



The Hospitality Culture Scale: A measure organizational culture and personal attributes

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ABSTRACT

The hospitality industry has a unique and specific culture when compared to other industries. Because of this, not everyone will want to make this industry a career, as evidenced by the high turnover. Yet, the hospitality industry needs to attract and keep motivated and dedicated employees. This study set out to discover attributes that are unique to hospitality organizations as well as the characteristics and values of a person who would be successful in a work environment that exhibited this culture. This includes determining if a person is a match to the culture of the hospitality industry. In order to identify the variables of hospitality culture, an extensive review of the literature and a panel of industry experts were consulted. The items identified from both groups were used to establish the constructs for a scale, which is called the Hospitality Culture Scale. Seven hundred and forty one hospitality professionals rated the attributes. Principal component analysis determined the final factors for the organizational culture and personal attributes. These constructs included: management principles, customer relationships, job variety, job satisfaction, principles, propitiousness, leadership, risk taker, accuracy, and composure.

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1. Introduction

The hospitality industry has a unique and specific culture that can be generalized to multiple organizations that provide accommodations, lodging, and/or foodservices for people when they are away from their homes (Woods, 1989). The components of the hospitality product include not only the physical product, but the service delivery, service environment, and the service product (Rust and Oliver, 1993). This industry is different than any other because of the intangible hospitality product that the personnel are delivering. Unlike most service industries, it is the *manner* in which the hospitality employee provides the service – as opposed to the service itself – which is critical to the customer's overall enjoyment of the product or “experience” being purchased. Accordingly, the relationship between front-line hospitality employees and the customer greatly influences customer satisfaction and loyalty. As such, attracting and retaining workers who are able to provide exceptional customer service should be a high priority for any hospitality organization. At the same time, the hospitality industry is often characterized by notoriously poor wages, low job security, long

working hours, limited opportunities for personal development, and seasonality (Deery and Shaw, 1999; Baum, 2008). Not only is it unlikely that these job attributes will attract the most qualified candidates for exceptional customer service, but they greatly contribute to the industry's high turnover rate. Yet, hospitality organizations are given the challenge of finding and hiring personnel who hold similar values, and are able to both manage people and the service process under difficult circumstances.

Organizations routinely engage in activities to identify and select individuals who are likely to share their cultural values (Schneider, 1987; Lee-Ross and Pryce, 2010). These individuals are hypothesized to share common backgrounds, characteristics, and orientations. By relying on both established recruiting sources (e.g., search firm and/or specific universities for college recruiting) and established screening selection techniques (e.g., specific tests and minimum cut-off scores), organizations are able to narrow the range of characteristics chosen applicants are likely to possess (Bretz et al., 1989).

Researchers have made theoretical and methodological advances in understanding the development of cultural values in non-hospitality organizations (Judge and Cable, 1997; Sheridan, 1992). However, little research has investigated what attributes produce a measurably distinctive hospitality industry culture (Dawson and Abbott, 2011). Even fewer studies have examined whether a person is a match to this culture or not. A person's match is important because as Gordon (1991) argues, the organizational culture is strongly influenced by the characteristics

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(shared meanings) of the industry in which the company operates. He believes that within industries, certain cultural characteristics will be widespread among organizations, and these most likely will be quite different from the characteristics found in other industries.

The purpose of this study was to create a scale of hospitality culture by establishing the organizational culture and personal attributes (characteristics and values) of those employed in the hospitality industry. A quantitative instrument was developed and validated in order to measure this. We call this instrument, The Hospitality Culture Scale (HCS). It is intended to measure a person's understanding of the culture of hospitality organizations and to determine if a particular individual's values are in-line with those currently working in the industry.

2. Literature review

2.1. *The concept of organizational culture*

Although organizational culture has emerged as one of the dominant themes in management studies for the past 25 years (Gregory et al., 2009; Gordon, 1991; Judge and Cable, 1997; O'Reilly et al., 1991; Schein, 1992, 2004; Schnedier, 1990; Sheridan, 1992), there is still no clear consensus with regard to the definition. Edgar Schein's abundant research (1985, 1990, 1992, 2004) into the concept of organizational culture is perhaps the most widely cited. Schein (1992) characterizes organizational culture as: "the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to other problems" (p. 12). However, many researchers have based their descriptions on the actual principles of culture itself (Crichton et al., 2004; Rashid et al., 2003; Rousseau, 1990; Schein, 1985). These principles range from fundamental assumptions through values and behavioral norms to actual patterns of behavior that form the core identity of people (Rousseau, 1990). A dynamic approach to understanding organizations involves seeing culture as sets of practices in which people engage in order to live their lives, to comprehend their world and to produce and comprehend meaning (Crichton et al., 2004).

