

# Does Customer Orientation Mediate the Effect of Job Resourcefulness on Hotel Employee Outcomes? Evidence from Iran

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This study proposes and tests a conceptual model that investigates whether customer orientation acts as a mediator of the relationship between job resourcefulness and hotel employee outcomes. The results from a survey of 145 frontline hotel employees in Iran suggest that customer orientation has a full mediating role in the relationship between job resourcefulness and role-prescribed customer service. Contrary to the hypothesised relationships, there is no empirical support for customer orientation as a mediator of the impact of job resourcefulness on job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Theoretical and practical implications of the results are discussed.

**Keywords:** customer orientation, hotel employees, Iran, job outcomes, job resourcefulness

Frontline employees in the hospitality industry have to provide quality services to customers and display effective recovery efforts for restoring the satisfaction of disgruntled customers, despite the stressful and demanding situations in the workplace. With this realisation, managers need to give serious consideration to the acquisition and retention of talented employees (Deery, 2008; Raybould & Wilkins, 2006; Solnet & Hood, 2008). Job resourcefulness and customer orientation are among the critical personality traits that seem to pay dividends in frontline service jobs (Karatepe, 2011a; Yavas, Karatepe, & Babakus, 2011).

Job resourcefulness refers to 'the enduring disposition to garner scarce resources and overcome obstacles in pursuit of job-related goals' (Licata, Mowen, Harris, & Brown, 2003, p. 258). Job resourcefulness is a situational-level personality trait within a hierarchical personality structure and emerges from the joint effects of elemental (e.g., emotional instability) and compound personality traits (e.g., competitiveness) (Licata et al., 2003). Job resourcefulness arises from enduring pressures to act in certain ways in a specific work environment (Ashill, Rod, Thirkell, & Caruthers, 2009). Customer orientation is defined as 'an employee's tendency or predisposition to meet customer needs in an on-the-job context' (Brown, Mowen, Donovan, & Licata, 2002, p. 111). As a surface-level personality trait, it is also within a hierarchical personality structure and

results from a combination of elemental, compound and situational traits, as well as the specific work environment (Licata et al., 2003). Job-resourceful employees can excel in work environments that are devoid of job resources (Harris, Artis, Fogliasso, & Fleming, 2007). Customer-oriented employees can engage in good interactions with customers to deliver high-quality services in the workplace (Babakus, Yavas, & Ashill, 2009).

## *Purpose*

Against this background, this study proposes and tests a conceptual model that investigates customer orientation as a mediator of the relationship between job resourcefulness and hotel employee outcomes. Job satisfaction, role-prescribed customer service and turnover intentions are the outcomes studied in the model. Job satisfaction is defined as 'the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one's job values' (Locke, 1969, p. 316), while turnover intentions refer to employees' willingness to leave an organisation (Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & De Chermont, 2003). Role-prescribed customer service refers to 'expected employee behaviours in serving the firm's customers' (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997, p. 42). These relationships are assessed based on data obtained from frontline hotel employees in Iran.

The present study contributes to the hospitality management and marketing literature in two ways. First, acquiring and retaining a pool of job-resourceful frontline employees is particularly important, because frontline employees have frequent face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions with

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customers, work under job resource constraints and have to display high-quality job performance on a continuing basis. Since today's competitive market environment pays utmost attention to customer sovereignty, it is also critical to acquire and retain a pool of customer-oriented frontline employees. In their review of human resource management issues in the tourism and hospitality industry, Kusluvan, Kusluvan, Ilhan and Buyruk state:

... more research is needed to define the personality traits and emotional and aesthetic qualities of prospective employees as well as how these traits and qualities actually affect employee, customer, and organisational outcomes and whether such people are willing to work in and have vocational commitment to the industry, given the often poor employment conditions. (2010, pp. 192–193)

Obviously, there is a dearth of empirical research pertaining to personality traits in general. Other personality variables such as emotional intelligence, core self-evaluations and polychronicity appear to be critical in frontline service jobs (e.g., Jang & George, 2012; Jung & Yoon, 2012; Karatepe, Keshavarz, & Nejadi, 2010). Due to the paucity of empirical research on job resourcefulness and customer orientation (Karatepe, 2011a, in press; Yavas et al., 2011), this study centres on the mediating role of customer orientation with regard to the effect of job resourcefulness on job outcomes.

