Customer Service Behavior and Attitudes among Hotel Managers: A Look at Perceived Support

Functions, Standards for Service, and Service Process Outcomes

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Abstract

A model of customer service behavior and outcomes was proposed and tested among managerial-supervisory personnel ($N = 250$) from 11 hotel properties within six large national and international hotel companies. Confirmatory factor analyses yielded a reliable approach to examine elements of customer service and outcomes in a service-based setting. Specifically, organizational support was represented by two independent dimensions of coworker support and supervisory support. A dimension of standards for service was presented and validated as a central mediating factor in the perception of service processes, along with customer (guest) orientation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions as outcome measures in a path model of customer service behavior.

Keywords: customer service process; organizational support; standards for service.

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Support Functions, Standards for Service, and Service Process Outcomes

As the presence of service-based organizations continues to steadily increase in today's business economy, considerable attention is being paid to the issue of customer service (Burke, 1995; Schneider & Bowen, 1992). Researchers in the areas of management, marketing, and psychology are conducting research that examines consumers' reactions to and expectations of the output from service-based organizations (Guerrier & Deery, 1998). Despite the large amount of research examining customer service, little attention has centered on the managers who are responsible for customer service processes in hospitality. The purpose of this investigation is twofold: (a) to specify and validate the perceptual and attitudinal elements of customer service processes from a managers' perspective and (b) to create and test a model that explicates organizational behavior in a service setting.

Customer Service

Three general characteristics are presented in the literature on organizations to describe service-based processes (see, for instance, Schneider & Bowen, 1992, 1993). First, service itself is an intangible element in the customer-service provider exchange and is difficult to measure quantitatively, mainly because the end product (the service) results from an exchange of human action and behavior. Although tangible products are often exchanged in service episodes, tangible products do not rely strictly on human action to be consumed. Second, services are generated and typically consumed simultaneously with the producer or seller present during the consumption of the service, whereas most tangible consumer products are produced and consumed apart from the place of purchase. Last, the provision of service requires a

multidirectional exchange process, with both consumers and service providers sharing information, behavior, and products to successfully complete its delivery and consumption. Tangible products, on the other hand, typically require less service-based attention from the producer prior to selection and consumption by the consumer (Susskind, Borchgrevink, Kacmar, & Brymer, 2000).

Through the process of theory development with regard to customer service in organizations, service quality and customer satisfaction have been identified as two main elements of the customer service process. Service quality is typically defined as a long-term construct that characterizes an organization's provision of service on a continuum (e.g., ranging from poor to exceptional). On the other hand, customer satisfaction is an event-specific construct that represents an individual's perception of his or her service experience (Bitner, 1990; Cronin & Taylor, 1992, 1994). For example, a luxury hotel may have a long-standing tradition for providing exceptional service but may dissatisfy customers from time to time for a variety of reasons. Therefore, customer dissatisfaction with a single service episode does not necessarily imply that service quality is low because many influences in addition to service quality influence customers' perceptions of service. The empirical distinction among service quality and customer satisfaction is important and suggests that customers' perceptions of service processes are influenced by both situational factors and broad-based organizational factors. Whether referring to service quality or customer satisfaction, consumers seeking services hold the expectation of being treated with courtesy and receiving services consistent with their expectations and their perceptions of the organizational environs (Ford, 1995; Ford & Etienne, 1994). As such, customer service providers are, in part, responsible for creating and maintaining both service quality and customer satisfaction simultaneously in their organizations.

In most service-based organizations, the output is produced, provided, and consumed in a single episode or a series of episodes (e.g., in a restaurant or hotel). Therefore, customers normally consume and evaluate the output of the service process in the presence of the service provider. This differs significantly from manufacturing-based processes where product quality and a customer's satisfaction with a product are typically assessed apart from the producer.

