



Effects of co-worker support and customer cooperation on service employee attitudes and behaviour: Empirical evidence from the airline industry

Thanawut Limpanitgul ^a  , Matthew J. Robson ^b, Julian Gould-Williams ^c,
Weerawit Lertthairakul ^d

^a Faculty of Management Sciences, Kasetsart University, 199 M.6 Sukhumvit Road, Si Racha, Chonburi 20230, Thailand

^b Leeds University Business School, University of Leeds, United Kingdom



^c Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, United Kingdom

^d Faculty of Business Administration, Sripatum University, Thailand

Received 3 October 2012, Accepted 24 May 2013, Available online 20 September 2013.

 What do these dates mean?

Show less 

 Share  Cite

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2013.05.004> 

[Get rights and content](#) 

Abstract

The service marketing literature promotes the importance of customers and co-workers in providing excellent service delivery. Using a sample of 335 cabin service attendants of a major flag-carrier airline, we examine structural effects of support received from customers and co-workers on service employees' attitudes and behaviours. In support of our hypotheses, we identify that the relationships between customer cooperation and

external representation (i.e. the willingness of employees to promote the organization to outsiders), and the relationship between co-worker support and internal influence (i.e. employees' involvement in recommending service improvements) are fully mediated by job satisfaction and organizational commitment. However, the data did not support two of our hypotheses, namely the effect of organisational commitment on internal influence, and the effect of customer cooperation on organisational commitment. It is possible that these non significant findings are a consequence of our respondents' collectivistic values along with their differentiating between the organization and customers.

Introduction

The tourism industry has grown to become one of the largest and most important sectors in many countries. The industry contributes more than nine percents of world GDP and represents ten percent of employment worldwide (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2011). This said, there are growing numbers of tourism-related firms, resulting in intense competition between rival companies. As such, the pursuit of service excellence is considered an essential strategy (Gould-Williams, 1999). Increasing numbers of service providers seek to deliver superior service to customers in order to exceed customer expectations (Peccei & Rosenthal, 2001). Scholars have suggested that quality can be enhanced when employees do “that little bit extra” for the customer (Ennew & Binks, 1999). As a result, a significant number of studies of employee extra-role behaviours have been carried out in various service contexts. The empirical evidence to date supports the significant role of organisational citizenship behaviour (hereafter OCB), which is defined as employee discretionary behaviour that is intended to help either individuals or organisations (see Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009 for review).

However, Bell and Menguc (2002) reported that most studies rely on generic measures of OCB which are assumed to be applicable across contexts. To date, little is known about citizenship behaviours that are service-specific. The significance of these service-specific behaviours stems from an observation that some forms of OCB might be more appropriate for some sectors than others (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). In the service sector, where employees “have special requirements on dimensions related to dealing with customers and representing the organisation to outsiders” (p. 90), studies have attempted to identify specific forms of service employee citizenship behaviour (SECB). One prevalent stream of work (e.g. Bettencourt & Brown, 1997) has emphasised prosocial service behaviour (PSB), which represents positive behaviours that service employees direct at customers and co-workers. The service literature reveals two other dimensions of employee behaviour, namely internal influence and external representation which are

critical to the success of service organisations (cf. Bowen & Schneider, 1985). According to Bettencourt, Gwinner, and Meuter (2001), external representation reflects allegiance to the organisation through the promotion of its interests and image to outsiders whereas internal influence refers to involvement and contribution of constructive ideas to improve service quality delivered by the company and its workers. While the literature has paid some attention to identifying drivers of PSB, the origins of internal influence and external representation remain largely unknown. This is an issue as the drivers of internal influence and external representation may be different to those of PSB. In the absence of evidence, it is possible for practitioners to assume that components of SECB (i.e. PSB, internal influence and external representation) are equivalent, as in the recent case of Virgin Atlantic, who fired employees for negatively representing the organisation to outsiders on Facebook on the basis that these individuals 'could not possibly be good service providers' (The Sun, 1 November 2008).

In service organisations, co-workers and customers are considered important elements of service work (Korczynski, 2002, Susskind et al., 2007, Zeithaml et al., 2009). There are recognitions of the service provider-customer interdependence (Netemeyer et al., 1997, Schneider and Bowen, 1992, Schneider and Bowen, 1995, Schneider et al., 2003) and the essence of co-worker cooperation (Azzolini & Shillaber, 1993) in the delivery of excellent service. However, only few studies have examined these interpersonal exchange relationships (Ladd and Henry, 2000, Sherony and Green, 2002). Specifically in the service context, little attention has been given to the support that employees may receive from other concerned parties during service provision despite its promising effects on employee responses (Yoon, Seo, & Yoon, 2004). The main objective of this study is to provide a holistic understanding of SECB and support received from co-workers and customers. In this respect, we make two main contributions to the literature. First, the extant literature review reveals that only a limited number of studies have considered the effects of support on psychological and behavioural responses of the service employee. In addition, existing conceptualisations of relationships among these variables are somehow mixed. Therefore, the present study seeks to empirically provide evidence of the theoretically-anchored structural explanation between support and service behaviour. Second, we focus on identifying the drivers of multi-component SECB. To our knowledge, no prior work has focused on the drivers of SECB as a whole (incorporating PSB, internal influence, and external representation), limiting managerial understanding of the facets of citizenship behaviours.

