Factors Affecting the Hotel Service Personnel’s Internal Service Intention

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Abstract

Hospitality is a service industry in which team cooperation and assistance among coworkers is necessary. In this study, we investigated the effects of leader-member exchange (LMX) and attitude on internal service behavioral intention. In this study, we chose frontline professional service personnel from 28 international tourist hotels in Taiwan as research subjects and collected 645 valid questionnaires for statistical analysis. The results showed that LMX and attitude significantly affected internal service behavioral intention. The results of this study should provide practical and theoretical assistance guidance for the rapidly growing domestic hospitality industry in terms of increasing service competitiveness and facilitating the strategic planning of human resource management.

Keywords: leader-member exchange, internal service behavioral intention, hospitality industry

Introduction

The hospitality industry is facing increasingly fierce competition in recent years and is realizing that satisfying the diverse demands of customers within the industry requires coworkers to cooperate with and assist each other to provide better quality service and create satisfying brands (Chen, 2013). Internal service is an internal environment that results from coworkers that share a customer support mentality. Within this concept, employees are considered to be internal customers and other supporting personnel, including managers and other service supporting personnel, are considered to be internal service providers. In such an environment, good internal service benefits external customer service, thereby affecting the performance of the entire company (Large and König, 2009).

Leader-member exchange (LMX) is a type of exchange that has been attracting the most attention among social exchange premises (Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie, 2006). Within LMX, employees in formal work settings who hope to obtain rewards from their managers, such as good evaluations, raises, promotions, or favorable work arrangements, demonstrate behavior that is beneficial to the organization and is consistent with or even above what the
company and its managers require. Hotel service relies highly on mutual cooperation and cooperation among colleagues to provide superior service. Thus, in this study, we investigate the relationship among LMX, internal service attitude, and behavioral intention in international tourist hotels.

**Literature Review**

The theory of leader-member exchange (LMX) was first introduced by Graen et al. (Dansereau, Graen, and Haga, 1975; Graen and Cashman, 1975). LMX differs from other traditional leadership theories in that the social exchange view is used to model the process by which leaders exert their authority to develop exchange relationships with their subordinates. Within this theory, leaders often have a few close subordinates (which are called internal groups), such as assistants, aides, or consultants, with whom they maintain good formal and informal relationships, in terms of trust, interaction, and support, while establishing different interaction relationships with other subordinates (which are called external groups).

Li, Sanders, and Frenkel (2012) used luxury hotels in mainland China as research subjects and found that LMX had positive effects on employees’ investment in work and their willingness to assist and support each other. Kim, O’Neill, and Cho (2010) investigated reasons for mutual cooperation among workers in the hospitality industry and found that LMX encouraged workers to voluntarily provide service and assistance to obtain rewards or positive responses. Thus, we proposed the first hypothesis: LMX is significantly correlated with workers’ internal service attitude.

TPB is an extension of the theory of reasoned action that was developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). According to the TPB, an individual’s attitude towards certain behavior is his favorable or unfavorable evaluation of certain behavior. Attitude can affect the individual’s intention, which further determines his behavior towards the subject. Taylor and Todd (1995) state that the more positive an individual’s attitude towards specific behavior is, the more positive and stronger is this individual’s intention for such behavior and vice versa. Internal service is the provision of service to other units or individuals within an organization (Billy, Pearl, Gail, and Skip, 2006). Boshoff and Mels (1995) found that employees and departments are both users and providers of service. This internal service affects the demonstration and effects of services to outside customers (Large and König, 2009). Thus, we proposed the second hypothesis: attitude is significantly correlated with workers’ internal service behavioral intention.

**Methodology**
In this study, a questionnaire survey was used to investigate the effect models of LMX, attitude, and internal service behavioral intention for service personnel in the domestic hospitality industry. We used an LMX questionnaire that was developed by Ma and Qu (2011), of which consisted of 6 questions. We used the TPB questionnaire of Beck and Ajzen (1991) to develop questions related to attitude, and internal service behavioral intention, each of which included 7 and 3 items, respectively, for a total of 10 items. We presented a preliminary questionnaire to 5 scholars and professionals in the industry to evaluate the appropriateness of the questionnaire and modified the language and narrative of the questionnaire such that the questionnaire could be used to measure all of the variables in this study. In both sections, a Likert 5-point scale was used to describe the degree of agreement, i.e., strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The third section asked for basic information about the interviewees’, including demographic variables such as gender and age.