The study of customer service has begun to move to the forefront of organizational research to address issues such as (a) employees' reactions to customer service episodes (Bitner, 1990; Bitner, Booms, & Mohr, 1994; Singh, Goolsby, & Rhoads, 1994), (b) a service orientation (Bowen, Siehl, & Schneider, 1989; Firnstahl, 1989; Hurley, 1998; Kelly, 1992; Petrillose, Shanklin, & Downey, 1998,), and (c) the organizational environment in which customer service episodes take place (Schneider & Bowen, 1992,1993). It is safe to propose that managers of service- based organizations and researchers alike understand that customer satisfaction and service quality are crucial elements to operational success in the service sector. This highlights the importance of understanding organizational behavior that will lead to satisfying customer-service provider interactions on the front lines among managers, customer service employees, and their guests.

To understand better how service-based organizations function, the development of theoretical frameworks that describe the interactive nature of consumer- provider episodes from the service providers' point of view (Abramis & Thomas, 1990; Bitner et al., 1994) and the organizational elements that lead to effective service should be considered. Therefore, it appears necessary to redirect research efforts in the area of customer service to the factors in service-based organizations that best describe the behavior and attitudes of customer service providers in terms of work-based relationships and their reactions to service-based processes in organizations.

It is particularly prudent to begin with an examination of managers' perceptions of and attitudes toward the customer-service provider exchange, given their administrative role in the service process.

Customer Service Behavior

The provision of customer service is an organizational behavior that is influenced by the organization as a whole, including its management, coworkers, and customers. To engage in customer service (the behavior), individuals must possess not only the motivation to perform their customer service duties but also an aptitude to perform them. As such, individuals display varying levels of proficiency and frequency of customer service behavior. From a managerial perspective, employees' customer service behavior is likely to be difficult to predict and control due to multiple influences on employees' behavior and attitudes in the service-based workplace (Schneider, Wheeler, & Cox, 1992).

The factors of customer service behavior that lead to successful and satisfying customer-employee interaction have yet to be well identified in the study of service- based organizations (Bitner et al., 1994). The lack of distinction among the influences of customer service behavior is due primarily to the fact that each service episode tends to be unique and is influenced by forces both internal and external to the organization, such as customers, employees, and the organization itself (Schneider & Bowen, 1995). An examination of customer service behavior and its impact on workplace attitudes in service-based organizations is a logical extension of the existing body of literature on customer service processes.

Borrowing From the Climate Literature

Early research examining organizational climate conducted by Litwin and Stringer (1968) identified elements of an organizational environment believed to influence organizational behavior and effectiveness. Their conceptualization and measurement of climate involved assessing individuals' perceptions of a set of measurable organizational properties experienced directly or indirectly by an organizational constituent (Litwin & Stringer, 1968). Despite the insightful framework developed, a number of researchers later discovered some conceptual and methodological flaws in Litwin and Stringer's (1968) measurement of organizational climate (Muchinsky, 1976; Sims & Lafollette, 1975). The original dimensions proposed by Litwin and Stringer were reclassified following several factor analytic studies that identified new (i.e., reworked) dimensions. In effect, the general character of the original constructs was maintained; however, recommendations were made to regroup the scales based on theoretical and statistical criteria (cf. Muchinsky, 1976; Sims & Lafollette, 1975).

These studies were conducted at a time when the business economy had yet to shift to its current service-based focus. In fact, it is likely that the work done by Muchinsky (1976) and Sims and Lafollette (1975) do not represent organizations today, particularly service-based organizations. Given that climate emerges from a shared perception of an organization's practices and procedures (Schneider, 1975), it makes sense to take a step back into these practices and procedures in service-based organizations to uncover a framework that accurately measures customer service behavior and attitudes. It should be noted, however, that Schneider and colleagues (1992) have begun to explicate a climate for service. We begin by identifying perceptual and procedural elements of the service process that are likely to influence customer service behavior and hence service process outcomes, rather than attempting to measure

organizational climate. This work is presented as a test of elements of the service process and customer service behavior, which we believe are unique and important to service-based organizations and hence hospitality management.

