

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE FRONTLINE EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOR TOWARDS GUEST SATISFACTION IN HOTEL

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Abstract

This study seeks to analyse the factors that influence frontline employee behaviour towards guest satisfaction as frontline employee is the first person that any hotel guest would refer to should there be any queries. Thus, being a frontline employee will have an impact on guest approach and overall satisfaction. For this paper, in order to achieve the objective of the study, a review on data collected from secondary data such as journals, articles and websites were carried out. The finding of the study has proven that there is a relationship between the variables and has an impact on the service encounter. In conclusion, frontline employee behaviour is a vital factor to focus as they can give great effect on overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction for guest in their experience during their stay in the hotel.

Keywords: *Employee behaviour, guest satisfaction, work environment, hotel.*

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1. Introduction

The importance of service in worldwide setting keeps increasing. In today's global competitive environment, delivering quality service is regarded as an important strategy for enhancing guest satisfaction. In any hospitality organization, there is a wide variety of employees' behaviour that can occur within the surroundings. Hanna, Backhouse, and Burns (2004) define employees' behaviour as various sequences of actions carried out by employees within the hotel organization. The behaviours of frontline service are important to guest evaluations of the service encounter (Hartline, Maxham, and McKee, 2000). Bowen and Shoemaker (1998) stated that frontline employee behaviour can results either positive or negative which can affect the guest perception of the service. Brown, Cowles, and Tuten (1996) found that positive frontline employee behaviour leads to the increasing of guest satisfaction. Chapman and Lovell (2006) highlighted the service encounter is at the heart of the service provided by the hotel organization to the guest. The service encounter is a moment of truth when every frontline employee has an opportunity to satisfy the guest in improving guests' perception of service quality.

The frontline employees' behaviours are important in a service company as they connect the hotel organization with its guests and they represent a critical factor in developing effective working relationships with guests (Gronroos, 1990; Gwinner, Gremler, and Bitner, 1998).

Liljander (2000: 162-171) highlighted the importance of frontline employees' behaviour during the service encounter in the hotel industry; as they illustrates the main focus in any hotel should be the personal linkage between the service provider and the guest. It means that if the frontline employees practice a positive behaviour, the guest will give a positive reaction and may give results in building a guest relationship towards the hotel itself. Turkey and Sengul (2014) stated that when employees are properly trained concerning the job and empowered, they can display behaviours that make the customer happy, while those employees who do not find their working conditions and wages adequate and who experience role ambiguity and more likely to display behaviours that make the customers unhappy.

The strong relationship between the employee and guest in a period of time gives the opportunities to the hotel organization to respond to service failures or competitors before the guest lost faith with the hotel organization (Berry and Parasuraman, 1991; Storbacka, Strandvik, and Gronroos, 1994). Arnette, Laverie, and Mclane (2002) mentioned that the hotel employees can be a source of competitive advantage because most hotels depend on the frontline employees to deliver service. In other words, the frontline employee behaviour can give an impact to the image of the organization in delivering service which leads to the satisfaction and experience to the guest in the hotel. Hartline and Ferrell (1996) stated that service firms especially to the hotel organizations must find solution to effectively manage the service providers to help ensure their attitudes and behaviour because the service providers interaction with the guest can influenced the guest's evaluation of the service encounter which is important in delivery of the quality of service.

The aim of every service in the hospitality industry is to provide good service experiences, increase the guest satisfaction, and loyalty of the guests towards the organization in order to achieve the mission of gaining the profit. Walter, Edvardsson and Ostrom (2010) mentioned that guest will deal with service provider during service encounter which is the most necessary part of service experiences.

This research study is to focus on frontline employees because they are the first person who will meet face to face with guests when they entered the hotel. This study attempts to show how frontline employee behaviour can affect overall satisfaction whether the service encounter will lead to guest satisfaction or dissatisfaction. It also examines whether the guests are having good or bad experience in the hotel. Liljander and Strandvik (1997) stated that the frontline employee who shows the positive emotion can lead to positive satisfaction and word-of-mouth behaviour by guests, while negative emotion may results in dissatisfaction which can cause bad image of the hotel in addition of complaining behaviour by guest.

