



Individual employment characteristics of hotel employees that play a role in employee satisfaction and work retention

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ABSTRACT

The variation of individual employment characteristics may influence how employees feel about their work environment. This study intended to identify employment characteristics that influenced employee satisfaction with work environments related to employment retention. Factors played different roles in measuring job satisfaction and employee retention according to individual employment characteristics, while factors related to the work environment (location, communication, accomplishment, and department) should be addressed regardless of employment characteristics. It is recommended that hoteliers provide a customized improvement agenda directed to and focused on individual groups according to that group's employment characteristics.

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1. Introduction

The downward pull of the national economy has shed new light on the importance of human resources and employee retention. It is not a secret in the hospitality industry that satisfied workers stay in their jobs longer and treat customers better. The longstanding question has been raised countless times: how do we keep hospitality employees satisfied in their jobs thus creating company longevity while increasing productivity?

According to Morley (2009), no other industry has created jobs with the consistency of leisure and hospitality; including restaurants, casinos, hotels and amusement park employees. A healthy resource for jobs in the past despite the 9/11 attacks, the 2001–2003 economic downturn, and even the 1989–1992 recession; the hospitality industry is now facing an economic dark hour. The hospitality industry has typically been dominant in hiring employees, but not so fortunate in retaining them. Hospitality is an industry that has been long been plagued by turnover rates traditionally ranging from 60% to 300% (Jones, 2008) resulting in lost training wages, frustrated accountants and financial statements screaming for a reduction in wasted or lost human resource dollars. Employees are an organization's foundation; it is critical

that an organization retain valuable employees despite the huge problems that exist in attracting and retaining a skilled workforce.

Braham (2005) states that millions of dollars and productivity are lost due to employee turnover and can be saved through a better understanding of the reasons why successful employees “disengage” and leave their jobs. Braham (2005) theorizes that capable employees are not “pulled” by offers that are more attractive as much as they are “pushed” out of a company. Branham continues, turnover costs do not tell the whole story: long before employees leave they become disengaged. Disengaged employees are uncommitted, marginally productive, frequently absent, or working against the interests of the company (Braham, 2005).

An appropriate understanding of workers' expectations of their work environments is a critical issue in hoteliers' ability to retain workers (Susskind et al., 2000; Hinkin and Tracey, 2000). The issue of a sustainable workforce has become a fundamental issue in today's hotel industry. As employees have become the most valuable asset of hotel companies, a company's success will depend greatly on building a work environment that attracts, meets and exceeds employees' expectations. How workers feel about their work environments may vary due to individual characteristics, and these differences may determine the level of satisfaction with work environments and workers' intentions to remain at the hotel (Franek and Vecera, 2008). Understanding employees' concerns regarding their work environments, and satisfying their concerns can play an important role in sustaining successful businesses in the hotel industry as customer retention and defection are highly dependent on how front-line employees

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deal with customers (Ford and Heaton, 2001), this is particularly true in the hotel industry.

Previous research pertaining to job satisfaction factors in hospitality indicates that while money is a common factor (Hussain, 2008) there are several reasons why an establishment might lose staff. Much of the debate in previous research has focused on whether organizational commitment or job satisfaction has the greatest influence on employee turnover (Deery, 2008). Carbery et al. (2003) investigated the psychological contract, career expectations and managerial competencies on employees' decisions to leave an organization. The authors found that a combination of demographic, human capital, psychological attributes and hotel characteristics contributed to employee turnover.

Past research has also highlighted personal factors that focus on individual attributes and characteristics (Ellickson, 2002; Hickson and Oshagbemi, 1999). In addition, a vast amount of research on the issue of job satisfaction has been documented based on demographic characteristics. Differences have been also found according to demographic characteristics, such as gender (Clark, 1997; Wharton et al., 2000), age (Clark, 1997; Eskildsen et al., 2003), education level (Clark, 1996; Verhofstadt and Omev, 2007), income (Tang, 2007; Clark et al., 2009), and tenure (Oshagbemi, 2000; Kalleberg and Mastekaasa, 2001). However, issues encountered by individual employment characteristics have received little attention from scholars, primarily those whose research focuses on the hotel industry. Franek and Vecera (2008) indicated what is desired by one group of individuals is often different from what is desired by another group, which leads to the theory that employees become diversified according to employment characteristics. There is a need for a study that would provide information on job satisfaction factors based on employment characteristics, expressly among workers who have a variety of employment backgrounds.