Researchers have identified service climate-type constructs, such as service orientation (Hogan, Hogan, & Busch, 1984) and customer orientation (Kelly, 1992), that are presented as important elements in the provision of customer service. Hogan et al. (1984) broadly define service orientation as "a set of attitudes and behaviors that affects the staff of any organization and its customers" (p. 167). In terms of explaining a customer orientation, Kelly (1992) describes customer service employees as being affected by factors such as organizational socialization, motivational direction and effort, organizational climate, and commitment to the organization. Similarly, Ford and Etienne (1994) identify three broad categories of determinants of service provider behavior during service encounters: (a) customer variables, such as demographics or behavior; (b) provider variables, such as demographics, behavior, mood, and affect; and (c) contextual variables, such as the organizational environment, structure, leadership, and coworkers. In sum, Schneider et al. (1992), Hogan et al. (1984), Kelly (1992), and Ford and Etienne (1994) each identify components of customer service behavior but stop short of an integrative framework to predict customer service behavior and outcomes within service-based contexts. It is evident that customer service behavior is influenced by multiple factors and is, in part, a function of ambient organizational factors including employees' and managers' reactions to those factors (Litwin & Stringer, 1968; Muchinsky, 1976, 1977; Schneider et al., 1992).

A Model of Customer Service Behavior and Outcomes

To describe the influences of employees' behavior in service-based organizations, a path model is proposed that presents the dimensions of, and influences on, service providers' customer service behavior in terms of their attitudes and perceptions of their work-related environment. The model presented as Figure 1 begins with coworker support and supervisory support. Perceived coworker support and supervisory support are expected to conjointly influence perceptions of organizational standards for service that mediate guest orientation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Last, job satisfaction and organizational commitment ultimately influence turnover intentions. Theoretical support for each of these proposed linkages is offered in the following sections.

Organizational Support

In general, organizational support has been defined as an employee's perception of the concern an organization shows for his or her well-being (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986) and is based on an attitudinal response to the organization as an entity (Shore & Tetrick, 1991). In a recent investigation of service employees' work- related attitudes and perceptions, notable measurement error was found in the assessment of organizational support as conceptualized by Eisenberger et al. (1986), suggesting that organizational support be examined more closely to capture better the support function in service-based organizations (Susskind et al., 2000).

In light of these findings, it was suggested that the measurement of organizational support should be extended to address additional influences from peers and superiors, given Litwin and Stringer's (1968) conceptualization of organizational support in terms of coworkers, supervisors,

and broader-based organizational elements. The need to clarify support functions in service-based organizations is strengthened by the work of Levinson (1965). Levinson notes that employees typically view actions made by agents of an organization as a function of the organization itself, implying that employees, supervisors, and managers in the conduct of their work-related duties represent the organization and its ownership. This concept was also embraced by Eisenberger et al. (1986) who in reference to Levison's (1965) work stated "the personification of the organization was assumed to represent an employee's distillation of views concerning all the other members who control that individual's material and symbolic resources" (p. 500).

When considering Litwin and Stringer's (1968) conceptualization, support is a macro construct consisting of workers' perceptions of support from the organization as whole, along with influences from superiors, subordinates, and coworkers, without specifically distinguishing between the influences from peers and superiors. We propose that in service-based contexts, coworker support and supervisory support are independent surrogates for perceptions of organizational support (cf. Levinson, 1965), calling for a slight departure from the well-received interpretations of Eisenberger et al. (1986) and Eisenberger et al. (1990). The proposed restructuring of organizational support, in terms of coworker support and supervisory support, allows for a more specific description of the influences of support in terms of employees' reactions to their work environment.

Coworker support. Coworker support is defined as the extent to which employees believe their coworkers are willing to provide them with work-related assistance to aid in the execution of their service-based duties. In most instances, coworkers' work-related support is vital to the accomplishment of work-related tasks. Coworker support (formal or informal in nature) is

usually void of hierarchical distinctions and acts as a supplement to formal support available from supervisors and managers.

