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Abstract

Historically, part time employees have played a critical role in the delivery of guest services in the hospitality industry. This study evaluates commitment issues from 169 part time hospitality workers. Discussions focus on effective strategies to boost employee commitment and levels of employee support among part time workers in order to improve behaviors and enhance loyalty.

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By Misty M. Johanson and Seonghee Cho

Historically, part time employees have played a critical role in the delivery of guest services in the hospitality industry. This study evaluates commitment issues from 169 part time hospitality workers. Discussions focus on effective strategies to boost employee commitment and levels of employee support among part time workers in order to improve behaviors and enhance loyalty.

Introduction:

In the general business literature vast amounts of research exists in the area of organizational commitment. Studies have investigated the relationships between commitment and job satisfaction (Feather & Rauter, 2004); intention to leave or stay (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002); perceived organizational and supervisors' support (Beck & Wilson, 1998; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986); as well as, employees' behaviors and attitudes (Allan & Sienko, 1997; Thorsteinson, 2003). A fewer number of studies are published that have focused in the area of organizational commitment and part time employment relationships (Shockey & Mueller, 1994; Stamper & Van Dyne, 2001). Within the hospitality literature, little if any, recent research attempts to link part time employment relationships and organizational commitment. Overall, the literature within the general business environment has provided some conclusive results that can be applied to the hospitality industry, however, further evaluation of part time workers and their employment relationships is needed within the hospitality field to better understand this critical and necessary group of employees in order to assist our managers with strategies to enhance commitment levels of their part time workers and ultimately increase organizational success.

Essential Hospitality Workers

The hospitality industry has long considered part time workers a necessity for gaining a competitive advantage as they provide managers with a flexible source of labor during periods of fluctuating service demands (Enz & Inman, 1992). They have been considered to play a key role in the delivery of guest service and customer retention while offering wage and benefit savings to an organization (Stamper & Van Dyne, 2003). Although most part time workers typically perform the same job tasks and hold the same responsibilities as full time hospitality employees, management's perception of part time workers indicates that they are substandard to full time workers, thought to be less concerned with quality, cleanliness and considered less hardworking with higher rates of absenteeism (Inman & Enz, 1995). Interestingly, little empirical evidence actually exists in the hospitality literature to support or oppose this conviction of low commitment of part time hospitality employees despite their critical role within the industry.

Over a decade ago, research published on part time hospitality workers indicated that employees' work attitudes did not vary among work status (part time versus full time (Inman & Enz, 1995). As a result, researchers warned that what economic gains the industry may have made by employing low-cost part time workers was most likely lost through high levels of turnover that resulted from issues relating to managements perceptions, indicating that management may have in fact treated part time workers as less capable than their full time counterparts leading to unmotivated part time employees who eventually delivered poor service then quit (Inman & Enz, 1995). Only one recently published study applied to hospitality was found that addressed part time employee's value within the industry. This particular study analyzed organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) that part time hospitality workers performed (Stamper & Van Dyne, 2003). OCBs are those behaviors that describe employees' willingness to perform tasks that require effort beyond their prescribed role descriptions (Moorman & Harland, 2002). For example, employees choose to stay after their shift to help their co-workers just because they know the co-workers need some extra assistance and their help would result in improved customer service. The findings suggested that work status (part time versus full time) and organizational culture do in fact have significant effects on hospitality employee's work behavior (Stamper & Van Dyne, 2003). The results indicated that part time employees engage in less 'citizenship' behaviors than full time employees. Perhaps validating management's long and widely held perception that part time workers are dispensable. However, a key finding was reported in the general business literature, uncovering that behaviors of part time employees are in fact contingent on their commitment, implying that when part time employees' commitment is low, workers are unlikely to perform more OCBs (Van Dyne & Ang, 1998). This presents

a pressing need for management, to focus on understanding commitment issues, of perhaps their most crucial group of employees, to ultimately better behaviors and improve their organizations' bottom-line.

Why Study Commitment?

Employee commitment has been studied through two main streams, professional and organizational commitment. These two types of commitment are often called dual commitment. Professional commitment refers to the psychological attachments that employees form to their profession (Lee, Carswell, & Allen, 2000). Professional commitment has showed its link to improved employee performance, (Lee et al., 2000) and job satisfaction and decreased intention to leave (Bline, Duchon, Mexiner, 1991). On the other hand, organizational commitment (OC) is the extent to which a worker is involved in, and identifies with, their organization (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993). An employee's commitment to his/her employer is influenced by the employer's support, supervisors' support, or job satisfaction and has shown its relationship with decreased turnover intention. Organizational commitment is of interest in this study.

