THE ROLE OF MANAGEMENT COMMITMENT OF SERVICE QUALITY THROUGH JOB EMBEDDEDNESS ON SERVICE RECOVERY PERFORMANCE

Norhamizan Hamir[1], Rashid Salleh[2], Noraslinda Mohd Said[3], Hashim Fadzil Ariffin[4], Zamri Ahmad[5]

Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

[1]norhamizan317@uitm.edu.my; [2]rashid.salleh@uitm.edu.my; [3]noraslinda698@uitm.edu.my; [4]hashim@uitm.edu.my; [5]zamri.ahmad@uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Service recovery is a corrective action that is carried out immediately by the service provider if the service offered went wrong. The employee is responsible to handle the situation in order to ensure that the customer who might not be satisfied with the situation that happens turns to be satisfied. One of the concepts of the service recovery that have been discussed in the literature is related to service recovery performance. The researcher defined that service recovery performance is to focus on the performance of frontline employees. Service recovery performance is not about a strategy or action to handle a service recovery situation which among others are an apology, giving discounted price and compensation but more towards the behavior of the frontline employees getting engage in resolving the situation. Past researchers have identified that the management commitment to service quality which represented by several indicators may lead to the service recovery performance of the employees. However, the relationship has a missing link. The objective of this conceptual paper is to further discuss the relationship between management commitment to service quality and service recovery performance with the present mediating role of job embeddedness among frontline hotel employees in four and a five-star hotels. The proposition suggested in this paper may require support with further empirical findings to be carried out.

Keywords*: service recovery performance, management commitment to service quality, job embeddedness, service training, empowerment, reward.*

INTRODUCTION

The service industry is considered unique compared to the retail of goods and physical products. The uniqueness of the industry is due to its characteristics that are identified as perishable, intangible, inseparable and heterogenic. Perishable is related to the services that cannot be stored or inventoried for later use or sale compared to physical products (Berry &

Parasuraman, 1991). Intangible refers to a service provided by the organization as things that cannot be seen, touch, smell or hear, thus it relies on the performance of the service person (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991). On the other hand, inseparable relates to the service requires the customer and service provider to be present at the same time and location (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991), either the customer or service provider one does not present, service does not happen. Finally, heterogenic being defines as the involvement of two-party (customer and service employee) in order for the service to be carried out as it may relate to quality and performance (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991).

Based on the above tenet, providing quality service is considered very important to an organization to ensure a good reputation. A "zero defect" is almost impossible in service delivery. If the service delivery carried out not as according to the standard set by the organization, there is a high possibility that a service failure may happen. In a situation where service failure occurs, it demands a service recovery to be carryout immediately by the service personnel. Addressing a service recovery situation is important as it helps in solving the problem and at the same time addressing customer dissatisfaction (Ashill, Rod, & Carruthers, 2008). Frontline employees play as key personnel in delivering quality service to the customer (Ashill, Carruthers, & Krisjanous, 2006) as they are the first person that usually interacts with the customer. They usually control the customer experience and expectations towards the service delivered.

To date, the study on the service recovery performance in Malaysia seems to be limited with a study related to hotel environment (Masdek, Aziz, & Awang, 2011), airline industry (Ng, Sambasivan, & Zubaidah, 2011) and insurance company (Piaralal, Bhatti, Piaralal, & Juhari, 2016). This study will focus on finding the relationship of service training, empowerment, rewards with the present of job embeddedness as a mediating factor upon service recovery performance among four and five-star frontline employees in Malaysia.

There were two reasons for testing the aforementioned relationship. First, it seems to be relevant and significant as this study was built on the work of Karatepe and Karadas (2012) that proposing a similar study on the management commitment to service quality and job embeddedness towards the attitude and behavior related of frontline employees to be carried out the cross-national country. Second, the existing studies are still underscored especially in the mediating mechanism (Safavi & Karatepe, 2019) besides lack of the effect of the variables being investigated especially in the local context.

In this study, the service training, empowerment and rewards for this particular study are identified as management commitment to service quality due to it resulted in high-quality performance (Boshoff & Allen, 2000; Yavas, Karatepe, & Babakus, 2010).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service recovery performance

Researchers have defined the service recovery performance as the perception of frontline employee's abilities and actions to resolve a service failure in order to satisfy the customer (Ashill, Carruthers, & Krisjanous, 2005; Babakus, Yavas, Karatepe, & Avci, 2003). On the other hand, Boshoff and Allen (2000) describe it as the effectiveness of employees dealing with customer complaints to the satisfaction of employees. Meanwhile, this paper hold to the definition by Liao (2007) that define service recovery performance as the behavior of the

customer service employee in the act of engagement in handling customer complaint in order to recover customer satisfaction and loyalty after a service failure.

Service recovery has been conceptualized in three features. First, it relates to the service recovery efforts which involve service recovery strategy such as fixing the problem, taking ownership, apology, empathy, acknowledgment, assurance and compensation (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1994; Johnston & Fern, 1999). Second, it is about employee behavior which focuses on the action of the employee (do and say) when handling the complaint (Hui Liao, 2007). Lastly, its focuses at the performance where employee responsible in the interaction and directly handle the service and production of the service organization by transmitting the function of service organization through their attributes, attitude and behavior (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003).