Supervisory support. Supervisory support is defined as individuals' beliefs that supervisors are willing and able to assist them in the performance of their work-related duties. Support from a supervisor can be moral, physical, or managerial. Individuals' impressions of supervisory support are based on the concept that the actions and behavior of supervisors are intended to facilitate the work-related performance. This is consistent with Wayne, Shore, and Liden's (1997) finding that the quality of leader-member exchange (LMX) has a strong effect on perceived organizational support. Consequently, in the service organization, most customer service efforts require a supervisor or manager as a principal organizational representative to provide and monitor formal work-related information, in terms of performance feedback and evaluations. Therefore, it is likely through both coworker and supervisory support functions in the organization service providers will be exposed to organizational standards for performance of customer service duties. Therefore, we present standards for service as a mediator of perceived support functions and outcome variables.

Standards for service. In terms of organizational climate, Litwin and Stringer (1968) defined standards as organizational members' perceptions of (a) organizational goals and objectives; (b) managerial expectations for job performance; and (c) the implicit importance placed on those goals, objectives, and performance demands. The Litwin and Stringer (1968) dimension of standards received criticism over its psychometric properties as a construct following tests of exploratory factor analysis and was deemed an unreliable dimension of organizational climate (Muchinsky, 1976; Sims & Lafollette, 1975).

The factor analytic findings reported by Muchinsky (1976) and Sims and Lafollette (1975) concerning the standards dimension are likely a result of the typically distant relationships found among the employees, the product, and organizational objectives (i.e., task identity and task significance) in larger, more bureaucratic organizations (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). In customer service organizations, however, standards are generally more pronounced due to the fact that the service provider is more involved with the production and delivery of the product and/or service. Additionally, service providers are more likely to receive frequent feedback concerning their performance (i.e., deviation from expectations for service) in a service episode during or immediately following its consumption by either the consumer or management (Schneider & Bowen, 1995).

The standards dimension, as conceptualized here, also includes the measurement of workers' belief that they are viewed as a crucial part of the service delivery process (Lewis, 1989). Managers of service-based organizations have considerably less contact with their customers when compared with their employees (Bitner, 1990; Schneider & Bowen, 1993), emphasizing the important role employees play in the service delivery process. If employees believe they are as important to the organization as the customer and their significance in the service delivery process is institutionalized into organizational practices, they are more likely to view positively their customer service duties through performance efficacy promoted by their superior and coworkers. This portion of the standards dimension differs from support-based functions because it is possible to have support to perform service-related duties without being awarded a sense of importance in the service process. As a central component of customer service behavior, standards represent an important part of an organization's strategic mission and

should be used as a gauge by which products and/or services are produced and evaluated in an organization.

       Hypothesis 1: Perceptions of coworker support positively influence standards for service.

       Hypothesis 2: Perceptions of supervisory support positively influence standards for

          service.

Guest Orientation

       Guest orientation is defined as the importance a customer service provider places on his or her customers' needs and expectations with regard to service offerings and describes the extent to which employees are willing to put forth time and effort to satisfy their customers (Kelly, 1992). Employees' guest orientation is influenced by the standards and principles set by the organization and the extent to which individuals believe they are meeting the explicit service goals of the organization. Guest orientation is an outcome of the customer service process. One develops a normative guest orientation through exposure to and relationships with individuals involved in the service process (i.e., customers, coworkers, and superiors)(Hogan et al., 1984; Kelly, 1992; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Recently, an investigation of service orientation, as conceptualized by Hogan et al. (1984), identified measurement problems when applying the Service Orientation Index to service-based personnel in the hotel industry and suggested that a close revaluation of service orientation be undertaken in hospitality (Petrillose et al., 1998). As an outcome variable, guest orientation represents a service provider's level of affective commitment toward customers.

