



Customer service employees' behavioral intentions and attitudes: an examination of construct validity and a path model

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Abstract

Customer service employees ($N = 386$) from a variety of service-based organizations (e.g., hotels, restaurants, and retail stores) were sampled in a cross-sectional design to assess the construct validity and predictive utility of measures of: (a) perceptions of organizational support, (b) organizational commitment, (c) job satisfaction, (d) intent to quit, and (e) life satisfaction and to assess the appropriateness of use and the impact of these scales within a service-based context. The construct validity of the measures was assessed through the application of confirmatory factor analysis, while the predictive character of the proposed path models was assessed using path analysis. Results indicated that the measures of job satisfaction, intent to quit, and life satisfaction demonstrated acceptable construct validity within the service context sampled, while the measures of organizational support and commitment received mixed support due to problems with measurement error and item specification. The analyses of the path models revealed that: (a) perceived organizational support strongly and significantly influenced job satisfaction and organizational commitment, (b) job satisfaction had a unidirectional impact upon life satisfaction, (c) despite a strong correlation, job satisfaction displayed a limited predictive impact on organizational commitment, and (d) intent to quit was influenced by both job satisfaction and organizational commitment. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Customer service employees; Behavioral intentions; Attitudes; Construct validity; Path model

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1. Introduction

Due to the increasing prevalence of service-based organizations in our business economy, considerable research efforts are being directed toward the elements which impact the functioning and output of customer service organizations (Guerrier and Deery, 1998; Lengnick-Hall, 1996). The successful delivery of *services* is based upon a strong association among the three tiers of *service constituents*, customers, employees, and management, to coordinate customers' needs and expectations with those of management and staff members (Schneider and Bowen, 1992, 1995). The unique interrelationship among the "three tiers" of service constituents (Schneider and Bowen, 1992, 1995) continues to be of considerable interest to researchers and practitioners.

1.1. Service organizations

Schneider and Bowen (1992) contrast service-based organizations from traditional manufacturing-based organizations using three characteristics. First, service is intangible and difficult to gauge or measure quantitatively due to the fact that the end product (the service) is primarily contingent upon the exchange of human action and behavior, while tangible products do not rely strictly on human action to be consumed. Second, services are typically produced and consumed simultaneously with the producer or seller present during the consumption of the service, while most tangible consumer products are produced and consumed apart from the place of purchase. Finally, service providers ordinarily require input from the consumers to successfully complete its delivery and consumption, while tangible products are typically "ready-made" and normally require less attention from the seller prior to selection and consumption. The dynamic nature of service creates unique challenges for the operators of service-based organizations, and more specifically, for those responsible for the provision of customer service.

Much of the early research on customer service stemmed from marketing professionals' desire to better understand consumers' increasing demands and expectations in regard to the provision of high quality service in manufacturing settings (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988). Specifically, researchers and practitioners focused mainly on the development of service-oriented strategies to help ensure the delivery of high-quality service in business transactions (Oliva et al., 1992). In effect, service processes have been examined to uncover the ingredients that make *service episodes* agreeable to consumers (Bolten and Drew, 1991). However, in the process of examining customers' needs and expectations, many other important facets of the customer service process have been paid considerably less attention than warranted in an economy which is now primarily service based (Davidow and Uttal, 1989; Friedman, 1998).

Customer service research to date addresses issues of customer satisfaction (Bolten and Drew, 1991; Ford, 1995; Ford and Etienne, 1994) and service quality (Oliva et al., 1992; Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988) with only a limited number of research investigations focusing *specifically* on the employees responsible for the provision of

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