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Measuring Service Innovation Performance through Team Culture and Knowledge Sharing Behaviour in Hotel Services: A PLS Approach

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Abstract

Increasing competition in the global marketplace demands hotels to develop a competitive advantage by ensuring innovative performing services. The rapid increase in the scope of service providers within various facets of Malaysian tourism and hospitality sector has not only limited the process of innovation performance but also the commitment of the managements' general practices to manage service innovation. Focusing on the Malaysian hotel industry, the objective of this study is to examine the influence of team culture and knowledge sharing behaviour on service innovation performance. Based on the literature review, team culture and knowledge sharing behaviour are hypothesised to have a significant impact on service innovation performance. Non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed amongst 327 employees working in luxury hotels within Klang Valley, Malaysia. Data was analysed using partial least squares (PLS) based structural equation modelling (SEM). All the hypothesised relationships are supported and the findings indicate that team culture and knowledge sharing behaviour have a significant effect on the service innovation performance. The hotels need to develop a strong team culture and knowledge sharing behaviour to accelerate the process of service innovation performance while providing the consumers better experiences. Implications, limitations of the study and future research suggestions are also discussed.

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1. Introduction

Globalization and growth of the hospitality industry in the 21st century, which includes the restaurants, accommodation, entertainment and transportation businesses, faces an increasing competition and requires a distinct measurement of their services (Monica-Hu, Horng & Christine-Sun, 2009). Service level and scalability features of hospitality services are continuously introduced while simultaneously achieving certain levels of service quality and sustainable growth (Evangelista, Lucchese & Meliciani, 2013; Parasuraman, A. Zeithaml & Berry, 1994; Tseng, Lin, Lim & Teehanke, 2015). The major focus of the traditional hotels are towards promotional development, cost-competitive and customer-focused-services - those which are continuously driving them towards service innovation for a profitable business process (Möller, Rajala & Westerlund, 2008; Lance, Bettencourt, Brown & Sirijanni, 2012). In pushing for a consistent high performance service, the service innovation and its accompanying dynamic capabilities (Orfila-Sintes & Mattsson, 2009) are the key drivers for the current generation of hospitality business practices. Some hotels focus on introducing new products while others focus on improving customer services to achieve a competitive advantage. The importance of the service innovation is to provide measurements of service performance, service problems and service delivery. Gaining a competitive edge over current competitive market service innovation is an essential concern for improving business service capabilities and quality upgrade of services (Orfila-Sintes, Crespi-Cladera & Martínez-Ros, 2005; Tseng et al., 2015).

Customers in particular always seek for new and unique experiences (Ali & Omar, 2014). To meet the requirements of the customers, a recent emphasis has been put on 'knowledge sharing' between hotel employees and an organization's soft elements such as 'team-culture' relationship to influence the service innovation performance (Monica Hu et al., 2009; Yu, Yu-Fang & Yu-Cheh, 2013). The dynamics of the service industry are moving at a fast pace where the products or services with a greater degree of innovation tend to accomplish higher satisfaction performance for consumers and higher financial performance for organizations (Tseng et al., 2015).

In this race for service innovation the Malaysian hospitality industry is not far behind (Parnian, Hosseini & Shwu, 2013) and with a continuous improvement in service performance of hotel services, it may be possible to satisfy the customers' novel demands. In 2013, Malaysia attracted a huge number of tourists and a receipt of US\$ 21.1 billion from the tourists is considered a huge impact on the nation's economy as well as the tourism industry of Malaysia (Ali, 2015), while a 2.7% of growth in tourist arrival has been indicated by United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) where a majority of the studies claimed that Malaysian hospitality industry is one of the key players for such performance (Inside Malaysia, 2012; Nair & Whitelaw, 2009). However, despite the increasing research on product innovation and service innovation, the majority of past research on the issues of innovation focuses on innovation in manufacturing firms (Monica-Hu et al., 2009; Yam, Lo, Tang & Lau, 2010; Lau, Yam & Tang, 2010) whereas a slight concern has been given to the service industry. A few studies have discussed the implication of service innovation performance in the hospitality and tourism sectors from the perspective of knowledge sharing and team-culture (Kim & Lee, 2006; Wang & Yang, 2007; Karlsen & Gottschalk, 2004; Chen & Cheng, 2012; Monica Hu et al., 2009). Although these studies have addressed different issues in different contexts, no relevant studies have been found in the Malaysian context addressing the assessment of service innovation performance in hotels through knowledge sharing and team-culture. This integration is to facilitate understanding of the relationship between service innovation performance and knowledge sharing in the hotel services and how team-culture can stimulate the ability of service innovation performance.