       Hypothesis 3: Standards for service positively influence a guest orientation.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is an attitudinal measure that relates past events and rewards to current feelings about a job (Locke, 1976) and can be described as "a personalistic evaluation of conditions existing on a job" (Schneider & Snyder, 1975, p. 319). Customer service employees who report higher standards for service are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs because the establishment and execution of standards affirms the organization's acceptance of the workers' important role in the provision of customer service (Lewis, 1989).

Hypothesis 4: Standards for service positively influence job satisfaction.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment consists of "(a) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; (b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (c) a strong desire to maintain membership [employment] in the organization" (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979, p. 226). Organizational commitment has a rich history in the study of organizations as an outcome variable. As noted above, factors from a service-based environment (i.e., standards) influence service providers' perceptions of job satisfaction, suggesting that employees who are satisfied with their jobs view their employing organization as valuable and are more likely to be committed to the organization. Hence,

Hypothesis 5: Standards for service positively influence organizational commitment.

Intent to Quit

An individual's desire to end an employment relationship is normally framed as a set of psychological responses to specific organizational conditions. Turnover intentions typically

include a range of organizational withdrawal behaviors ranging from daydreaming to the

physical act of quitting (Kraut, 1975). The behavioral intention to quit has been critically

evaluated in the organizational behavior literature and generally indicates that intent to quit is

negatively related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment (cf. Tett & Meyer, 1993).

The specific antecedents and consequents of intent to quit have been well studied in a number of

research investigations and have identified organizational commitment as a mediator between

job satisfaction and intent to quit (Davy, Kinicki, & Scheck, 1991; Williams & Hazer, 1986).

These relationships are further supported by a number of studies that identify job satisfaction as

an antecedent of organizational commitment (Tett & Meyer, 1993). However, in a recent

investigation of service employees' work-related perceptions and attitudes, job satisfaction and

organizational commitment were found to be conjoint influences on intent to quit, opposed to the

pattern of relationships suggested by Davy et al. (1991) and Williams and Hazer (1986)

(Susskind et al., 2000). Therefore, as positive affective responses, it is reasonable to present job

satisfaction and organizational commitment as conjoint negative influences on intentions to quit.

Hypothesis 6: Job satisfaction is negatively related to intent to quit.

Hypothesis 7: Organizational commitment is negatively related to intent to quit.

In sum, factors traditionally associated with the measurement of organizational climate

have been reconceptualized and combined along with additional service-relevant measures to

create a model of customer service behavior and outcomes. The proposed model represents an

initial attempt to describe customer service employees' perceptual and behavioral processes. This

investigation proceeds in two interrelated stages. First, the construct validity of the variables

described above will be assessed to provide a foundation for a test of the nomological validity of

a model for customer service. Subsequently, the resulting measurement model will be applied to

the model of customer service behavior and outcomes using latent structural equation modeling techniques.

Methods

Participants

Managerial-supervisory personnel ($N = 250$) surveyed for this project represented 11 different hotels from 6 national and international hotel corporations. The managers in these hotels included executive committee members (general managers, rooms division managers, food & beverage managers, controllers, marketing directors, human resource directors, chief engineers, executive chefs) plus department and assistant department heads. The supervisors represented line and staff departments, including food & beverage, rooms division, accounting, human resources, marketing/sales, and engineering. The participants could be described as approximately 49% male and 51% female, between the ages of 18 and 62 ($M = 36$, $Mdn = 33$), working for their organization at the time of survey administration an average of 5.5 years ($Mdn = 4.2$).

Procedure

The participants were approached during management development sessions sponsored by the participating hotels and were asked to complete a questionnaire during a scheduled break designed specifically for that purpose. The managers were instructed to evaluate each question based on their subordinates' perception of their respective organization. Participants returned the surveys directly to the researcher immediately following their completion during the session.

As an exploratory study looking into perceptions of customer service processes and outcomes in hospitality organizations, we gathered managers' reports of their subordinates' views of the organization. This is based on the supposition that managers' perceptions of front-line processes and interaction are an important element in managing and better understanding service-based organizations.

