



Full length article

## Supervisory orientation, employee goal orientation, and knowledge management among front line hotel employees

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates how managers can enhance the knowledge management (KM) among front line hotel employees at the individual level, by affecting the employee goal orientations through supervisory orientations. This study found significant influence of supervisory orientations on employee goal orientation. The positive effect of employee learning goal orientation on KM is also significant. However the effect of performance goal orientation on KM is insignificant. Results also support the indirect positive effect of the supervisory end result, and capability orientations on KM through the mediation of goal orientation. The main contribution of this study is the identification of indirect effect of supervisory orientation on KM through the mediation of employee goal orientation. This study links three separate concepts which are supervisory orientation, employee goal orientation and KM in a single model, for the very first time. Furthermore, the concept of supervisory orientations has not been discussed in the existing hospitality literature.

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### 1. Introduction

Hotel industry mainly provides accommodation and rest facilities to the tourists and travellers (Chen, 2013). According to the office of national statistics, the current annual number of overseas incoming tourists and travellers in the UK is approximately 3,050,000 (Tourism industry- Office for national statistics). There are 2,267,000 employees working in the hospitality sector to serve these customers (JOBS02: Workforce jobs by industry- Office for national statistics). The hospitality sector is facing the problem of high employee turnover (Yang and Wan, 2004), and when an employee leaves the organization the knowledge and talent also go with the employee. In this situation of high employee turnover, if employees do not transfer, and store or document their knowledge in organizational memory, organizations can face the loss of human capital, which can ultimately affect the quality of services provided to the customers (Yang, 2004). In the hotel industry, customer expectations are on an increase, and hotels need to meet these expectations, maintain the level of customer satisfaction and loyalty, and enhancing service quality. To meet these challenges, it

is important for hospitality organizations to transform knowledge of individual employee into the intellectual asset of the company, which can be done by effective knowledge management (KM) among employees at the individual level (Yang, 2004; Kim and Lee, 2013). KM is defined as a process of creating, acquiring, transferring, documenting/storing, and applying the knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Rowley, 2000). KM can be exercised both at the individual and organizational levels, but both the levels of KM need individual willingness and contribution (Yang and Wan, 2004; Bock and Kim, 2002).

Due to its own specific characteristics, hospitality industry needs specialized research (Ladkin and Weber, 2011). In the hospitality industry, knowledge means “knowledge of company’s customers, products and services, operational procedures, competitors and job associates” (Yang and Wan, 2004). KM is very crucial among front line employees of hotels because they are the front face of the hotels and are in direct contact with customers (Ferry, 2005), to provide them high quality and customized services (Kuo et al., 2012). Hospitality researchers also suggest that KM should initiate from an initial service encounter (Yang, 2004). So this study is an attempt to know how an organization can enhance KM among front line hotel employees, i.e. how to encourage them to acquire knowledge from others, transfer their own knowledge,

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store their knowledge in organizational memory, and apply their knowledge.

Organizations are investing considerable amount of money and time into KM, to facilitate collecting, storage, and dissemination of knowledge. However despite of this investment, it has been estimated that fortune 500 companies lose at least \$31.5 billion annually because of KM failure (Babcock, 2004). Knowledge is considered as power, and an important strategic asset, which provides a competitive advantage to the organization and also to the individual employees in the organization, therefore many employees appear to be reluctant in sharing the knowledge with other colleagues, because they think that, it may hinder their promotion in the organization, if they share their knowledge with other employees in the same organization (Uriarte, 2008; Bock et al., 2005). For organizational growth and competitiveness, however, it is necessary that knowledge should be shared in the organization. Organizations need to transform their knowledge into profitable products and services, they also need to renew the capabilities dynamically, and they can do it by acquiring, organizing, sharing, and applying their knowledge resources (Schiuma, 2012). Effective KM strategically enhances firm innovativeness which leads to better business performance (Ferraresi et al., 2012).

One of the prominent factors which have the potential to influence KM is employee goal orientation (Kim and Lee, 2013), which can be influenced by supervisory orientation (Kohli et al., 1998). Employee goal orientation in any organization can be, learning orientation, and performance orientation i.e. some employees consider learning as achievement and some prefer to show performance (Dweck, 1986). Kim and Lee (2013) argue that employee learning goal orientation is positively related to knowledge sharing behaviour, where performance orientation negatively affects employee knowledge sharing behaviour. Therefore consistent with Kim and Lee (2013), if organization or management encourages and prefers learning orientation over performance orientation, it can lead to better KM among employees. So if an organization wants to promote KM among its employees, it is important to know the factors having the potential to influence employee goal orientation, as it can be influenced by the different situations in the organization (Button et al., 1996).