In order to improve the guest satisfaction, this study will then identify the importance of employee behaviour towards the hospitality industry in the service encounter especially in hotel industry.

2. Literature Review

In the hospitality industry, the guest is an important asset for an organization. To increase the loyalty among the guest to the organization, the organization must first know what the guest's needs and wants in order to satisfy them. The characteristics of employee behaviour especially frontline employee that any guests would acknowledge and give a positive impression to the service encounter are responsiveness to the feedback from the guest and reduce guest complaints about the organization. This chapter will discuss some literature from previous researchers study regarding the variables of the factors that influence frontline employee behaviour such as work-

family conflict, employee rewards, and working environment as independent variables while service encounter as a dependent variable.

2.1 Service Encounter

It is important to understand the nature of encounter itself in developing an understanding of employee behaviour towards service encounter because it determines on an overall satisfaction. Service encounter is about the personal interaction in which one person provides a service to another person. It is an opportunity for a service provider especially frontline employee to play roles in providing good services to guests as the results in improving their service failures in communication and performance which leads to the outcome either positive or negative of guest perception and evaluation to an organization in addition to provide a satisfying service experience for guests. The atmosphere of the service, employee behaviour, and favourable and unfavourable incidents may give impact to the guest's mood during or after the encounter itself. Czepiel (1985) stated that the factors of frontline employee personal characteristics or behaviour and guest's perception will influenced the outcomes during the service encounter. From this factor, it will relate to the guest's expectation which determine the guest's satisfaction and evaluation during service encounter. Rupp and Spencer (2006) and Grandey, Dickter, and Sin (2004) mentioned that the frontline employee deviant behaviour could be a consequence to the encounter and also behaviour of the guest which the organization should take seriously about this matter.

2.2 Issues affecting frontline employee behaviour towards service encounter

2.2.1 Work-family conflict

Work and family are the two most significantly important of an individual's life. This study will compare the influence of work-family related factor. Karatepe and Sokmen (2006) stated that hotel employee especially frontline employees are confronted with the work-family conflict as it has two direction of conflict that is work and family roles. Frone, Yardley, and Markel (1997) mentioned that there are two interdependent elements on work-family conflict which are work interfering with family and family interfering with work. The researchers also said work interfering with family stands for the impact of work related factors on family aspects while family interfering with work reflects the effects of family responsibilities on work outcomes. Both of these conflict dimensions can influence employees' workplace attitude and behaviour in the hotel organization.

From the point of view, work-family conflict can lead to the negativity of employee attitude and behaviour. The elements of work-family conflict will affect service recovery performance (Karatepe et al. 2006). Employees whose work and family roles interfere cannot satisfy both roles in the same time period because more attention directed at work more than family. When employees have work overload to do, it prevents them from enjoying family life and might feel stressed about their job because they concentrate and spend too much time at work more than with family. Judge, Boudreau, and Bretz (1994) mentioned that a lot of previous researchers had identified and predict the number of hours worked per week is a time-based conflict. It proves that the number of hours worked per week is positively related to work-family conflict.

This factor also may results in high turnover intention by the employees (Boyar, Maertz, Pearson, and Keough, 2003). Employees who cannot establish a balance between work-family conflict and family-work conflict may tend to leave the hotel organization in order to eliminate the conflict because of their family responsibilities and commitment as an

employee. This conflict will appear to be a high turnover rates which can give impact on service quality and produce various costs associated with recruitment and training the new employees in the hotel organization. It is important for the management to investigate and know the relationships by the factor of work-family conflict with turnover intentions in the hotel industry.