Measurement

Survey measures evaluated participants' perceptions of coworker support, supervisory support, standards for service, guest orientation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each scale item on a five choice Likert-type metric (i.e., *strongly agree* = 5, *agree* = 4, *neutral* = 3, *disagree* = 2, and *strongly disagree* = 1).

Coworker support. Coworker support was measured using an 8-item scale modified specifically for this investigation. Coworker support items were adapted from the Eisenberger et al. (1986) and Litwin and Stringer (1968) measures of organizational support. The general character of the original scales was maintained; however, each question was specifically reworded to assess the respondents' perceptions of their relationships with and attitudes toward coworkers in service-related jobs. A sample item from this scale is "I find my coworkers to be very helpful in performing my customer service duties."

Supervisory support. Supervisory support was measured using an 8-item scale designed specifically for this investigation. The supervisory support items were also adapted from the Eisenberger et al. (1986) and Litwin and Stringer (1968) measures of organizational support. These items were identical to the coworker support items, except the word *supervisor* was

substituted for the term *coworker* in each item. As with coworker support above, this scale assessed the respondents' perceptions of their relationships with and attitudes toward their supervisors in service-related jobs. A sample item from this scale is "I find my supervisor to be very helpful in performing my customer service duties."

Standards for service. Based on the propositions of Litwin and Stringer (1968) and Lewis (1989), standards for service were measured with a 10-item scale designed specifically for this investigation. The scale assessed participants' belief that standards for service processes are viewed as a crucial part of the customer- service provider exchange by the organization's leadership and are present in their work environment. A sample item from this scale is "I feel my employers really want me to provide excellent customer service."

Guest orientation. Participants' guest orientation was measured with an 8-item scale developed specifically for this investigation. The guest orientation scale was based on Kelly (1992) and Hogan et al.'s (1984) definitions of perceptions of a service-focused orientation. This scale assessed participants' belief that service providers' primary duties are to attend to their customers' (guests') needs. A sample item from this scale is "If possible I meet all requests made by my customers."

Job satisfaction and intent to quit. A 3-item general job satisfaction scale and a 2-item intent to quit scale (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) were used to assess participants' level of general job satisfaction and intent to quit. Sample items from these scale are "Generally speaking, I am very satisfied with this job," and "I frequently think of quitting this job," for the job satisfaction and intent to quit scales, respectively.

Organizational commitment. As noted with perceptions of organizational support, the measurement of organizational commitment using the Organizational Commitment

Questionnaire (OCQ) (Mowday et al., 1979) has presented some difficulties in the measurement

of service-based workers' attitudes (Susskind et al., 2000). Therefore, an alternative measure of

organizational commitment was used to assess the participants' perceived level of affective

organizational commitment. A 9-item scale developed by Balfour and Wechsler (1996) assessed

the respondents' perception of affective commitment toward their employing organization. A

sample item from this scale is "I feel like part of the family in this organization."

Analyses

 Confirmatory factor analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) creates a solution that

tests specific hypotheses about the existence of factors and the nature of their linear

combinations (Nunnally, 1978). Ordinary least squares multiple groups CFA was applied to the

data (Hunter & Cohen, 1969). The fit of measurement model was assessed with tests of internal

consistency and parallelism.

 Internal consistency. The tests of internal consistency (item homogeneity) examine the

scale variables' deviation from an a priori specified factor, assuming that items from a single

construct cluster together in a linear fashion as indicators of the underlying latent construct. A

factor is internally consistent when individual responses to one item in a scale are similar to all

other responses made to all other items believed to be a part of the factor. Internally consistent

items will satisfy the conditions established by the Spearman product rule (Spearman, 1904),

where a matrix of predicted correlations computed based on the factor loadings is compared with

the observed matrix (i.e., the matrix formed by the scale items). A factor is deemed internally

consistent per the Spearman product rule when the deviations between the predicted and

observed matrix are not significant, considering measurement error. The recommended approach

to assess the goodness of fit with multiple groups analyses is to examine the residuals and determine with %2 analyses if the observed residuals are smaller than what could be expected by chance alone at the selected level of significance (in this case $p = .05$).