2. Literature review

2.1. Service innovation performance

Over the past years the service sector of hospitality and tourism industry has reached new levels and predominantly has been improving. The most important reason as identified by Osborne (1998) is that post 1985 studies, especially of innovation in services, have a strong socio-economic positioning. A scale has been developed by Scott and Bruce (1994) to measure the employee service innovation behaviour through interviewing high level managers in the firms. Through a continuous process of knowledge transfer and Enz and Siguaw (2003) stated that managers can learn through the success of the proven leaders in the hospitality industry and motivate their

employees to build a positive team innovation culture. Previously, many researchers have found that restaurants, hotels and other service based hospitality sectors tend to focus on quality improvement rather than pushing themselves towards innovation. The majority of the studies had not developed innovation capabilities within themselves. The commodification of any service is quite important, as it helps the service supplier to understand how the services have been accepted by service consumers and what their extra needs and wants are. Jeong and Oh (1998) proposed that, to meet the demands of consumers the organizations should conduct quality development through new services and modifications of old services. Service innovation is a notion for enhancement of the services which have been taken into practice. Service innovation performance is progressively measured with a set of criteria to improve the competitive strategy of any organization. Measurement is the primary objective to support the organization to develop their services skills and also define the design stages to develop the services. Berry, Shankar, Parish, Cadwallader and Dotzel (2006) identified that an innovation model that pushes forward any organization towards service innovation requires two distinctive service innovation approaches: (1) innovation in service delivery process (2) innovation of new service offerings that satisfy the customers' wants. These two identified approaches are equally dependent on employees' knowledge sharing behaviour and team culture for impacting a firm's performance through service innovation (Hu et al., 2009). Service innovation performance, incorporated with knowledge sharing from customers and frontline service personals will impact the sales, costs and competitive performance of the organization (Melton and Hartline (2013). Integrating customers, employees and partners helps in the process of innovation possibilities which is beneficial to an organization's service performance. Hence, a service provider plays the most important role to encourage and motivate the employees towards knowledge sharing intentions and also create a harmonious team culture within the organization which is essential for the innovation development process in gaining a competitive advantage.

2.2. Knowledge sharing behaviour

Qualitative research by Mason and Pauleen (2003) has revealed that sharing is the most important component in knowledge management implementation. Previous studies by Cabrera, Collins and Salgado (2006) identified that personality, willingness to share and organizational commitment as factors that determine individual engagement in intra-organizational knowledge sharing. Moreover, Clarke and Rollo (2002) stated that managing the knowledge is a social process, where one must take into consideration the influence of social and cultural factors as the majority of big and small companies' strategy is to integrate the knowledge, skills and expertise of their employees to gain a better edge in competitive advantage and for effective managerial practices in their daily operations. Factors such as technologies (Malhotra & Majchrzak, 2004), motivations (Ardichvili, Page & Wentling, 2003), leadership and cooperative culture (Yang, 2007) and integrated organizational communication (Moffett, McAdam, & Parkinson, 2003) will affect the knowledge sharing behaviours. Knowledge sharing can take place in different ways; it may be between employee-customer or employee-employee communications with their own knowledge skills. In a complex environment of hotels, personal and direct communication helps and creates a possibility for individuals and organizations to understand each other's behavior and culture which can be in terms of positive or negative aspects (Hu, 2009). From the positive aspect, knowledge sharing behavior sometimes aids the organization in terms of decision making and innovation possibilities, whereas a negative aspect can be counted as knowledge-reserve and less organization commitment from the employee perspective (Cabrera et al., 2006; Foss & Pedersen, 2002). "Knowledge is power"- employees in hospitality industry may reserve their knowledge for their own personal development due to the strong competition in the hospitality industry itself, and an intention towards knowledge sharing behaviour within themselves are not often noticed. Partial knowledge transfer are found to be more common (Goh, 2002; Hu, 2009) as an organization faces challenges while removing the knowledge-reserve behaviour from the employees. A majority of organizations try to understand team behavior towards sharing knowledge between them, which has been found to be one of the crucial factors to understand the team culture within them and this forces the organizations to create a positive team culture that supports vigorous collaboration between themselves. Furthermore, previous research showed a need for knowledge sharing and knowledge management in order to create new strategies and new innovation possibilities in the hospitality and tourism industry (Sungsoo, 2005; Al-Refaie, 2015; Grisseman, Plank & Brunner-Sperdin, 2013; Jiménez-Zarco, González-González, Martínez-Ruiz &