Antecedents of service recovery performance

Previous researchers have identified the antecedents of service recovery performance and segregate them into job-based, organizational based and personal based. For the purpose of the paper, only the organizational based antecedents will be discussed.

Organizational based antecedents were traced from the early research work by Boshoff and Allen (2000) which have grouped the antecedents into perceived management attitude (i.e. top management commitment, customer service quality and customer service orientation) and working environment (i.e. teamwork, empowerment, customer service training). Several researchers (i.e. Ashill et al., 2006; Babakus et al., 2003; Rod & Ashill, 2010) have identified it as a management commitment to service quality. In addition, a study by Kim and Oh (2012) has identified the antecedents as service recovery efforts which include the construct such as customer service orientation, empowerment, rewards and service training. There is also research work by Karatepe, Baradarani, Olya, Ilkhanizadeh and Raoof (2014) that have identified the high-performance work practice which comprises job security, empowerment, training and rewards was also the antecedent to the service recovery performance.

Reviewing the above discussion has lead the researcher to trace three main constructs to the service recovery performance. Service training, empowerment and rewards were identified as the three constructs that become the basis in conducting the study on service recovery performance. The researcher intent to extend those studies by incorporating the mediator element into the relationship. Based on Kim and Oh (2012), they highlighted that previous research that looks at the direct relationship between organizational antecedents and service recovery has to open up for further research in the area. In addressing the statement, the researcher will test the research model that investigating the mediating role of job embeddedness between management commitment to service quality and service recovery performance. This supports the suggestion from Karatepe & Karadas (2012) that not many empirical studies test the relationship of job embeddedness as a mediating variable with the performance outcome. Moreover, they stated that training, empowerment and rewards are three important indicators of management commitment to service quality increasing job embeddedness.

Service training

In the service industry, customer service training is important especially to the frontline employees as part of the preparation in dealing with the unsatisfactory customers. The importance of service training has been reported in the studies where an employee that do not

possess the requisite job and interpersonal skill will fail in providing a high level of service and in dealing with the complaint from the customer (Boshoff & Allen, 2000; Yavas, Karatepe, Avci, & Tekinkus, 2003). In addition, Boshoff and Allen (2000) also stressed that organizations should have not only empower and selecting the right people for the job but at the same time, the staff should also be trained to deal with the situation.

Empirical research works have reported a mixed result for the direct relationship between service training and service recovery performance. Studies on the indirect relationship between service training, service recovery performance and the mediating role of job satisfaction and organization commitment found a significant result (Ashill et al., 2006, 2008; Babakus et al., 2003). For the purpose of the study, the role of job embeddedness as the mediator will be tested on the relationship between service training and service recovery performance. It is anticipated that there will be a positive and significant relationship. The employee will evaluate the training that they received through the knowledge and abilities that they gained. Together with the feeling of connection to the people and environment, feeling comfortable with the organization and unwilling to sacrifice their benefit currently received if they leave the job will make them able to handle service recovery situations effectively.

Empowerment

Empowerment in the service management literature has been defined as sharing power (Savery & Luks, 2001), use of employee initiative and judgment in carrying out the job (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996) and freedom and ability to make decision and commitments (Slåtten & Mehmetoglu, 2011). Empowerment is important in delivering quality service to the customer (Hartline, Maxham, & McKee, 2000). Having empowerment will reduce a long chain of command by the employee especially when dealing with a disgruntled customer (Babakus et al., 2003). This will allow the employee to effectively provide a quick and appropriate response to any service situation such as service failure.

Study-related to the indirect relationship between empowerment and the mediating role of job embeddedness has received attention from Karatepe and Karadas (2012) found a significant relationship. The study showed that the combined force of empowerment and job embeddedness as motivational factors activate the service recovery behavior of the service personnel.

Rewards

In literature, rewards have been identified as important tools in motivating employees to perform their work (Lawler & Cohen, 1992). It plays a role to attract, retain, motivating, elicit and reinforce the desired behavior of the employee (Bustamam, Teng, & Abdullah, 2014). In addition, it also been determined as part of the element of service quality and significantly related to service delivery performance (Liao & Chuang, 2004; Lynn, Lytle, & Bobek, 2000).

Based on the empirical studies specifically looking at the indirect relationship, rewards do also receive substantial attention from the researchers. Studies on the indirect relationship between rewards and service recovery were significantly mediated by organizational commitment (Ashill et al., 2006). However, this particular study will be expecting a similar result shall be achieved with the mediation of job embeddedness based on the research work from Karatepe & Karadas (2012).

Job embeddedness as a mediator

Job embeddedness is basically about employee retaining themselves in the job (Holtom, Mitchell, & Lee, 2006). Mitchell, Holtom, Lee and Sablynski (2001) identified job embeddedness contends with three components namely links, fit and sacrifice. These components enable the organization to retain the employees and the employees display high-quality performance (Karatepe & Karadas, 2012). Specifically, the link relates to the connection that the employees have with their coworkers and work environment. Fit explains that the employees feeling comfort or compatibility with the organization. Finally, sacrifice means the unwillingness of the employees to release their benefit if they leave the organization.