Organizational culture literature acknowledges the difficulty of measuring and identifying a typology of organizational cultures, mainly, because the shared assumptions and understandings lie beneath the conscious level for individuals (Lund, 2003). Often taken for granted by the members themselves, these assumptions can be identified through stories, special language, norms, institutional ideology, and attitudes that emerge from individual and organizational behavior (Tierney, 1988). The culture of an organization reflects the prevailing ideology that its people carry inside their heads (Cameron and Quinn, 1999). This often happens to the point where they drop out of acute awareness, become unconscious assumptions, and are then taught to new members as a reality and as the correct way to view things (Sathe, 1985). Organization culture conveys a sense of identity to employees, provides unwritten, and often unspoken guidelines for how to get along in the organization (Cameron and Quinn, 1999).

Deeply held assumptions often start out historically as values, but as they stand the test of time, gradually come to be taken for granted and then take on the character of assumptions (Schein, 1990). Weiner (1988) explains that values are a type of social cognition that facilitate a person's adaptation to his or her environment. On the organization side, value systems provide generalized justification both for appropriate behaviors of members and for the

activities and functions of the system (Enz, 1988). Shared values are relatively stable and interact with a company's people and organizational structure to produce patterns of behavior (Chatman, 1991).

When the members of a social unit share values, an organizational culture or value system can be said to exist (Weiner, 1988). Almost every organization has some core values that are shared across the entire organization (Chatman and Jehn, 1994). Selznick (1957) argued that shared values are essential for organizational survival because they maintain the organization as a bounded unit and provide it with a distinct identity. Characterizing an organization's culture in terms of its central values requires identifying the range of relevant values and then assessing how much intensity and consensus there is among organizational members about those values (Enz, 1988). Values are fundamental and enduring characteristics of both individuals and organizations (Tepeci and Bartlett, 2002).

In an effort to understand the forms and consequences of organizational culture, researchers have explored how the various characteristics of powerful members, such as the organization's founder (Pettigrew, 1979; Schein, 1985) or groups of members (Schneider, 1987) influence the content and intensity of the consensus that exist about organizational values. "Founders often start with a theory of how to succeed; they have a cultural paradigm in their heads, based on their experience in the culture in which they grew up. In the case of a founding group, the theory and paradigm arise from the way that group reaches consensus on their assumptions about how to view things" (Schein, 1983, p. 14). Pettigrew (1979) characterizes founders as entrepreneurs who communicate the cultural paradigms through their language and style. This paradigm sets the tone for the vision of the company and becomes the ideology throughout the organization. The ideology can impart meaning, demand involvement, motivate the performance of routine tasks, and resolve the concerns of its people. The ultimate organizational culture will always reflect the complex interaction between the assumptions and theories that founders bring to the group initially and what the group learns subsequently from its own experiences (Schein, 1983).

Various questionnaire instruments have been developed to measure an organization's cultural values. Most have been based on prior assumptions regarding the types of values organization members share or the behavioral norms in organizations (Sheridan, 1992). Through interviews, questionnaires, or survey instruments one can study culture's espoused and documented values, norms, ideologies, and philosophies (Schein, 1990). O'Reilly et al. (1991) proposed a more descriptive approach commonly used to assessing one's fit to a particular culture or industry, the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP).

2.2. *Assessing person–organization fit*

Previous research on person–organization (P–O) fit concerns the antecedents and consequences of compatibility between people and the organizations in which they work (Kristof, 1996). Fit is considered as the congruence between a diverse collection of applicant and organizational attributes (Judge and Cable, 1997). This involves a correspondence between the norms and values of organizations and the value of persons (Chatman, 1989). Researchers seem to agree that culture may be an important factor in determining how well an individual fits an organizational context (Goodman and Svyantek, 1999; Kilmann et al., 1986; Schein, 1985).

Congruency between and individual's values and those of an organization is at the crux of person–culture fit. P–O fit research has shown that the discrepancy between the actual and ideal organizational culture (i.e. discrepancies between what the organization and the individual values) can influence important organizational criteria (Chatman, 1991). "One way to assess culture quantitatively

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