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) as cited by A.Ahmad (2008) stated that a form of work family conflict involves role-produced strain, which means a severe or excessive demand on the strength or abilities of someone or something such as pressure, burden, or feel stress of the job. The employee who feel a high levels of burden at work are more likely to have conflict when work responsibilities interfere with family roles because the employee may suffers from depression of the job and find it difficult to think rationally since they cannot balance between work and family factors. It had been proved by the previous researchers that work stress is positively related to work-family conflict.

2.2.2 Employee reward

Employee perceptions about reward influenced employee attitudes (Babakus, Yavas, Karatepe, and Avci, 2003; Ogaard, 2006). Reward can be referred as being how people are compensated according to their value to an organization which involves both financial and non-financial rewards (Armstrong, 1996). Shoaib, Noor, Tirmizi, and Bashir (2009) had recognized that employee rewards is very important since it has lasting impression on the employee and continued to support the employees' perception of their value to the organization they work with. Employee will give the best of their maximum efforts so that they will be rewarded by the management of the organization. Employee reward is one of the method of motivating employees in changing work habits and behaviours which benefited the hotel organization. Sutherland (2004) demonstrates that reward is the basic element which point out on how may the employees gain by spending their time and effort towards the achievement of company objectives in order to attract employees as the rewards are an appreciation for them by the organization and to retain valuable employees. According to Wang (2004), reward plays so many roles in an organization as it creates commitment among employees to better performance which leads to job satisfaction and improve their self-esteem.

There are two types of rewards, financial and non-financial rewards. Financial reward is about tangible rewards which these rewards are conferred to the job performed by employee such as salaries, incentive payment, bonuses, and promotion. For non-financial reward, it is about intangible rewards such as appreciation, recognition, and job satisfaction. Most of the organizations used non-financial reward as an effective way to motivate employee and as a satisfaction to the employee for giving so much efforts on their job done for the hotel organization (Frey, 1997). Mossbarger and Eddington (2003) had mentioned that the organizations often use rewards as a strategy to prevent employee dissatisfaction although it may not be the long term strategy to be used.

Reio and Callahon (2004) had described that both financial rewards and non-financial rewards can motivate the frontline employee which results in higher productivity. The motivation and the productivity of employees can be fulfilled by providing them the effective rewards which can results in improving performance of an organization (Deeprise, 1994). Again, Deeprise (2006) identified that managers need to provide incentives, in the form of recognition and rewards, to encourage people to maintain excellent performance and to improve unsatisfactory performance. With this approach, it may give accomplishment to an organization based on how an organization motivates their frontline employees and in the

way they monitor and evaluate their performance before the management makes decision on what types of reward should be given to an employee. Shoaib et al. (2009) had proved in his study that it is important for an organization to know the value of all the employees placed in the reward systems.

According to Mishra and Dixit (2013), the financial and non-financial rewards are related in increasing high productivity and employee's effort on their job which leads to the job satisfaction and feeling of happiness by an employee. The researchers also concluded that there is a positive relationship between employee's performance and rewards which leads to the outcomes of job satisfaction among the frontline employee. The employee commitment towards their job satisfaction means the employee have a positive behaviour that will give a positive impact towards service encounter and leads to the organizational efficiency to maintain good image and service. Based on the previous researchers in their study, there is a positive relationship of financial and non-financial rewards with employee performance in an organization.

2.2.3 Work environment

Work environment plays an important role in the employee's job satisfaction. Numerous behavioural studies have proved that a pleasant and comfortable work environment improves employees' productivity and reduces turnover. Robbins (2013) pointed out that working conditions will influence job satisfaction as the employee are concerned with a comfortable working environment and more likely to produce better work outcomes. Work environment can be referred as all the factors that are related about the job such as all the facilities for doing the job, comfort with the workplace, safety in the workplace, and the degree of noise. The elements of physical work environment include temperature, noise, hygiene, ventilation, and working hours should be appropriate so that the employees would not feel pressured and stressed while getting their task to be done (McCoy and Evans, 2005). Leaman (1995) as cited by N.Kamarulzaman et.al (2011) had stated that employee dissatisfaction to physical work environment is more likely in having lost of concentration at work. According to Ramlall (2003), a positive and good working environment may lead to employee retention as they feel they are valued employee to the organization.

