee job attitudes, which are linked to employee behaviours at the individual level.

Job Attitudes

A job attitude is defined as the knowledge structure that summarizes and organizes the array of emotions and thoughts that stem from actual work experiences with a specific job (George & Jones, 1996). Job satisfaction and organizational commitment both represent positive job attitudes, which have been linked to employee behaviours, such as OCBs and PSBs (Ackfeldt & Wong, 2006; Lavelle et al., 2009).

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Organizational commitment is commonly discussed in conjunction with job satisfaction. Job satisfaction and organizational commitment are highly interrelated construct, but not identical (Meyer, Irving, & Allen, 1998). Locke (1976) defined job satisfaction as “a pleasurable or positive state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (p. 1300). Job satisfaction may be seen as a subjective feeling,