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The impact of developmental experience, empowerment, and organizational support on catering service staff performance

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Abstract

The present study focuses on three selected aspects of human resource development, i.e., access to developmental experience, organizational support, and empowerment, and their impact on customer orientation and performance outcomes. The rationale is to provide opportunities for employees to enhance their skills through developmental experience, to empower them and to provide the support needed to deliver quality service. Results show differential effects between the three predictors and outcome measures. Both empowerment and organizational support have a significant effect on customer orientation. Empowerment significantly improves performance and organizational support increases employees' sense of pride. Developmental experience has a significant effect on performance only. Managerial implications are discussed and suggestions are made for future research directions.

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1. Introduction

Catering is a high contact service and a people-oriented business. To survive in such a competitive market, it is crucial that both customers and employees are satisfied with the food, the dining environment and the service provided. Service organizations aim to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty as the ultimate goals. To achieve these goals they rely on their employees to deliver quality service and adopt the kind of customer-oriented mindset that leads to customer loyalty (Horney, 1996). In Heskett's model of the employee–customer–profitability link, the interaction between employee and customer has a positive influence on performance (Heskett et al., 1994). Further, in the interaction between employees and customers, the attitudes and behaviors of service employees affect customers' perceived service (Bitner, 1990). Barsky and Dittmann's study (1990) shows that well-trained, fairly paid employees contribute to a lower employee turnover rate. Satisfied customers result in higher return rates. Dedicated employees are more likely to engage in activities that result in customer satisfaction and profitability.

One of the critical success factors for running a restaurant is gaining a competitive advantage through people (Pfeffer, 1994). The long hours, night and weekend working, inconvenient scheduling, irregular days off and low pay, together with highly seasonal demand and lack of stability, make restaurant jobs less attractive to many people (Lucas, 1993). The same characteristics thus make managing the work force more challenging. The food service industry is a labor-intensive industry with a relatively high employee turnover. This creates problems in terms of service quality, consistency and team spirit among employees. Therefore, effective human resource management has become a vital component for creating and maintaining a competitive edge in the catering service industry. That is why we need to put people first in the service–profit chain (Heskett et al., 1994).

The restaurant setting provides an opportunity to study some human resource development issues in the hospitality industry from both the customer and employee perspectives. Employees are one of the key elements in the operation of a successful hospitality business. The study has important implications for quality of human resources, especially for human capital development activities. The purpose of the present study is to examine the impact of employees' perceptions of access to developmental experience, organizational support, and empowerment leading to a better customer-orientation mindset, and a sense of pride in the job and in their performance. The results of the present study offer a basis for managers to understand the relationships among these elements, which hold the key to improved performance outcomes.

2. Review of the relevant studies and hypotheses

The conceptual framework for the present study is shown in Fig. 1. The major theme is to give employees an opportunity to learn and grow, an environment that offers rewarding experiences and the discretion to be involved in handling customers

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