

The Impact of Customer Oriented Boundary Spanning Behaviours on Customer Satisfaction and Service Provider Performance

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Abstract

Previous research has focused on frontline staff perspectives and more specifically on the antecedents of customer oriented boundary spanning behaviours (COBSBs). This paper investigates the impact of the COBSBs dimensions (*service delivery, internal influence, and external representation*), on customer satisfaction and supervisors' evaluations of frontline staff performance. Data collection was based on a mail survey of fitness instructors, their customers and supervisors. The results offer strong evidence for the positive impact of all three COBSBs on customer satisfaction and partial support for their impact on supervisors' evaluations of frontline staff performance. More specifically, *external representation* was the only COBSBs variable that did not have a significant positive impact on staff performance evaluations.

Introduction

The attitudes and behaviours exhibited by customer contact personnel have a significant impact on customer satisfaction as well as employee performance (Bowen and Schneider, 1985; Pfeffer 1994). Therefore, the aim of this study was to build on behavioural research in the services marketing and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) literature, and in particular, extend Bettencourt and Brown's (2003) work by demonstrating that customer oriented boundary spanning behaviours (COBSBs) had a positive impact on the evaluations of service contact staff by both customers and supervisors. The limited research on COBSBs to date has focused on the antecedents rather than the outcomes and has only sought the perspectives of service contact staff (e.g., Bettencourt, Brown and MacKenzie 2005). Furthermore, they focused on services with short customer-employee interactions such as retail banking, business credit and librarians (Bettencourt *et al* 2001, 2005; Bettencourt and Brown, 2003). The exploratory study extended the research by investigating the impact of the COBSBs of fitness instructors on supervisors' evaluations of the instructor's performance as well as customer satisfaction. It entailed a triadic survey of service contact staff (fitness instructors), their supervisors and customers. The study was also unique as it extended the research to a service context where service encounters are longer in duration, intimate and emotionally charged. Furthermore, the majority of the personal trainers are employed on a casual basis and thus may be argued to display less favourable job attitudes and behaviours in comparison with full time employees.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have examined the construct of organisational citizenship behaviours or prosocial behaviours (e.g., MacKenzie *et al* 1993; Netemeyer *et al* 1997; Organ, 1988, 1990,

1995; Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1994). However, they are considered to be generic in nature (Bell and Menguc, 2002) and as such do not focus on the unique requirements of customer contact employees, or boundary spanners, and their interactions with customers (Borman and Motowidlo, 1993; Podsakoff *et al* 2000). In response, drawing from the services marketing management and boundary spanning literature, Bettencourt and Brown (2003) developed a scale that specifically measured the customer oriented boundary spanning behaviours of customer contact employees along the following three dimensions: (i) external representation (being vocal advocates to outsiders of the organisation's image, goods and services), (ii) internal influence (taking initiative in communications to the firm and co-workers to improve service delivery by the organisation, co-workers and oneself) and (iii) service delivery (serving customers in a conscientious, responsive, flexible and courteous manner).

Hypotheses

Customers will form their impressions of the organisation based on the boundary spanner and as such they are critical to customer satisfaction, perceptions of service quality (Kelley, 1992; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1991) and purchase intentions (Baker, Levy, and Grewal, 1992; Goff *et al* 1997; Spreng, MacKenzie, and Olshavsky, 1996). Exhibiting behaviours such as courtesy and personal attention enables customers to meet their own needs thus increasing their satisfaction levels (Bettencourt and Brown, 2003; Parasuraman *et al* 1988). It has been found that salespeople who have displayed customer oriented behaviours in order to help their customers, resulted in increased customer satisfaction (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). Thus, in the service encounter, the helping behaviours of customer contact employees can directly impact on customer satisfaction (Hartline *et al* 2000). For example, fitness instructors/ personal trainers who provide additional advice on nutrition so the customer can achieve their goal of weight loss are likely to enhance their customers' satisfaction. This leads to the following hypothesis:

