



Does transformational leadership style influence employees' attitudes toward food safety practices?

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study were to examine whether transformational leadership style (TL) and organizational climate (OC) impact employees' attitudes and intentions to follow safe food handling practices. We also set out to investigate the moderating effect of food safety certification on the relationships among TL, OC, and employees' attitudes and intentions to follow food safety practices in restaurants. Questionnaires were distributed to restaurants in one state. Structural equation modeling techniques and multiple group analysis were used. The results of this study indicate that TL did not impact employees' attitudes and intentions. However, TL significantly impacted OC, and OC significantly impacted employees' attitudes and intentions to follow safe food handling practices; additionally, employees' attitudes significantly impacted intentions to perform safe food handling practices. Furthermore, the moderating effect of food safety certification on the relationships among TL, OC, and employees' attitudes and intentions was also significant. The results of this study not only provide a theoretical framework but also present more detailed diagnostic information regarding the impact of TL and OC on employees' attitudes and intentions to follow safe food handling practices.

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1. Introduction

Serving safe food in foodservice establishments is especially important in the prevention of possible foodborne illness (FBI) outbreaks. Poor practices related to safe food handling, such as improper temperatures, improper hygiene, and cross-contamination, are significantly related to FBI outbreaks (CDC, 2011; FDA, 2010; Pilling et al., 2008). Pilling et al. (2008) have suggested that poor practices related to food handling are the result of employee noncompliance. A total of 816 FBI outbreaks with 80,682 reported cases were associated with food workers (including individuals who harvest, process, prepare, and serve food) between 1927 and the first quarter of 2006 (Greig et al., 2007). Even though the exact numbers and causes of foodborne disease outbreaks in the restaurant industry are not known, the number of FBI outbreaks

associated with food workers appears to be increasing (Greig et al., 2007).

While the health inspectors and inspection processes are a vital part of ensuring food safety in restaurants, restaurant managers may play an even more important role in the food safety of the restaurant industry because managers spend much more time involved in the operation. Managers and supervisors could serve as role models to their employees by strictly adhering to food safety rules and by keeping their work sites clean (Arendt et al., 2011; Nieto-Montenegro et al., 2006) because if the managers think their workplaces and eating places must be clean and sanitary, they are more likely to make efforts to enforce the Food Code and provide their employees with food safety training programs and practices. In addition, some researchers (Arendt and Sneed, 2008; Griffith et al., 2010a,b; Powell et al., 2011) have found that the supervision in restaurants is a key factor in employees' motivations to adhere to safe food handling practices. The authors further suggested that the context of the organization should be considered, such as leadership programs, food safety management systems, food safety environments and organizational structures. In addition, the study conducted by Arendt et al. (2011) identified four factors that serve to motivate retail foodservice employees to follow food safety practices: (1) communication between employees and supervisors, (2) rewards and punishments, (3) resources, and (4) intrinsic

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motivators, such as feeling, responsibility, satisfaction, etc. Although many factors are considered to influence employees' motivations for following food safety practices, past studies in the area of food safety have not examined the influence of TL and OC on employees' internal motivations to adhere to such practices, rather they have focused on monetary and other tangible rewards (external motivators).

Among different styles of leadership, the impact of servant and relational leadership styles also have not been examined with respect to food safety. While the servant leadership style primarily focuses on employees increasing their autonomy, personal growth, and well-being (Dierendonck, 2011; Stone et al., 2004) and the relational leadership style focuses on the nature of the relationship between managers and employees (not based on hierarchy) (Uhi-Bien, 2006), TL focuses on organizational objectives (tasks). In other words, transformational managers empower and support their employees, thereby enhancing their commitment toward the organizational objectives. Therefore, this study explored managers' individual considerations towards motivating their employees and the ways in which managers inspire and stimulate their employees' attitudes and behavioral intentions to follow food safety practices (organizational objectives).