The purpose of this study is to identify whether individual job satisfaction factors have a relationship with an individual's overall job satisfaction and their level of intention to remain at their current work place according to employment characteristics by applying a newly modified job satisfaction scale.

2. Literature review

2.1. Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction has been described in many different ways: as the extent to which employees like their work (Agho et al., 1992); as a function of the perceived relationship between what one wants from one's job and how one perceives it as offering or entailing (Locke, 1969); as a combination of psychological and environmental circumstances that cause a person to be satisfied with his or her work (Hoppock, 1935); as an incidental issue to job performance (Fitzgerald, 1972); and as the feelings employees have about their jobs in general (Smith et al., 1975). Many researchers have approached job satisfaction from the perspective of need fulfilment by asking whether the job met the employee's physical and psychological needs (Porter, 1962; Wolf, 1970). Lester (1987) and Wanous and Lawler (1972) indicate that researchers conduct different studies of job satisfaction because employees have different attitudes and values regarding the various aspects of their work.

2.2. Justification for job satisfaction study

Customer satisfaction is highly dependent on how customers are treated by front line employees. Studies centering on employee satisfaction within the work environment have determined that

job satisfaction has a relationship and that relationship is primarily focused on customer satisfaction which is heavily emphasized in service-oriented business (Heskett et al., 1997). Schneider and Mowen (1985) and Arnett et al. (2002) conclude that levels of customer satisfaction are linked to services performed by workers who are satisfied with their jobs and their workplace environments.

Job satisfaction has been shown to have a significant relationship to organizational commitment and employee turnover (Barrow, 1990; Porter and Steers, 1973; Schlesinger and Zornitsky, 1991; Testa, 2001) and has generated widespread interest among both researchers and practitioners. Schlesinger (1982) indicated that employees who are satisfied with their jobs provide better services than those who are not satisfied. Because service products are provided through people, employers need to maintain employees' expectations (Rafaeli, 1989): this is especially true in an industry that is heavily based on human interactions (Spinelli and Canavos, 2000).

McNeese-Smith (1997) indicated that employees who experience job satisfaction are likely to be more productive and stay on the job. Hoteliers need to keep employees longer, not only due to the cost of hiring and training new employees, but also tenured employees tend to provide a more positive performance, which is linked to customer satisfaction (Bedeian et al., 1992). Employee job satisfaction is directly associated with customer loyalty; customer loyalty is unequivocally related to profitability (Fay, 1994; Iaffaldano and Muchinsky, 1985); therefore, maintaining quality employees would be the ideal method to sustain a solid reputation and build a repeat customer base (Keane, 1996).

2.3. Job satisfaction factors

Efraty and Sirgy (1990) describe job satisfaction as "one's effective appraisal of various job dimensions"; this includes the work itself, supervision, pay, promotion policies, and co-workers. Identifying factors of job satisfaction provides hoteliers with information that assists them in making meaningful decisions regarding employee job satisfaction (Cranny et al., 1992). Glisson and Durick (1988) considered the worker and the nature of the work itself as two important factors affecting job satisfaction. Variables selected to measure job satisfaction need to represent all aspects of the work environment: human relations, the job itself, personal feelings, and membership within the organization (Syptak et al., 1999). Porter and Lawler (1968) divided influences on job satisfaction into internal satisfactory factors related to the work itself, such as: feeling of achievement, feeling of independence, self-esteem, feeling of control and other similar feelings obtained from work, and the external satisfactory factors not directly related to work itself, such as: receiving praise from the boss, good relationships with colleagues, good working environment, high salary, good welfare and utilities.

2.4. Job satisfaction studies

Although there is an abundance of research pertaining to job satisfaction the research is lacking in methods to measure employee job satisfaction levels. This lack of research can be attributed to the number of specified variables' variations among the studies and the variations on the level of importance or each specified variable (Lester, 1987). Research as far back as Hoppock (1935) views job satisfaction as impossible to measure in one specific manner. The effect of job satisfaction on employee retention may be just an equation in general; however, it is important to explore and understand the key factors of job satisfaction and individual characteristics that differentiate individual levels of satisfaction (Franek and Vecera, 2008).

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