Following the section addressing the development and conceptualisation of service employee citizenship behaviour, we introduce our theoretical model and develop our hypotheses. Then, the paper describes the measurement process, including the sample characteristics obtained from a major flag-carrier airline designed to test our proposed

model and hypotheses. Finally, we conclude the paper with discussions of the implications and limitations of the findings and suggest avenues for future research.

Access through your organization

Check access to the full text by signing in through your organization.

Access through **your organization**

Section snippets

Development of service employee citizenship behaviour

Based on the OCB literature, with particular reference to the role of service employees, Bettencourt and Brown (1997) conceptualised PSB as comprising of two dimensions of discretionary behaviours which employees directed at external customers (i.e. extra-role service delivery) and, internally, at their co-workers (i.e. cooperation), as well as role-prescribed tasks that employees are required to perform for customers. Taken together, PSB can be defined as behaviours, both in-role and ...

Job satisfaction and organisational commitment

Although existing research has produced a considerable amount of empirical evidence concerning the relationships between employee job satisfaction, organisational commitment and OCB, few OCB studies have examined these two attitudinal constructs at the same time. With recognition of the interdependence between job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Luthans, 2002, Rayton, 2006) and the importance of both constructs in understanding employee behaviour (Harrison et al., 2006, Tett and ...

Context of the study

Among travel and tourism industries, the airline industry is considered as an ideal context for employee citizenship behaviour studies for three main reasons. First, the airline industry is widely recognised as a vital component of the world economy, facilitating international trade and investment. According to IATA (2008), the global commercial aviation industry generates approximately \$510 billion in revenue in 2007 and is forecast to generate this amount throughout the next decade. In the ...

Analysis and results

The present study utilised AMOS 6 to examine the measurement model and test the proposed structural relationships between the constructs. Prior to the analysis, multivariate assumptions (i.e. normality, multicollinearity, and outliers) were diagnosed. The results revealed that the data met all requirements so that normality and other assumptions were not a serious concern in interpreting the study results. ...

Discussion

The basic premise of this study is that the support received from co-workers and customers has indirect effects, mediated by job satisfaction and organisational commitment, on levels of SECB engaged by employees. To a large extent, the study's results presented here are consistent with the theoretical framework and previous OCB studies in that our data provide evidence supporting nine of the eleven sub hypotheses outlined in Table 2. In keeping with the conceptual model, there is evidence of ...

Limitations and avenues for future research

Caution should be exercised in attempts to generalise from these findings. The study respondents are employees of a single organisation operating in the airline industry based in Thailand, which may limit the generalizability of our findings. On the other hand, the company is a founder member of a global code sharing strategic alliance. Whether or not the findings possess external validity is a matter for future research work. As the AC→INT and CSC→AC paths were not found to be statistically ...

Conflict of interest

We certify that we have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript. ...

[Recommended articles](#)

References (117)

T.D. Allen *et al.*

[Ratings of organisational citizenship behaviour: does the source make a difference?](#)

Human Resource Management Review (2000)

S.J. Bell *et al.*

The employee-organisation relationship, organisational citizenship behaviours, and superior service quality

Journal of Retailing (2002)

L.A. Bettencourt

Customer voluntary performance: customers as partners in service delivery

Journal of Retailing (1997)

L.A. Bettencourt *et al.*

Contact employees: relationship among workplace fairness, job satisfaction, and prosocial service behaviour

Journal of Retailing (1997)

L.A. Bettencourt *et al.*

Customer-oriented boundary-spanning behaviours: test of a social exchange model of antecedents

Journal of Retailing (2005)

G.O. Bostrom

Successful cooperation in professional services: what characteristics should the customer have?

Industrial Marketing Management (1995)

N.A. Bowling

Is the job satisfaction-job performance relationship spurious? A meta-analytic examination

Journal of Vocational Behaviour (2007)

Z.X. Chen *et al.*

The relationship between the three components of commitment and employee performance in China

Journal of Vocational Behaviour (2003)

C.T. Ennew *et al.*

Impact of participative service relationships on quality, satisfaction and retention: an exploratory study

Journal of Business Research (1999)

C.T. Kwantes *et al.*

Culture's influence on the perception of OCB as in-role or extra-role

International Journal of Intercultural Relations (2008)