Research work on job embeddedness has found a correlation with organizational citizenship behavior (Lee, Mitchell, Sablynski, Burton, & Holtom, 2004), job performance (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008), innovative behavior (Ng & Feldman, 2011), service recovery performance (Karatepe, 2014; Safavi & Karatepe, 2019) and customer service performance (Chan, Ho, Sambasivan, & Ng, 2019).

Focusing on the study related to performance, Lee et al. (2004) validated that employees who has a number of link and a good fit with their organization are motivated to perform in their daily job. On the other hand, the study by Karatepe (2014) which tested the relationship between job embeddedness and service recovery performance have resulted in a significant relationship between the two variables. Recently, Safavi and Karatepe (2019) conducted a study among hotel service workers who have found job embeddedness has mediate the relationship among job insecurity and service recovery performance. The growth in the body of literature indicates that job embeddedness has created more empirical study interest.

Proposed conceptual framework

Based on the review of past literature, the proposed conceptual framework is depicted in Figure 1. A Reformulation of Attitude Theory and Self-regulation Process (Bagozzi, 1992) will be utilized as the theoretical model underlying the research framework. It has been conceptualized that a person will evaluate the past, present and future outcome; later developed an emotional reaction that leads to various coping responses. Based on the framework, it will postulate that the employee will evaluate the service training, empowerment and rewards they will receive together with the feeling connected to the work environment and the people, comfort with the organization and unwilling to sacrifice their benefit if leaving the organization will make them handle the service recovery performance effectively. Therefore, this paper proposition presents:

Proposition 1 (P1):   Job embeddedness will mediate the relationship between service training and service recovery performance.

Proposition 2 (P2):   Job embeddedness will mediate the relationship between empowerment and service recovery performance.

Proposition 3 (P3):   Job embeddedness will mediate the relationship between rewards and service recovery performance.
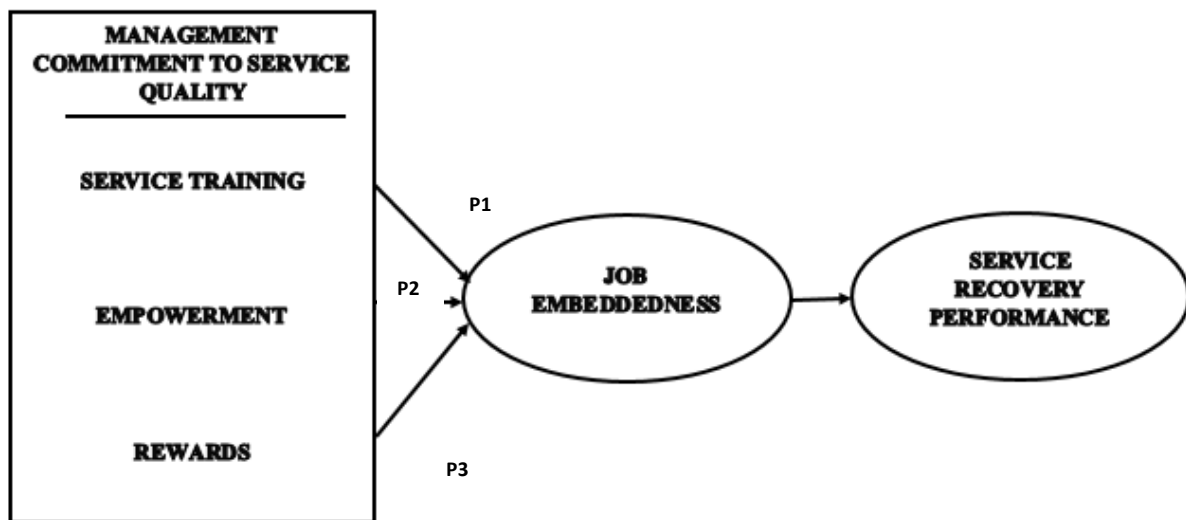
Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Model

CONCLUSION

The role of frontline employees in the hotel especially in dealing with service recovery situations is very important as it enhances the organization's service quality. A review of the literature showed that job embeddedness as the mediating variables support the relationship between the management commitment to service quality (i.e. training, empowerment and rewards) with the service recovery performance. The role of management commitment to service quality that comprises of service training, empowerment and rewards together with job embeddedness is posited to enhance and exhibit excellent service recovery performance. Frontline employees who have been given training, empowerment and rewards by the management together with the presence of link and feeling fit (element of job embeddedness) in their working environment will tend to perform efficiently in the service recovery situation. In addition, the employee may also unlikely to leave the job as they believed that it may be difficult for them to find other organization that offers better benefits from the one that they currently received. Investigating the relationship of job embeddedness as the mediator between management commitment to service quality and service recovery performance may consistent with the precepts of Reformulation of Attitude theory and Self-regulation Process (Bagozzi, 1992).

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