



Do emotions play a mediating role in the relationship between owner leadership styles and manager customer orientation, and performance in service environment?

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the dynamic relationships among leadership style (transformational and transactional), emotion in service employees, customer orientation (dimensions of enjoyment and needs), and job performance. The study proposes a model based on existing literatures and examines the mediating role of service employees' emotion in the relationship between leadership style and their customer orientation. The study found that all four elements of transformational leadership have a significant effect on positive emotion. Emotion is found to have a significant influence on both enjoyment and needs dimensions of customer orientation and to partially mediate the relationship between leadership style and customer orientation.

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1. Introduction

The topic of leadership has received a lot of attention from researchers of various disciplines as leadership influences followers' attitudes and behaviors, and thus, is considered to play a pivotal role in organization development and job performance. Researchers in the fields of organizational behavior and leadership have examined leadership styles and their effects on such job-related variables as job satisfaction, job stress, role conflict, job performance and organizational commitment (Humphreys et al., 2003; MacKenzie et al., 2001; Stock and Hoyer, 2002). The sales management literature also suggests that leadership style affects attitudes and behaviors of sales managers or sales people, and studies in this area have focused on examining the influence of leadership on such outcome variables as trust, role ambiguity, sales performance, and satisfaction with the job (MacKenzie et al., 2001).

However, very little is known about how leadership style affects service employees in a service setting. In the service industry, employees play a critical role in determining the quality of service and customer's overall experience with the company. Thus, service employees' disposition to orient their focus to customers (customer orientation) is an essential element for making a successful service delivery, achieving customer satisfaction, and earning

repeat business. Many researchers (Mowen, 2000; Brown et al., 2002) treat customer orientation as a high-level personality trait called “surface trait,” an enduring disposition to behave in a consistent manner in a specific context. For example, a service employee may treat customers with delightful manners at work, revealing his/her surface trait that is specific to the given context (on-the-job), while the same person may not behave the same way at home. Our approach is consistent with prior research that customer orientation is a surface trait that is context-specific (e.g., job-related context). Researchers suggest that there are different dimensions of customer orientation (Brown et al., 2002). For example, Brown et al. (2002) view that customer orientation encompasses need dimension (employee's tendency to meet the needs of the customers) and enjoyment dimension (employee's tendency to draw pleasure from serving the customers). Examining different dimensions of customer orientation and their separate effects on service delivery process will be useful because it will allow us to have a deeper understanding of the influences concerning customer orientation. Therefore, this study, by examining how leadership influences service employees' customer orientation, adds to an insufficient but slowly growing body of knowledge about leadership style and its influences on service-related variables.

A recent stream of research suggests that understanding service employees' emotion is important for understanding their attitudes and behaviors as emotions are at the core of human experiences. For example, some studies suggest that “emotional labor” service employees are required to perform is an intrinsic part of the job and employees' emotion is related to their attitude toward the job,

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job performance, and satisfaction with the job (Bitner, 1992; Kelley and Hoffman, 1997). These studies imply that emotion should be considered in examining the dynamic relationship between leadership style and service employees' attitude and behaviors. Although emotion has received a lot of attention from researchers especially in the area of services marketing, there is very limited research conducted on the role of emotion in explaining the relationship between leadership style and employees' attitude and behaviors. This study is an attempt to narrow this gap in the literature.

Specifically, this study will address the following research questions: (a) Does leadership style have a significant effect on service employees' emotion? If so, which style is more effective at arousing positive emotion and reducing negative emotion in service employees? (b) Does emotion affect customer orientation in service employees? (c) Does customer orientation influence job performance? If so, which dimension of customer orientation is more effective at enhancing job performance? and (d) does emotion mediate the relationship between leadership style and customer orientation? Understanding the influence of leadership style on employees' emotion, which is expected to influence customer orientation and job performance, is important from the strategic aspect of developing a leadership style that contributes to arousing positive emotion and instilling customer orientation in service employees and enhancing their job performance.