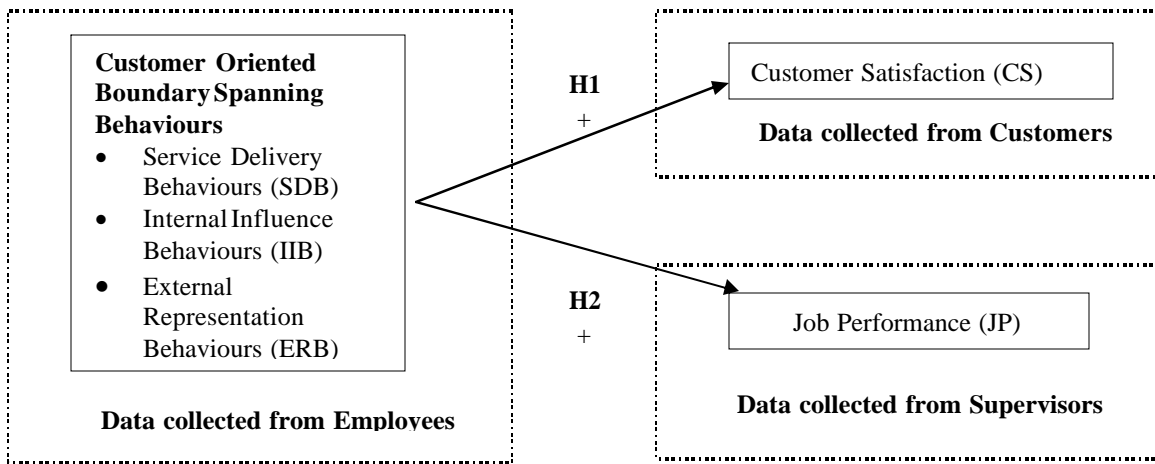
H1: The customer oriented boundary spanning behaviours of service delivery, internal influence and external representation impact positively on customer satisfaction.

Researchers found that a positive effect exists between customer oriented behaviours and sales performance (Boles, Johnson, and Barksdale, 2000; Brown *et al* 2002). A positive relationship also exists between effort and performance (Blau, 1993; Gardner, Dunhan, Cummings and Pierce, 1989), particularly the work related efforts of a salesperson (Brown and Leigh, 1996; Brown and Peterson, 1994). Effort, being described as the amount of energy that a person puts into a behaviour (Locke *et al* 1981), should be reflected in terms of their job performance as seen from the perspective of the supervisor or manager. In the services context this leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: The customer oriented boundary spanning behaviours of service delivery, internal influence and external representation impact positively on job performance.

The research model which guided this study is summarised in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Research Model



Methodology

The mail survey was conducted in the Fitness industry in Western Australia and the sample was drawn from the membership listing held by Fitness WA. A total of 159 fitness instructors, 117 customers and 112 supervisor 'useable' questionnaires were returned. The effective response rate for employees was 11.9% and for customers 8.7%. To determine the effective response rate for supervisors it would have been necessary to contact every organisation and individually to ask how many staff they supervised. This was time and cost prohibitive. The number of triadic sets, that is the three corresponding questionnaires, totalled 88. This relatively low response rate has been evidenced in other dyadic research studies (e.g., John & Reeve, 1982). The data collected was considered adequate for the research purpose as the respondents represented a diverse heterogeneous group of supervisors, employees and customers.

The scale developed by Bettencourt and Brown (2003) was used to measure the three dimensions of customer oriented boundary spanning behaviours (COBSB). Kelley and Davis (1994) developed a customer satisfaction scale based on research by Oliva *et al* (1992) which was used in this study. The items regarding supervisors' evaluations of fitness instructors' job performance were compiled from the employee performance scales used by Podsakoff and MacKenzie (1994) and Wayne and Liden (1995).

Data Analysis and Results

Factor analysis was conducted on the COBSB items to assess the dimensionality of the scale in the fitness industry context. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO = 0.870) and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity indicated that there were significant correlations between the variables and the data was suitable for factor analysis.