Kohli et al. (1998) explain how the supervisory orientations can influence employee goal orientation. They argue that different types of supervisory orientations (end result, activity, and capability) have different effects on employee goal orientation. So if supervisors want to stimulate and encourage learning or performance goal orientation among employees, they need to adopt supervisory orientation accordingly, and by stimulating desired goal orientation among the employees, they can ultimately enhance KM among employees.

So this study investigates how managers can influence KM by stimulating desired employee goal orientation. In this way this study contributes to the body of knowledge by filling the number of gaps in the existing literature, i.e. supervisory orientation is an important factor having the potential to influence different employee outcomes such as employee goal orientation (Kohli et al., 1998), but there is lack of research on the topic of supervisory orientation, and the majority of research on the topic is limited to the sales management (Kohli et al., 1998; Anderson and Richard, 1987; Challagalla and Shervani, 1996). In the KM research, emphasis of researchers is more on knowledge sharing, which is only one element of KM. This study contributes by discussing KM as a full construct, including, acquiring, transferring, documenting, and applying the knowledge. This study investigates the indirect effect of supervisory orientation on KM among hotel employees, through the mediation of goal orientation, which is not considered in the existing literature. Furthermore in the hospitality literature, employee goal orientation is only investigated with knowledge

sharing, which is only one component of KM. This study investigates the effect of employee goal orientation on the whole construct of KM including acquiring, transferring, storing/documenting, and applying the knowledge. Furthermore it also links these three concepts in a single model using structure equation modelling (SEM), followed by the objectives of analysing,

1). The direct effect of supervisory orientation on employee goal orientation.

2). The direct effect of employee goal orientation on KM.

3). The indirect effect of supervisory orientation on KM, through employee goal orientation.

By achieving these objectives this study provides a framework to the hotel managers on how they can encourage their front line employees to practice KM by influencing the employee goal orientation accordingly, to gain organizational benefits. As front line employees are in direct contact with the customers (Ferry, 2005), they receive information directly. Supervisors can motivate them to convert it in organizational knowledge i.e. by documenting, or storing it somewhere in organizational memory, i.e. using information and communication technologies (ICTs) or manual databases. In this way organizational knowledge as a whole can be increased which leads to many positive business imperatives, like innovative services (Kim and Lee, 2013), and business performance (Ferraresi et al., 2012).

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Knowledge management

The concept of KM is rooted in the resource based view (Donate and de Pablo, 2015; Penrose, 1959; Barney, 1991) and the knowledge based view of the organization (Kogut and Zander, 1992; Grant, 1996). According to the resource based view, the main source of competitiveness for any organization is its strategic resources (Amit and Schoemaker, 1993), and the knowledge based view considers knowledge as the main strategic resource, and asset of the organization. Firms can exploit the knowledge resources through proper KM, in order to create value (Zack et al., 2009). KM can be described as “the process of knowledge acquisition, organizing knowledge, knowledge leverage, knowledge sharing, and organization memory” (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Rowley, 2000). Knowledge creation/acquisition is explorative in nature as it aims at creating new knowledge, and knowledge sharing, storage/documenting, and application are exploitative in nature as they aim to exploit and leverage the knowledge resources (Grant, 1996; March, 1991).

Knowledge acquisition means acquiring new knowledge, or replacing the existing implicit or explicit knowledge of the organization (Alavi and Leidner, 2001). When organization creates or acquires new knowledge, there are chances of forgetting the acquired knowledge, and the knowledge may lose (Alavi and Leidner, 2001). So it is important that acquired knowledge should be properly stored in the organizational memory either as manual documents, electronic databases, or it can be codified into the procedures and stored in an expert system. Knowledge storage refers to the structuring and organizing the knowledge resources, to develop the organizational memory (Alavi and Tiwana, 2003; Zack, 1999). Sharing and disseminating the knowledge by the organizational members are referred as knowledge transfer. It refers to the task information availability, and to share the information and knowledge to collaborate with the members in order to solve the problems or generating new ideas (Cummings, 2004). In this way employees in the organizations share their knowledge, skill, and experience with the other members in the organizations (Lin, 2007). Finally the knowledge application involves the inte-

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