According to George and Jones (1999), the poor working condition will make an employee feels dissatisfied to continue doing their task which may lead to negative job performance and affect employee commitment and intention to stay with the hotel organization. Safety and health. environment is one of the determinants that organization should take consideration of. Badekale (2012) stated that every organization is responsible for providing a safety and health environment in order to prevent their employees from getting any hurts, injuries or loss during work hours. By providing a safety environment, the employees are likely to engage high performance since they feel that their welfares are being guaranteed by the organization.

Next, lighting can be an aspect of work environment factor towards employee behaviour. An appropriate lighting enables employees to have a full concentration and minimize error which leads to increase productivity and employee performance in an organization ("Lighting in the Workplace" n.d.). The lighting level is needed and much easier for employees for getting their task done on time to be submitted to the management of the organization ("Lighting in the Workplace" et al.). Peter, Susannah, and Luc (2007) describe brightness and lighting as a mood and alertness of an employee as it will impact

on task performance of an employee. The researchers also said the exposure to the brightness of lighting during morning and afternoon will give an impact on employee's personal mood, alertness, productivity, and task performance when doing the task. Emmanuella, Christiana, Grace, Comfort and Leticia (2012) acknowledges the employee who use a computer display will prefer low lighting levels to perform tasks given due to reduce reflection from computer. While for those employees who use to read, write, or draw on paper will prefer high lighting levels because it will make them easier to perform tasks given and clearly seen small letters in a paper.

Roeloeofsen (2002) implies that by improving working environment will results in increasing the performance levels and reduce a number of absenteeism among the employee. In this new era, most of the organizations are taking serious about more effective strategy to environmental management in enhancing the high potential of the hotel organization by improving performance level which leads to the positive frontline employee behaviour on job satisfaction (Govindarajulu, 2004). The positive behaviour and satisfied frontline employee with their job will perform better to the organization profitability and productivity. They also will be more committed to the hotel organization and contribute more efforts in achieving the hotel organization's goals.

3. Methods

3.1 Data Collection

As for this research, to achieve the objective of the study, a review on a secondary data is to be carried out. Secondary data is a data and source obtained from information available and published reports such as bulletin, newspaper, journals, books, magazines, and websites which the information gathered is already exist and been gathered by the previous researchers. The data of the research study are collected as follows:

3.1.1 Journals and Articles

The major sources of this research study are journals and articles which are gathered from the Internet that contain the most specific and up-to-date information on research and usually requires professional or academic knowledge to be fully understood. The various journals and articles are used as a source to find important content to include in a literature review and as a point of the idea of this study. The journals and articles are selected obtained from various sources such as Google Scholar and electronic academic journal which are ProQuest and Emerald have broadened the potential audience for research articles.

3.1.2 Websites

Websites is a second source of the research study after the journals and articles. This source may give some additional information to include in a literature review, finding and discussion of the research study that will support the main point of this study.

4. Findings

This chapter will cover about the finding of this research study in translating the collected data into information needed to response to the problems presented and answer the research objectives.

4.1 Factors that influenced employee behaviour towards service encounter.

This study provides an understanding in identifying the factor that influence frontline employee behaviour towards service encounter which is work-family conflict, employee reward, and work environment as it results in the employee performance and retention towards the organization itself. The factor of work-family conflict illustrates that frontline employee role conflict with work and family are positively related to their attitude and behaviour in an organization. Karatepe et al. (2006) explains that the element of work-family conflict will influence the service recovery performance. Both of these work and family conflicts cannot be satisfied in the same period because more attention has been directed at work more than family. This is because the employee's commitment and responsibility through their work requirement is easier to quantify than the boundaries and responsibilities of the family role. Boyar et al. (2003) mentioned that the work-family conflict may results in high turnover retention by employees which they may tend to leave the organization.