Previous studies (Frash et al., 2005; Mitchell et al., 2007; Pilling et al., 2008; Powell et al., 2011) have identified barriers/failures that affect employees' food safety practices. Such examples include pressure with respect to time, inadequate facilities and supplies, lack of accountability, lack of involvement of managers and coworkers, and organizational failure to support food safety practices. These barriers/failures are related to the workplace environment, its conditions and climate including the degree to which managers are involved. To mitigate barriers and encourage the adherence to workplace food safety practices, certain organizational behaviors have been suggested, including providing supervisory and peer support, adequate resources, training, organizational support, and an appropriate management culture (Frash et al., 2005; Griffith et al., 2010a,b; Medeiros et al., 2012; Murphy et al., 2011; Powell et al., 2011). In addition, Mitchell et al. (2007) said, "researchers in the food safety arena need to pay more attention to understanding the 'insider' perspectives of the individuals whose behavior they are intending to change." However, there is no empirical study or theoretical model to support that these suggestions are effective in restaurants that use relevant organizational theories. Accordingly, additional research about the contextual and organizational influences on employee food safety handling behavior is needed (Mitchell et al., 2007).

Organizational food safety performance (i.e., foodservice sanitation inspection scores/grades given by health departments) is an indicator of a restaurant's sanitary conditions (Lee et al., 2012), which are mostly maintained by the frontline employees. Thus, managers must identify possible factors that will influence employees' attitudes and intentions to follow food safety practices within their workplaces. As a result, this study examined the impact of barriers and suggestions related to the insider perspectives of the managers and organizational influences on food safety practices in restaurants. Specifically, the purpose of this current study was to examine the effect of the previously unexplored theory of TL and OC on employees' attitudes and intentions to adhere to food safety practices. Furthermore, this study investigated the moderating effect of food safety certification on the relationships among TL, OC, and employees' attitudes and intentions to follow food safety practices in restaurants. This study will provide practical guidelines for changing food safety behaviors in restaurants, and it should be useful in creating tailored training programs designed to improve employees' food safety practices (i.e., food code compliance). Furthermore, this study identified how employees think about their work environment and TL. Thus, the results of this

study will be useful in developing an appropriate food safety climate in workplaces and in improving the relationship between managers/supervisors and frontline employees. In addition, this study will help managers/supervisors better understand employees' attitudes and intentions to follow food safety practices and, in turn, maximize employees' food safety performance. Therefore, the results of this study will provide practical recommendations and possible solutions for improving restaurants' sanitary conditions, thereby reducing FBI outbreaks in the restaurant industry.

2. Literature review

2.1. Transformational leadership style (TL)

Burns (1978) defined the transforming leader as one who "is able to lift followers up from their petty preoccupations and rally around a common purpose to achieve things never thought possible". Transformational leaders have four attributes: idealized influence (charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985). Idealized influence, or charisma, describes leaders who have great power and influence to be strong role models for followers. Transformational leaders have high standards for moral and ethical conduct and provide a vision and a sense of mission for the followers. Thus, followers have deep respect for these leaders, and they trust and admire them (Northouse, 2004). Inspirational motivation involves the arousal and raising of motivation beyond original expectations. Intellectual stimulation includes leadership that stimulates followers to think about old problems in new ways. Transformational leaders encourage followers to rethink ideas that they had never questioned before and to take risks. Individualized consideration involves supporting and listening to the individual needs of followers. Transformational leaders assist in the career development of individual followers (Northouse, 2004).

Over the past 50 years, leadership has been considered as an OC antecedent (Zohar and Tenne-Gazit, 2008) because the top leader creates and develops the climate and culture of an organization. Transformational leaders have closer relationships with their followers, however, because they establish mutual trust, share visions, and have clear perceptions regarding the organization's policies, procedures, and practices (Zohar and Tenne-Gazit, 2008). For instance, general managers' transformational leadership practices in the work environment include sharing organizational vision and inspiring, intellectually stimulating and instilling higher order ideals and values among subordinates (Patiar and Mia, 2009). Additionally, the transformational leader shows consistent behaviors across situations so that variations in followers' perceptions regarding an organization's policy and procedures will be reduced (Zohar and Tenne-Gazit, 2008) and a stronger OC will be created. The transformational leader also provides a supportive climate and encourages followers to come up with new ideas to solve problems, which in turn, empower subordinates and increases their workplace enthusiasm.

In the hospitality industry, TL is considered an efficient way for management to utilize human resources and the ideal way to lead frontline hotel employees (Clark et al., 2009; Tracey and Hinkin, 1994). More specifically, TL has strong positive correlations with four outcome measures with respect to the employees: mission clarity, role clarity, openness of communication, and satisfaction with leaders (Tracey and Hinkin, 1994). A study conducted by Clark et al. (2009) found that transformational (empowering) leadership was positively associated with shared values between the hotel and its frontline employees, and the study further indicated that the shared values had a positive effect on employees' role clarity, job satisfaction, and commitment to service quality. However, a study

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