The results of the study will reveal not only the role of leadership style in arousing emotion but also the role of emotion in the relationship between leadership style and customer orientation. The findings will have important implications as to how organizations can achieve high customer orientation and job performance.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1. Leadership style

Leadership style has been studied extensively in various contexts and from many different theoretical perspectives. Leadership is typically defined as traits, qualities, and behaviors of a leader. Leadership is different from management (Burn, 1978) in that, according to Kent (1999), management focuses on allocating and insuring the effective use of resources (e.g., people, capital, information, technology, etc.) in the accomplishment of the organization's goals. On the other hand, leadership focuses on marshaling, energizing and unifying people toward the pursuit of a leader's vision. Therefore, leadership requires an ability to bring the will of followers into consonance with that of the leader so that they follow him or her voluntarily, with enthusiasm and dedication – a condition not necessarily involved in either management or administration (Ackoff, 1999).

Pearce et al. (2003) offer a historical analysis of leadership styles and classify them into four: directive leadership, transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and empowering leadership. Directive leadership involves the use of direction, command, assigned goals, intimidation and reprimand as the primary mechanisms to influence others' behaviors. Transactional leadership refers to the type that is based on the premise that individuals will maximize their expected return from performance and the leader's use of positive reinforcement and punishment based on performance is effective at addressing the followers' expectation and influencing their behaviors. Transformational leadership is involved with internalization of the organization's goals for followers, thereby changing their attitudes, beliefs, and goals. Transformational leaders create and foster an environment where a trustful relationship can be formed and visions are shared (Bass, 1985). This style is often considered charismatic leader-

ship. Empowering leadership emphasizes the development of a follower's skill to self-manage.

Many previous studies relate transactional leadership to transformational leadership and view transformational leadership as complementary to transactional leadership (MacKenzie et al., 2001). For example, one may possess charisma, which primarily distinguishes transformational leadership from transactional leadership, and still uses the mechanism of positive reinforcement and punishment contingent on performance to influence others, which is a base of transactional leadership. Researchers view transformational leadership behaviors augment the effect of transactional leadership behaviors because of the internalization process, through which transformational leadership influences followers and the followers' goals are aligned with the organization's (MacKenzie et al., 2001). MacKenzie et al. (2001) view transformational leadership as consisting of four behavioral types: core transformational behavior (articulating a vision, providing an appropriate model, and fostering the acceptance of group goals), individualized support, high performance expectation, and intellectual stimulation. Articulating a vision is a behavior on the part of a leader that is aimed at identifying and expressing a clear vision for the future. Providing an appropriate model means the leader sets a behavioral example for the followers to model after. Fostering the acceptance of group goals means the leader encourages cooperation among group members and encourages them to work toward a common goal. High performance expectations are related to setting the expectations high for excellence, quality and high performance for followers. Providing individualized support is defined as behavior on the part of the leader that indicates he/she respects followers and is involved with helping followers for their individual development with concern about their personal feelings and needs. Finally, intellectual stimulation is related to encouragement of followers to reexamine assumptions about their work and to find creative ways of improving their performance. Many researchers (Liaw et al., 2010; MacKenzie et al., 2001; Rowold and Rohmann, 2009; Sarros and Santora, 2001; Tatum et al., 2003) view both transactional leadership and transformational leadership as effective at influencing followers' behaviors and include these two styles in their studies to examine the characteristics and the associated outcomes measured in such terms as customer orientation, job performance, trust, and role ambiguity. Because these two leadership styles are considered most effective at influencing others, the current study focuses on these two styles of leadership.

2.2. Emotion

Emotion in a service delivery context has received a lot of attention from academics because the way a customer or an employee *feels* about the service or the job makes a big difference in terms of outcomes favorable to the organization such as customer loyalty, repurchase behavior, employee job performance, and employee cooperative behavior. In the services marketing area, service employees' "emotional labor" has become an important topic because working in the service industry often requires one to engage in emotional labor (e.g., smiling to the customer even when the employee feels sad due to a personal matter) and emotion affects job performance and satisfaction with the job (Bitner, 1992; Kelley and Hoffman, 1997).

Studies show emotion consists of two dominant dimensions: positive and negative (Watson et al., 1988). Positive emotion (PE) is related to enthusiasm, activity, and alertness (Kelley and Hoffman, 1997). In contrast, negative emotion (NE) is a dimension of subjective distress and unpleasurable engagement that subsumes a variety of aversive states, including anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, fear, and nervousness. Studies (Bitner, 1992; Kelley and Hoffman, 1997) note the importance of positive employee emotion in job

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