Second, most of the empirical studies on job resourcefulness and customer orientation have emerged from data based on the samples of the developed western countries (e.g., Germany, New Zealand and the United States). Extension of research to other countries such as developing nonwestern countries is significant. Therefore, this study uses data from frontline hotel employees in Iran (officially known as Islamic Republic of Iran) that is a developing Middle East country. The Iranian work environment is noted for nepotism and favouritism. That is, kinship relations influence managerial decisions in the organisation (Karimi, 2008). It is a common belief among employees that favouritism, unfairness and subjectivity impede a reliable performance appraisal process (Namazie & Frame, 2007). There are poor service standards, especially in the major and quasi-state hospitality businesses, which also seem to create stressful situations for frontline employees in the workplace (Karatepe, 2011b). Under these circumstances, making wrong decisions about the hiring process can be partially responsible for these poor service standards. Finally, the results of this study would provide useful implications concerning the better management of frontline employees in the hotel industry.

## Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

### Background

Two important observations surface from a synthesis of limited writings on personality traits in frontline service jobs in the hospitality management and marketing literature. First, empirical studies have focused on the effects of personality traits on various outcomes. For example, Silva (2006) demonstrated that the Big Five personality traits (e.g., conscientiousness, emotional stability) as well as locus of control were positively related to job satisfaction and organisational commitment among nonsupervisory hotel employees. The results of a research among frontline hotel

employees in Northern Cyprus indicated that trait competitiveness, self-efficacy and effort were positively associated with job satisfaction and job performance and were negatively related to turnover intentions (Karatepe, Uludag, Menevis, Hadzimehmedagic, & Baddar, 2006). The results of a study in Nigeria revealed that frontline hotel employees with negative affectivity had heightened emotional dissonance and emotional exhaustion, while those with intrinsic motivation experienced low levels of emotional dissonance and emotional exhaustion (Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009).

In addition, Tews, Stafford and Tracey (2011) demonstrated that restaurant managers paid more attention to conscientiousness, agreeableness and emotional stability as the predictors of job performance than to general mental ability in their hiring preferences. A study conducted with frontline hotel employees in Iran illustrated that core self-evaluations mediated the effect of co-worker support on vigour and dedication (Karatepe et al., 2010). In a study of nonsupervisory hotel employees, Jang and George (2012) found that polychronic employees were satisfied with their jobs and therefore displayed low levels of turnover intentions. According to the results of another study conducted with frontline hotel employees in Korea, it was shown that emotional intelligence reduced counterproductive work behaviours, while it enhanced organisational citizenship behaviours (Jung & Yoon, 2012).

Second, empirical studies have tested personality traits as moderators. For instance, Karatepe (2011a) showed that job resourcefulness mitigated the effects of work–family conflict and family–work conflict on job satisfaction among frontline hotel employees in Nigeria. A study by Karatepe and Tizabi (2011) indicated that the interaction of intrinsic motivation and positive affectivity weakened work-related depression for a sample of frontline hotel employees in the United Arab Emirates. In a study of frontline hotel employees in China, Zhao and Namasivayam (2012) reported that the negative effect of work–family conflict on job satisfaction was weaker among employees with chronic promotion focus, while the detrimental impact of family–work conflict on job satisfaction was stronger among employees with chronic prevention focus. Hung, Yeh and Shih (2012) found evidence among hotel employees in Taiwan that low levels of political skill resulted in a negative effect of voice behaviour on performance ratings.

Although limited in number, the aforementioned studies have enhanced the understanding pertaining to various personality traits as antecedents or moderators. However, very little attention has been given to job resourcefulness as a situational-level trait and customer orientation as a surface-level trait in the hospitality management and marketing literature (Karatepe, 2011a; Yavas et al., 2011).

### Hypotheses

According to the hierarchical personality model, personality traits can be organised based on the level of their abstraction. That is, they can be organised in varying degrees of abstraction (Harris, Artis, Walters, & Licata, 2006). As a situational-level trait, job resourcefulness is influenced by elemental and compound traits. Job resourcefulness, in

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