Izquierdo-Yusta, 2014). Hotels can improve their quality of service by enhancing their employees' knowledge through an understanding of customers' preference and improve their service accordingly. Empirical studies suggest that sharing of knowledge and information within and by the team reflects a well-developed "team process" behaviour and results in a better coordination and superior team service performance (Finnegan & Willcocks, 2006; Paton & McLaughlin, 2008; Yu et al., 2013). Through a positive knowledge sharing behaviour across it, the organization can utilize its available resources more strategically to improve their service delivery process and service innovation behaviour within the employees (Bon & Mustafa, 2013; Edvardsson & Olsson, 1996; Hu, 2009). The purpose of this study is to provide new insights into the knowledge sharing behaviour and service innovation performance of different hospitality teams through a conceptual model. Through an extensive literature review of knowledge sharing behaviour, team culture and service innovation performance it was found that knowledge sharing behaviour within the organization is considered as one of the major influential aspects to increase the service innovation performance within these teams. Henceforward, our study proposed that knowledge sharing behaviour has an impact on service innovation performance.

Hypothesis 1: Knowledge sharing behaviour positively relates to service innovation performance of employees.

2.3. Team culture, service innovation process and knowledge sharing behaviour

The most important element behind a successful hospitality organization is the teamwork of the workforce. Defined by Earley and Mosakowski (2000) team culture is mainly based on norms, expectations and roles of the team members. To create a strong team culture an organization must derive from a pre-existing culture that drove the organizations' success and that same pattern will help the new team members to develop new services for organizational success. Team culture concerns members' delegation, self-evaluation and facilitating other team members' performance (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000). The importance of team culture in service innovation is, team culture creates a strategic commitment of the team members to enhance teamwork with a better communication in form of formal or informal social interaction and motivate others as an overall which results in better service innovation performance (Chen, Kirkman, Kanfer, Allen & Rosen, 2007; Gaziulusoy, 2015; Goh, Chan, Kuziemyky & Goh, 2013; Hoegl et al., 2007). A team culture consist of a set of rules that have been simplified within each other's expectations, perceptions and roles to accomplish any work and it may enhance the work performance based on the information shared between members. These values are uniformly shared between service personnel and help them to create a strong team, but cultural values cannot be uniformly distributed as it depends on an individual's personal beliefs. A strong team culture requires a significant degree of overlapping workplace personality which doesn't relate to the individual's cultural beliefs. In the hospitality sector, the innovative team has a strong influential team culture as the knowledge sharing behaviour from the individuals and within the team is strong (Hu et al., 2009). Successful service innovation implementation depends on the service team performance, which comes from individual contributions. Gilson and Shalley (2004) identified that the most creative teams are those whose members realize that they are working on highly interdependent jobs that require high levels of creativity. As a team they should realize that shared goals must be fulfilled from every individual where they spend time together to improve the performance of the team. In this study we related the team culture to the service innovation performance and proposed that team culture is positively related to service innovation performance. The previous section of knowledge sharing behaviour and team culture literature helped us to identify that there is a relationship between both as in an organization it affects each other, herewith we are going to test the significant relationship between the mentioned factors.

Hypothesis 2: Team culture is positively related to service innovation performance of the employees.

Hypothesis 3: Knowledge sharing behaviour is significantly related to team culture of the employees.