According to statistics provided by the Taiwan Ministry of Transportation and Communication in the Bureau of Tourism, there are 68 international tourist hotels in Taiwan. We contacting the senior managers of these hotels, and a total of 28 hotels were willing to participate in the questionnaire survey. In this study, we interviewed the frontline service personnel at these 28 international tourist hotels, including personnel at front desks, in service centers, in housekeeping, and in restaurants. We sent out 840 questionnaires and collected a total of 645 valid questionnaires (the valid return rate was 76.8%). We used validity analysis, correlation analysis, analysis of variance, and regression analysis to investigate the correlations among LMX, attitude, and internal service behavioral intention and also verified the framework and hypotheses of this study.

**Results**

Females accounted for 62.3% of the 645 interviewees. The majority (66.2%) of the interviewees were between 21 and 39. A large percentage (54.9%) of the interviewees had college degrees. The highest percentage (53.4%) of the interviewees had 5 years or less experience in the hotel industry. The highest percentage (64.8%) of the interviewees had average monthly incomes between NT$20,000 and NT$50,000. The interviewees were distributed among the following departments: the highest percentage was in housekeeping (33.4%), and the second and third highest percentages were in rooms division (27.6%) and the restaurant (25.9%), respectively.
We used correlation analysis to determine the relationships among LMX, attitude, and internal service behavioral intention. First, we found that LMX was significantly correlated with attitude and internal service behavioral intention. Next, we found that attitude was significantly positively correlated with internal service behavioral intention.

Using hierarchical regression analysis, we found that age, the number of years of work experience, and monthly income all had significant explanatory power on internal service behavioral intention. In addition, after controlling the effects of personal traits, we found that LMX significantly affected the internal service behavioral intention (Beta=.19, t=2.95, p=.02). After controlling the effects of personal traits on LMX, we found that the attitude significantly affected the internal service behavioral intention (Beta=.25, t=4.49, p=.00).

**Conclusion**

In this study, we found that LMX was significantly positively correlated with internal service attitude. Thus, we confirmed the first hypothesis of this study (i.e., LMX is significantly correlated with workers’ internal service attitude). Next, we also used regression analysis to find that LMX and attitude significantly affected internal service behavioral intention. Thus, we confirmed the second hypothesis (attitude is significantly correlated with workers’ internal service behavioral intention) of this study.

Li, Sanders, and Frenkel (2012) and Kim, O’Neill, and Cho (2010) conducted research studies on the hospitality industry and found that leaders who voluntarily provided service and assistance to encourage returns or positive responses from subordinates positively stimulated workers’ investment in the jobs and their willingness to assist and support each other. Yang (2010) investigated the causes and effects of job satisfaction for workers in the hospitality industry and found that using social exchange to establishing work satisfaction affected workers’ investment in the job and their willingness to support each other. The results of the present study support the views of Guchait, Pasamehmetoglu, and Dawson (2014); Li, Sanders, and Frenkel (2012); Kim, O’Neill, and Cho (2010); and Yang (2010). We found that LMX positively affected hotel workers’ internal service behavioral intention. Moreover, the results of this study support the premise of TPB. We found that it was more likely to observe internal service behavioral intention when surveyed workers assisted coworkers or provided services that their coworkers needed with an accepting and positive attitude would consider assisting coworkers as a positive contribution.
This study makes some primary contributions. First, we developed a correlation model among LMX, attitude, and internal service behavioral intention that was based on studies in the literature. Second, we found that the attitude affected internal service behavioral intention significantly. Therefore, we recommend that hotel managers establish mechanisms to help workers demonstrate internal service behavior, such as employee rewards, connecting promotion to internal service behavior, presenting public awards for internal service behavior, and announcing support for internal service behavior. For workers to voluntarily or actively assist or support coworkers, senior managers must clearly support such behavior or establish specific rules and incentives to motivate workers to learn about managers’ interest in and recognition of internal service behavior, mutual support, and a cooperative atmosphere. When senior managers show workers that internal service behavior will benefit their work, workers will become willing to demonstrate internal service behavior. The results of this study should provide practical and theoretical assistance guidance for the rapidly growing domestic hospitality industry in terms of increasing service competitiveness and facilitating the strategic planning of human resource management.

References