As employees form different levels and types of commitment towards organizations, it has been argued that evaluating the workers' perception of the organization's commitment toward the employees is also critical in understanding employment relationships (Allen & Sienko, 1997; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993). For example, it has been found that employees who feel strongly that their organization and supervisors support them at work, possess higher levels of commitment towards the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). In fact, perceived organizational support (POS) has been found to be the most important factor influencing OC (Beck & Wilson, 1995).

Moreover, when employees feel committed to an organization, they are likely to perform more appropriate behaviors (Van Dyne & Ang, 1998). Interestingly, the relationship between OC and behaviors was strengthened for part time employees, but not for full time workers (Van Dyne & Ang, 1998). This implies that if a part time employee is more committed to an organization, he or she will more likely perform desired behaviors. On the other hand, the increased commitment did not lead to better behaviors among full time employees (Van Dyne & Ang, 1998). Therefore, researchers concluded that behaviors of part time employees are contingent on their commitment, but the behavior of full time workers is independent of their attitude.

Furthermore, researchers have hypothesized that behaviors can influence organizational effectiveness and organizations' success. For instance, it has been proposed that behaviors influence the stability of organizational performance because "conscientious employees are more likely to maintain a consistently high level of output, thus reducing variability in a work unit's performance" (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000, p.545). Additionally, positive correlations were uncovered between conscientious and average profit per employee and a company's reliability (Yen & Niehoff, 2004). Additionally, 'helping' which is one of the citizenship behavior dimensions that is typically measured, was found to decrease food cost percentage and increase the operating efficiency ratio (Waltz & Niehoff, 2000), since employees who help others with their work would reduce work hours and help others become more productive employees (Podsakoff, et al., 2000).

Not only will employees who feel more committed to an organization perform more appropriate behaviors but they will also stay with the organization longer as well (Meyer, et al, 2002). Meta-analysis has indicated that employees with low levels of commitment are more likely to leave their organizations (Meyer, et al., 2002). Given that OC is an important antecedent of turnover (Erdheim, Wang, & Zickar, 2006; Peters, Jackofsky & Salter, 1981), it is therefore important for organizations to maintain high levels of employee commitment as well as perceived levels of support enhancing the organization's bottom line by promoting employee loyalty, reducing turnover costs and increasing quality guest service delivery (Lashley, 1995; Waltz & Niehoff, 2000).

Overall, these studies offer recommendations that are crucial in assisting managers with strategies for improving employees' attitudes, however, the focus of the research does not address variables of commitment of part time workers within the hospitality industry. Consequently, no empirical evidence was found that directly links organizational commitment, perceived organizational and supervisors' support, behaviors and loyalty of part time hospitality employees despite the fact that they are a necessity for gaining a competitive advantage within the industry. Therefore, this study seeks to determine whether any differences exist among part time employees' demographics and job characteristics and their levels of commitment, perceived levels of organizational and supervisors' support, and two specific dimensions of

organizational citizenship behaviors: helping and loyalty. These two specific dimensions of OCBs were chosen for analysis in this study as they have important implications for management in the hospitality industry. As presented previously, helping is a behavior that employees perform by assisting their colleagues beyond their required duties. These behaviors could lead to decreased labor costs and boost bonds among employees, consequently result in lowering turnover. Loyalty emphasized on promoting the organization's image, products and services. Although there has been no studies showing direct effects of employees' loyalty behaviors, it is assumed that the behavior may have impact on increasing a company's image and profitability.

Consequently, the primary goal of this research is to uncover whether or not part time employees' perceived levels of support, behaviors and loyalty, are predictive of organizational commitment within the hospitality industry. Uncovering this is essential for management in assessing how to achieve high levels of organizational success.

Investigating Employee Commitment
Sample and Data Collection:
A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to 508 entry-level employees from thirteen mid-to-upscale restaurants and three mid-to-upscale hotels in the Southeast region in the U.S. Only those who had worked for the organization for at least one month were invited to participate in this study. Employees were advised that participation was voluntary and that their responses would remain anonymous. Upon completion, participants submitted surveys to the researchers in secure envelops. Of 343 total returned surveys, 169 were classified as part time employees and therefore utilized for data analysis in this report. As a side note, the additional 174 surveys collected analyze full time employee-relation issues and are being further analyzed for future studies.