Table 1: COBSBs Factor Analysis Results

Items	Factor 1 Service Delivery	Factor 2 Internal Influence	Factor 3 External Representati on
Tells outsiders this is a great place	0.22	0.14	0.87
<i>Generates favourable goodwill</i>	0.49	0.35	0.49*
Says Good Things to Others	0.13	0.23	0.88
Encourages Friends to Use Services	0.18	0.31	0.68
Makes Constructive Suggestions	0.27	0.75	0.16
Contributes Ideas for Promotions	0.19	0.87	0.11
Shares Creative Solutions	0.22	0.70	0.36
Encourages Coworkers Ideas	0.13	0.66	0.44
Follows Customer Service Guidelines	0.70	0.22	0.25
<i>Follows up on Problems</i>	0.60*	0.41	0.31
Courteous and Respectful	0.76	0.09	0.10
Follows up on Promises	0.78	0.17	0.23
Understand Individual Needs	0.83	0.19	0.03
<i>Eigenvalues</i>	6.23	1.55	1.01
<i>Cronbach Alpha</i>	0.84	0.84	0.85

* As these cross loading items factored as suggested by Bettencourt, Brown and MacKenzie (2005) they were retained for the hypotheses analysis.

The items factored as expected along the three dimensions and subsequent Cronbach analysis supported their reliability (see results in Table 1). Cronbach alpha analysis also supported the reliability of the employee performance scale ($\alpha = 0.93$) and customer satisfaction ($\alpha = 0.87$). Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Hypothesis Testing Multiple Regression Results

Hp	Cons	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	Std. Error	Standardised Coefficients			ANOVA		Acc Rej	
						β	<i>t</i>	Sig.	F	Sig.		
H ₁	COBSB	0.464	0.216	0.194	0.58442				9.902	0.000**	Acc Acc Acc	
	s											
	→CS											
	Factors						112.219	0.000**				
	Constant					0.263	3.078	0.003**				
	SDB					0.301	3.527	0.001**				
IIB	0.242	2.828	0.006**									
ERB												
H ₂	COBSB	0.518	0.268	0.247	0.66021				12.587	0.000**	Acc Acc Rej	
	s											
	→JP											
	Factors						95.751	0.000**				
	Constant					0.480	5.638	0.000**				
	SDB					0.215	2.534	0.013*				
IIB	0.108	1.255	0.212									
ERB												

** Statistically significant $p < 0.01$, * Statistically significant $p < 0.05$

Discussion of Results and Implications

The results in Table 2 offer strong support for hypothesis one (H₁). The standardised β coefficient results show all three customer oriented boundary spanning behaviours had a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction. Hypothesis two (H₂) was partly accepted as only *service delivery behaviours* and *internal influence behaviours* had a significant positive impact on job performance (i.e., the *external representation behaviours* were insignificant).

The positive impact of service delivery behaviours on employee performance as assessed by supervisors in this study is in line with previous research on organisational citizenship behaviours where in-role behaviours, that is duties and responsibilities that are required or expected, did impact on overall performance ratings (Barksdale and Werner, 2001). Making constructive suggestions for service improvement is an internal influence customer oriented boundary spanning behaviour (Bettencourt and Brown, 2003), and is related to the civic virtue organisational citizenship behaviour. These civic virtue behaviours have been found to impact on performance assessment (MacKenzie *et al* 1998; Organ, 1988). Customer contact employees performing the role as boundary spanners are able to communicate appropriate customer suggestions on service improvement to the organisation and are thus displaying civic virtue behaviours (Yoon and Suh, 2003). As a result, the finding of this research study confirms prior

research on organisational citizenship behaviours and the outcome of these behaviours on performance ratings.

External representation behaviours entail employees making positive recommendations about the service to customers (Bettencourt and Brown, 2003), and was not significant in the evaluations by supervisors. This behaviour is linked more to customer satisfaction than job performance, often occurring in a one-to-one situation. Therefore, supervisors may not be aware that these behaviours are exhibited by the employee, or may not consider them to be of importance. Rather, it may be viewed by the supervisor as part of their job. Further research is required to evaluate if this is the case. However, given that external representation boundary spanning behaviours have a positive impact on customer satisfaction; it suggests that the organisation should ensure their managers are made aware of the various forms of COBSBs and perhaps make changes to the method and ways that customer contact employees are evaluated.

This study examined the relationship between COBSBs and their consequences from an individual's perspective. However, service employees are often required to work in a team service setting. This unit level perspective was identified in research on organisational citizenship behaviours (eg. Ehrhart, 2004; Schneider *et al*, 2005). Therefore, the effect of COBSBs on customer satisfaction and job performance should be examined in the context of a unit.

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