The employees who feel a high level of burden at work are more likely to form a work-family conflict because they feel so much pressure of the job and find it difficult to think wisely. It had been proved by the previous researchers that work stress is positively related to work-family conflict.

Second, the employee reward. For their study on reward, Babakus et al. (2003) claims that employee perceptions about reward influence employee attitudes. According to Wang (2004), reward plays so many roles in an organization as it creates commitment among employees to better performance which leads to their job satisfaction and improve their self-esteem. Most of the organizations used non-financial reward as an effective way to motivate employee and as a satisfaction to the employee at doing so much efforts on their job done for the organization (Frey, 1997). Deeprose (1994) stated that organization can improve their performance by providing the employees effective rewards which can increase the motivation and productivity of an employee. With this approach, organization manages to monitor and evaluate the employee performance before the management makes decision on what types of reward should be given to them. According to Mishra et al. (2003), the types of reward such as financial and non-financial rewards are related in increasing high productivity and employee's effort on their job which leads to the job satisfaction and feeling happiness by an employee. The researchers also concluded in their study that there is a positive relationship between employee's performance and rewards which leads to the outcome of job satisfaction. It means the employees have a positive behaviour that will give a positive impact towards service encounter and leads to the organizational efficiency to maintain good image and service.

Next, work environment. Robbins (2013) pointed out that working conditions will influence job satisfaction as the employee are concerned with a comfortable working environment and more likely to produce better work outcomes. Employee dissatisfaction to physical work environment is more likely in losing concentration at work (Laeman, 1995). Badekale (2012) stated that every hotel organization is responsible for providing a safety and healthy environment since employees will thought their welfares are being

guaranteed by the hotel organization. The lighting also can be an aspect of work environment which enables employees to have a full concentration and minimize errors when doing their job. Improving working environment will help in increasing the performance levels, improving the high potential of the hotel organization and leads to the positive frontline employee behaviour on job satisfaction (Govindarajulu, 2004).

4.2 Relationship between frontline employee behaviour and service encounter

This study provides an understanding in identifying the relationship between employee behaviour and service encounter. Czepiel (1985) mentioned that the factors of employee personal characteristics or behaviour and guest's perception is influencing the outcomes during the service encounter. It is related to the guest's expectation which determine the guest's satisfaction and evaluation during service encounter. The management of the hotel organization should pay attention to both employee behaviour and guest mood as it shows and found that both positive and negative mood will influence guest's impression and encounter satisfaction (Winsted, 2000). It is noted that employees' attitude and behaviour to service encounter is a key to the productivity of the organization as it will affect to overall satisfaction of guest's response during their stay in hotel which leads to satisfying experience and influence future return intention. The hotel can also find out the feedback of guests and use this information in establishing strategy to fix and improve service procedures in hotel. This factor can improve the rate performance of frontline employees and shows efficiency of the organizational productivity in maintaining the relationship with the guest loyalty to the hotel. If the hotel organization does not monitor frontline employees to practice a good and positive attitude in front of the guest, it will increase guest complaint towards the service and can cause bad reputation of the hotel organization.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the outcomes of the study had been revealed that employees' behaviours give an impact on service encounter in customer's overall satisfaction. The finding of the study had been proved that the factors such as work-family conflict, employee reward, and work environment have great influence and gives impact to employee behaviour towards service encounter. The management of the hotel organization should pay attention to both employee behaviour and customer mood as it shows and found that both positive and negative mood will influence customer's impression and encounter satisfaction (Winsted, 2000). Most of the previous researchers clearly stated that the hotel employee especially the frontline employee can also affect the outcome of service experience to the customer and influence future return intention because they are the first person who will deliver the first impression and good service to the customers. The hotel organization should motivate frontline employees as they are the first contact of an organization in maintaining the relationship with customer and improve productivity in hotel.

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