Measurement:
For the purpose of this research, six items were used to measure affective organizational commitment (OC) validated in a study by Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993). Perceived organizational support (POS) was measured with 17 items adapted from Eisenberger and Shani' study (1984). Perceived supervisors' support (PSS) was assessed with seven items developed by Pearce, Sommer, Morris and Frideger (1992). Helping and loyalty behaviors were then measured with ten items used in Moorman and Blakely's study (1995). Respondents were asked to rate the extent of their agreement for the items. All items were measured on a 7-point scale: 1=strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree. Lastly, five items were added to measure demographic information, age, gender, education, tenure, and ethnicity.

Reliability of each construct was measured using Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha level for each construct showed acceptable reliability levels: OC = .87; POS = .95; PSS = .93; Helping = .80 and Loyalty = .88. Since all constructs achieved a satisfactory reliability level, a mean score for each construct was computed and used for further analysis. To investigate whether POS and PSS affected employees' commitment and whether committed part time employees demonstrate stronger helping and greater loyalty behaviors, respondents were divided into three groups based on a responded score of OC on a scale of 7-point (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The three groups are named: 'committed', 'not sure group' (neither commitment nor not commitment), and 'not committed group'. The committed group consisted of 89 respondents who rated their OC at a 5-point or above; the unsure group consisted of 65 respondents who answered their OC at a score between 3.01 and 4.99; and the not committed group comprised of 13 respondents who rated OC at a 3-point or below.

Analysis of the Data:
An analysis of variance (ANOVA) with the OC group was employed to examine if POS and PSS affected employees' commitment, along with age, tenure, and education. ANOVA was also used to investigate whether committed part time employees help their co-workers and show greater loyalty than not committed part time employees. ANOVA was preferred over a regression analysis in this study because ANOVA reveals general profiles of the committed employee group and degree of organizational and supervisors' support that the committed employee group perceives. Understanding characteristics of the committed employee group is more important to firms since they can distinguish the committed group from the unsure and not committed groups, and in result emphasize factors increasing employees' commitment. Homogeneity of variances was then tested using Levene statistic before conducing a Post Hoc test to examine which group differs significantly from others. If the equal variance assumption was

met, Tukey was used for a Post Hoc test; Tamhane's T² was employed if the equal variance assumption was violated.

Reporting Commitment Levels:
Demographic Profiles of the Respondents:

Of the 169 part time hospitality employees participating in this study, 129 were working in the restaurant industry while 40 were employed part time within the lodging industry.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Demographic Attributes	n	%
Gender: Male	70	41.4
Female	98	58.0
Education: High School	23	13.6
Some College	60	35.5
Associate's Degree	32	18.9
Bachelor's Degree	46	27.2
Master's Degree	8	4.7
Ethnicity: Caucasian	90	55.2
Asian	7	4.3
Hispanic / Latino	8	4.9
American Indian	4	2.5
Average age: (range of 18 to 61 years)	29.8	
Average Tenure (in months):	29.3	
(range of 1 to 144 months)		

As Table 1 indicates, more than half of the respondents were female (n = 98). Overall, the participants were about 30 years old, on average, and have worked at their company about 29 months on average. Of the 169 respondents, 36% of them possess some college education (n = 60) and a 27% hold a bachelor's degree (n = 46). The majority of the participants were Caucasian (n = 90), followed by African American (n = 54), Hispanic/Latino (n = 8), Asian (n = 7), and American Indian (n = 4).

Characteristics of the Committed Employee Group

The Levene test showed that the three groups were not equally varied in age, tenure, education, and PSS. Thus, Tamhane's T2 was used to determine which group was significantly different. Tukey was used for POS.

As Table 2 indicates, age had a significant relationship with the degree of commitment. Employees in the committed group were older than those in the not committed group. The level of perceived organizational support and supervisors' support was significantly different among the three groups. The committed employees showed the highest POS level (M = 5.68), followed by the not sure group (M = 4.29) and not committed employees (M = 2.94). The same pattern emerged for PSS: the level of PSS was highest among the committed employees (M = 6.24), followed by the unsure employees (M = 5.10) and the not committed group (M = 3.22).

Table 2: Results of ANOVA for POS and PSS

	Committed	Not Sure	Not Committed	Levene Statistic	F-value	p-value
Age	31.70 a	27.75	27.25 a	9.96	4.23	.02
Tenure*	32.84	24.25	28.62	5.76	2.16	.12
Education	2.71	2.83	2.39	6.38	.86	.43
POS	5.68 a	4.29 a	2.94 a	.69	74.57	.00
PSS	6.24 a	5.10 a	3.22 a	23.13	47.04	.00

Note: Means with same letters are significantly different at .01 level.
* Tenure was measured in months

Commitment and Helping and Employee Loyalty

The Levene test showed that the three groups were not equally varied in helping and loyalty. Thus, Tamhane's T2 was used to determine which group was significantly different.