3. Research methodology

The target population for this study was limited to the employees working in luxury hotels located within Klang Valley, Malaysia. The survey was conducted through face-to-face interaction with the employees from different

departments at the selected hotels. A survey was used to collect the data using non-probability convenience sampling technique. A total of 328 questionnaires were distributed and after deletion of incomplete responses, 300 questionnaires were usable. The response rate was 91.5%. Out of these 300 respondents, 46% were female and 54% were male. With respect to the educational level of respondents, a majority (63%) graduated from university, 13% went to senior high school and 12% went to technical college. In terms of the working experience 29% had working experience of less than one year, almost 26% had a working experience of 1 – 4 years and 26% of respondents had 5 to 10 years of working experience. In terms of working position, 37.3% respondents were first line staff, 23% were grassroots leaders or supervisors, 23% were unit chief managers and 15% were departmental supervisors. The questionnaire consisted of 37 items in total. Knowledge sharing behaviour was measured using 10 items, team culture was measured using 16 items and 11 items were used to measure service innovation process, adapted from Hu, Horng and Sun (2009). All the items were operationalized by using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

4. Findings

For this study, hypotheses were tested based on structural equation modelling using a Partial Least Squares (PLS) method. In order to conduct the analysis, Smart PLS M3 Version 2.0 (Ringle, Wende & Will, 2005) software was used. Bootstrapping technique was applied to determine the level of significance for the loadings, weights, and path coefficients. Following the procedure suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), validity and goodness of fit of measurement model was estimated before testing the structural relationships outlined in the structural model (See Table 1).

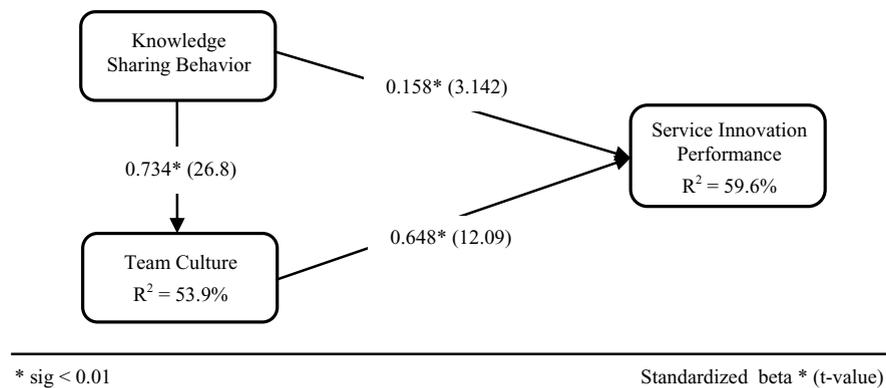


Fig. 1. Hypotheses testing.

For measurement model, all the standardized factor loadings of each construct were high (above 0.60) that ensured the convergent validity. Composite reliability for all the three constructs was above 0.50 that ensured the internal consistency. The average variance extracted (AVE) from all constructs exceeded the cut-off criterion of 0.50 (See Table 2), and were greater than the squared correlations between any pair of constructs (See Table 2). Since all these figures and measurement ensure reliability and validity of the measurement items, therefore, this research tested the same measurement model for further testing of the structural model and hypotheses.

Table 1. Validity and reliability for constructs.

Items		Loadings
Knowledge sharing behaviour (AVE = 0.507; composite reliability = 0.918)		
KS1	I am pleased to learn and share knowledge among different teams	0.784
KS2	I believe that members should help each other through teamwork to foster knowledge sharing	0.810
KS3	In a team setting, I would share knowledge with colleagues who had assisted me in the past	0.741
KS4	I want to become a person with professional knowledge in the eyes of my colleagues	0.741
KS5	I believe that knowledge sharing among teams can help establish my image as an expert	0.693
KS6	I respect others' impression that I am willing to assist people	0.750
KS7	Helping my team address work problems would make me feel happy and satisfied	0.733
KS8	I enjoy exchanging knowledge and I don't ask for anything in return	0.628
KS9	I am willing to use my spare time to help other team members	0.611
KS10	I would personally help other team members regardless of whether or not they ask for my help	0.643
Team culture (AVE = 0.509; composite reliability = 0.942)		
TC1	My team supports knowledge and technical information sharing	0.785
TC2	My direct supervisor supports knowledge and technical information sharing	0.737
TC3	My unit supervisor supports knowledge and technical information sharing	0.770
TC4	My department supervisor supports knowledge and technical information sharing	0.752
TC5	In my organization, there is always someone to address work problems	0.564
TC6	This hotel coordinates teamwork through formal rules and procedures	0.758
TC7	This hotel coordinates teamwork through pre-designed work plans and processes	0.755
TC8	This hotel coordinates teamwork through leaders or their assistants	0.726
TC9	This hotel assigns coordinators to coordinate teamwork	0.720
TC10	This hotel coordinates work by directly communicating with knowledgeable team members	0.654
TC11	This hotel's members hold regular meetings to coordinate teamwork	0.711
TC12	This hotel's members meet freely to discuss the coordination of teamwork	0.714
TC13	During our spare time, team members of this hotel socialize and hold various social activities	0.622
TC14	Each member of this team contributes equally to our hotel's service innovation	0.676
TC15	This service team possesses a fine spirit	0.715
TC16	Members of this team have a strong sense of participation	0.729
Service innovation performance (AVE = 0.551; composite reliability = 0.936)		
SIP1	At work, I seek new service techniques and methods	0.706
SIP2	At work, I sometimes come up with innovative and creative notions	0.691
SIP3	At work, I sometimes propose my creative ideas and try to convince others	0.765
SIP4	At work, I try to secure the funding and resources needed to implement innovations	0.801
SIP5	At work, I provide a suitable plan and workable process for developing new ideas	0.758
SIP6	Overall, I consider myself a creative member of my team	0.747
SIP7	This hotel provides a suitable environment for developing new services	0.736
SIP8	All departments and units interact well to develop new businesses	0.753
SIP9	When developing and executing new service projects, managers and front-line service personal collaborate closely	0.717
SIP10	This hotel will offer incentives or promotions to members involved in the development of new businesses upon the success of their project	0.781
SIP11	This hotel will dedicate some resources to developing new services	0.747

