

An expectancy theory model for hotel employee motivation

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to apply expectancy theory to employee motivation in the hotel setting and confirm the validity of expectancy theory. The proposed expectancy theory model for motivation was tested using data from 289 hotel employees. The results show that a modified expectancy theory with five components (expectancy, extrinsic instrumentality, intrinsic instrumentality, extrinsic valence, and intrinsic valence) best explains the process of motivating hotel employees. This study also indicates that intrinsic motivation factors are more influential than extrinsic factors for hotel employees, suggesting that hotel managers need to focus more on intrinsic factors to better motivate employees.

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1. Introduction

What makes hotel employees motivated and satisfied with their jobs? The hotel industry has long struggled with this question because of high employee turnover. It is believed that the nature of the work, its low pay, and its long working hours contribute to the high turnover. Thus, to effectively address this turnover problem, employee motivation could be an on-going and critical issue for managers in hotel operations.

The expectancy theory of motivation, originally developed by Vroom (1964), is a theory explaining the process individuals use to make decisions on various behavioral alternatives. The motivational force for a behavior, action, or task is a function of three distinct perceptions: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. Motivational force is the force directing specific behavioral alternatives, which are suggested when deciding among behavior options. Expectancy theory generally is supported by empirical evidence (Tien, 2000; Vansteenkiste et al., 2005) and is one of most commonly used theories of motivation

in the workplace (Campbell and Pritchard, 1976; Heneman and Schwab, 1972; Mitchell and Biglan, 1971).

Expectancy theory provides a general framework for assessing, interpreting, and evaluating employee behavior in learning, decision-making, attitude formation, and motivation (Chen and Lou, 2002). However, Mitchell (1974) suggested that the construct validity of the components of expectancy theory remains little understood. The results of the meta-analysis by Van Eerde and Thierry (1996) suggest that Vroom's model does not yield higher effect sizes than the components of the models, implying that the model lacks external validity. In addition, little research has been devoted to developing a theory for the process of employee motivation, and the lack of a strong theoretical framework may negatively affect the validity of the Vroom's model. Thus, one main purpose of this study was to gain more understanding of employee motivation and its decision-making process by testing the proposed model that was based on Vroom's expectancy theory.

Hotel employees require intelligence, job knowledge and skills, and time management ability but without motivation, an employee will not advance in his/her career (Wong et al., 1999). Lee-Ross (1995) stated the concept of "internal work motivation," which is to intrinsic motivation in that the more effort is expended on the jobs, the

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more motivated they would become. However, motivation factors including pay, monetary rewards, opportunity for advancement and promotion have been examined in the hotel industry (Byrne, 1986; Wong et al., 1999). Also, other motivation factors such as job responsibility, recognition from people, job challenge, feelings of accomplishment and development of self-esteem have been identified important for hotel employees (Wong et al., 1999). Intrinsic means belonging naturally, existing within, and extrinsic operating or originating from the outside: intrinsic work motivation refers to motivate someone by his/her heart (e.g., feelings of accomplishment and development of self-esteem) and extrinsic work motivation applies monetary rewards. Thus, this study also intended to comparatively examine importance of intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation for hotel employees with their intensive labor work, low pay, image of low status and few opportunities for advancement.

Both hotel employees and the management acknowledge the importance of employee motivation, and both will benefit from a better understanding of forms of employee motivation. Hotel employees will be motivated in the way they want to be motivated to do their jobs and to enjoy their jobs. Hotel management will implement employee motivation more effectively, and effective employee motivation will impact employee performance and service quality directly or indirectly. The proposed employee motivation model can help hotel management understand the needs and wants of employees and develop effective motivation plans for employees. Furthermore, the research model also can be applied to motivate individuals at the managerial level in the hotel industry.

2. Literature review

The expectancy theory of motivation, originally developed by Vroom (1964), is a theory explaining the process individuals use to make decisions on various behavioral alternatives. Expectancy theory is presented as follows:

motivation force = expectancy × instrumentality × valence.

Motivation force is a force directing specific behavioral alternatives, which are suggested when various behavior options are selected by individuals. The theory asserts that they will select the option with the greatest motivation forces. The motivational force for a behavior, action, or task is a function of three distinct perceptions: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. Expectancy is the perceived probability that effort will lead to good performance; variables affecting the individual's expectancy perception include self-efficacy, goal difficulty, and perceived control. Expectancy that one's effort will lead to a desired performance is based on past experience, self-confidence, and the perceived difficulty of the performance goal. Instrumentality is the perceived probability that good

performance will lead to desired outcomes; trust, control, and policies are variables affecting the individual's instrumentality perception. Hence, the instrumentality is the belief that if an individual does meet performance expectation, he or she will receive a greater reward. Valence refers the value the individual personally places on rewards: the function of needs, goals, values and preferences. Expectancy theory generally is supported by empirical evidence (Tien, 2000; Vansteenkiste et al., 2005) and is one of most commonly used theories of motivation in the workplace (Campbell and Pritchard, 1976; Heneman and Schwab, 1972; Mitchell and Biglan, 1971).

Both the hotel industry and academy recognize the importance of motivating employees. Most previous studies have concentrated on identifying the factors that motivate employees and on suggesting implications for further improving employee motivation (Simons and Enz, 1995; Siu et al., 1997; Wong et al., 1999).

Expectancy theory is a theory of the process of motivation. Rather than simply explaining what will motivate an employee, process theories define how motivation comes about. Process theories are, in effect, working models of the decision-making processes that individuals perform in order to determine whether they will be motivated to pursue a certain activity and sustain a certain level of productivity. Process theories help describe and explain how behavior is directed, energized, sustained, or stopped. While several process theories of motivation exist, one of the most respected theories of motivation among organizational and industrial psychologists is the process theory of expectancy.

Expectancy theory provides a general framework for assessing, interpreting, and evaluating employee behavior in learning, decision making, attitude formation, and motivation (Chen and Lou, 2002). However, Mitchell (1974) suggested that the construct validity of the components of expectancy theory remains little understood. Many different interpretations, organizational plans, applications, and methods of statistical analysis have been used in conjunction with expectancy theory, but a major concern remains: that the validity of the expectancy theory remains unclear (Van Eerde and Thierry, 1996). Landy and Becker (1990) suggested that the key to improving the predictions of an expectancy model might lie in variables such as the number of outcomes, the valence of the outcomes, and the particular dependent variable chosen for study. Schwab et al. (1979) examined the relationship between the VIE model and two criterion variables: effort and performance. They included several moderators of this relationship in 32 between-subject studies in a statistical analysis. Van Eerde and Thierry (1996) used meta-analysis to examine the expectancy model further and its relationship to five types of criterion variables: performance, effort, intention, preference, and choice. Results showed average correlations between Vroom's (1964) model and work-related criterion variables that were slightly lower than those reported

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