As Table 3 indicates, there were significant differences in helping and loyalty behaviors among the three groups. The committed employees showed higher levels of helping behaviors compared to the unsure and not committed employees, M = 6.05, M = 5.72, and M = 5.11, respectively. Employees' loyalty

was also greater among the committed employees (M = 6.38) than the unsure (M = 5.40) and not committed employee groups.

Table 3: Results of ANOVA for Helping and Loyalty

	Committed	Not Sure	Not Committed	Levene Statistic	F-value	p-value
Helping	6.05 a,b	5.72 a	5.11 b	6.02	9.7	.00
Loyalty	6.38 a,b	5.40 a	4.79 b	5.92	45.74	.00

Note: Means with same letters are significantly different at .01 level.

Enhancing Employee Commitment

This study was designed to investigate whether perceived support affected part time employees' commitment and whether committed part time employees demonstrated stronger helping behaviors and possessed greater loyalty. Overall, it was found that part time employees' perceived levels of support from their organizations and supervisors were strong predictors of commitment to their organizations in the hospitality industry. The workers' strong commitment did result in greater loyalty and better behaviors, consequently, part time employees were motivated to help their co-workers and promote their organizations to friends and family. The results suggest a number of significant theoretical, as well as, critical managerial and organizational implications.

First, the findings indicate that part time hospitality employees who perceived greater support from their organization and supervisors' reported higher levels of commitment. These results support the findings presented in the general business literature that greater levels of POS will strengthen an employee's commitment to the organization (Eisenberger, et al., 1986 found in Moorman & Harland, 2002). Secondly, age was found to be the only demographic variable to significantly influence part time employees' level of commitment, indicating that commitment levels were enhanced as age increased – again a finding consistent with the expectations of research in the general business environment (Stamper & Van Dyne, 2003). Third, the current study revealed that those part time employees with higher levels of commitment were found to perform more helping citizenship behaviors and possessed greater loyalty behaviors toward the organization. As suggested in the general business literature, when organizations treat part time employees with respect and value their well-being, the employees will more likely develop psychological attachment and consequently the commitment motivates them to go beyond what they are required to do at work (Van Dyne & Ang, 1998).

Overall, the theoretical implications uncovered in this research indicate that hospitality managers need to understand that when employees perceive their employers' commitment to them exceeding their expectations, the employees will be more likely to demonstrate stronger commitment to their organizations, and when employees are committed to their organizations, they will engage more strongly in behaviors of helping co-workers and showing greater loyalty toward their employers. Moreover, past studies have indicated the importance of understanding commitment on an organization's bottom line. As low or decreasing levels of commitment and perceived support are detrimental to both the organization and the individual employee, then it follows that the organization should formulate and implement strategies that strengthen or maintain initial high levels of these dimensions (Currie & Dollery, 2006). One study reported that commitment levels could be increased by soliciting employees' feedback and participation in the day to day decision making process (Beck & Wilson, 1995). Research on empowerment in the hospitality industry claims that employee empowerment has been used as a valuable technique to encourage the necessary level of commitment to organizational goals and that it provides the necessary discretion and autonomy to generate the level of expected guest service required in the hospitality industry (Lachley, 1995). Furthermore, since part time employees often expect less from an organization than full time employees do, they have been found to demonstrate stronger commitment when they perceive the organization considering them as valuable assets for the company (Van Dyne & Ang, 1998). Hospitality organizations should offer similar treatment for part time employees as they do their full time counterparts such as benefits, training and recognition.

It is suggested that future research seek to uncover additional factors that affect employment relationships of part time workers in the hospitality industry as they have been considered such a critical component of organizational effectiveness. Interestingly, general business literature has uncovered that part time employees who 'desire to work in a full time capacity' may eventually show stronger levels of desired behaviors because they aspire to upgrade their work status and prove to management their value and worth (Van Dyne & Ang, 1998), this variable has yet to be analyzed in the hospitality environment. It

is also suggested that future research focus on other areas that affect organizational commitment other than work status, such as job position or job type to uncover other potential influences of employee commitment. Lastly, it is recommended to explore antecedents of professional commitment.

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