As PLS does not generate overall goodness of fit indices, a diagnostic tool is presented by Tenenhaus, Vinzi, Chatelin and Lauro (2005) to assess the model fit and is known as the goodness of fit (GoF) index. Hoffmann and Brinbrich (2012) report the following cut-off values for assessing the results of the GoF analysis: GoFsmall = 0.1; GoFmedium = 0.25; GoFlarge = 0.36. For the model used in this study, a GoF value of 0.498 is calculated which indicates a very good model fit. The result of the structural model showed that knowledge sharing behaviour has a positive and significant effect on team culture and service innovation performance. Moreover, team culture also has a positive and significant effect on service innovation performance. 53.9% of team culture is predicted by knowledge sharing whereas both the knowledge sharing and team culture predict 59.6% of service innovation performance. Hence, all the three hypotheses are supported (See Figure 1).

Table 2. Discriminant validity.

	1	2	3
Knowledge Sharing Behaviour	0.712*		
Team Culture	0.634	0.713*	
Service Innovation Performance	0.534	0.665	0.742*

Note*: The square root of AVE of every multi-item construct is shown on the main diagonal.

5. Conclusion

This study has been examined from employees' attitudes towards service innovation in Malaysian hotel industry and to test a model of knowledge sharing behavior, team culture and service innovation performance to identify till what extent knowledge sharing behavior and team culture effects on service innovation performance. Moreover, we also test the relationship between knowledge sharing behaviour and team culture. Three hypotheses were positively focused between each variable: the findings section shows that the three hypotheses have been positively supported by the empirical data showing that knowledge sharing behaviour is positively significant towards service innovation performance (Bank & Millward, 2000); between team culture and service innovation performance (Monica Hu et al., 2009) and knowledge sharing behaviour is also positively significant in relation with team culture (Goh C. et al., 2013). As supported by previous research, the knowledge sharing behaviour and service innovation performance, team culture and service innovation performance are both positive, as we predicted from the beginning. Recent literature showed that there is a relationship between knowledge sharing behaviour and team culture although very few studies have tested this. We tested the relationship in the context of Malaysian hotel industry sector and it has been found to be positively significant with each other, which is quite interesting. Through this positive impact researchers have further discovered the development of new services in the hotel industry while the employees will gain service innovation behaviour within their traits. Furthermore, a comprehensive study considering these new service development and employee service innovation behaviour as factors would be more relevant towards measuring service innovation performance in Malaysian hotel industry. As for the practical implications of these findings, it is quite obviously that employees' performance depends on a few relative factors. To achieve high service innovation performance in the hotel services the organization must develop and ensure knowledge sharing behaviour; furthermore, a better team culture means increased service innovation performance. The knowledge sharing behaviour within the hotel employees provide a positive effect on the overall team and service performance towards innovation possibilities. As for the managers, they have to focus towards individual employees, encouraging and satisfying all their service needs would definitely create a positive impact in the organization. The dominant effect of knowledge sharing behaviour and team culture towards service innovation performance will lead to customer satisfaction.

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