Parallelism. With tests of parallelism (item heterogeneity), all items within a particular factor should correlate in a similar (parallel) fashion with the items from other factors. As a test of external consistency, parallelism is needed to support tests of internal consistency. As with tests of internal consistency, the Spearman product rule is applied to assess deviations between the observed and predicted correlation matrices. Tests of parallelism aid in the identification of scale items that may be multicolinear or demonstrate a significantly varied pattern of correlation (e.g., cross-loading) with other measures.

The reliability and dimensionality of the measures were assessed with PACKET version 1.0 confirmatory factor analysis tests (Hamilton & Hunter, 1988). Scales were examined based on the criteria that the final retained scales meet the requirements of (a) each retained scale item demonstrating its highest factor loading on the specified principal factor and (b) each scale producing a nonsignificant chi-square for the sum of squared error (SSE) in terms of scale item homogeneity and heterogeneity (Hunter & Gerbing, 1982). Items not meeting these criteria were removed from subsequent analyses. The tests' homogeneity and heterogeneity yield results similar to those used in blind factor analyses when an orthogonal rotation is applied. As such, linear uncorrelated factors result, addressing item multicolinearity, cross loading, and factor misspecification.

Path Analyses

Acknowledging Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) recommended two-step approach to performing structural equation modeling, we assessed the measurement model for fit independently of the assessment of the structural model. A covariance matrix was used to test the latent structural equation model in LISREL 8.12a using the maximum likelihood method (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993). By default, the error terms were permitted to correlate and no relationships other than those specified in the path diagram were permitted to correlate in the structural analyses. To compensate for measurement error in the scale values within the path model, the paths from the latent variables to the indicators were set to the square root of the scale reliability. Additionally, the error variance was set to equal the variance of the scale multiplied by one minus the reliability. These procedures fix the proportion of error variance assigned to each factor based on the reported scale reliabilities and the relevant variance associated with each factor (Hayduk, 1987).

From LISREL four goodness-of-fit statistics were reported for the structural equation model: (a) goodness of fit index (GFI), (b) adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), (c) non-normed fit index (NNFI), and (d) standardized root mean squared residual (RMR). A good fit of a model to the data using the GFI and AGFI indices is characterized by values approximating .90 (Medsker, Williams, & Holahan, 1994), whereas an NNFI of less than .90 indicates that considerable improvements can be made to the model (Bentler & Bonnett, 1980). Additionally, RMR indicates a good fitting model when the residuals from the comparison of the fitted and observed covariance matrix are small (i.e., smaller than .05) (Byrne, 1998).

Results

Test of the Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analyses prompted the removal of two items from the coworker support scale. One of the items was removed due to a violation of homogeneity and one was removed due to violations of heterogeneity with the supervisory support scale. Four items were excluded from the supervisory support scale. One of the items was removed due to a violation of homogeneity and three were removed due to problems of heterogeneity with the coworker support scale and guest orientation scales. Four items were excluded from the standards for service scale due to violations of parallelism with the guest orientation scale, job satisfaction scale, and the organizational commitment scale, and one item was excluded for a violation of internal consistency. Analyses prompted the removal of three items from the guest orientation scale. One item was removed due to a violation of homogeneity, and two items cross-loaded with the commitment scale. One item was removed from the organizational commitment scale due to violations of parallelism among the job satisfaction and guest orientation scales. The job satisfaction and intent to quit scales were retained in their entirety.

The retained items exhibited their highest factor loading on the specified principal factor and maintained scale reliabilities greater than .70, suggesting that the a priori measurement model produced a good fit to the data. The tests of parallelism for the measurement model produced a nonsignificant chi-square ($X^2[455] = 487.40$, SSE = 1.95, $p > .05$) and each of the final scales demonstrated sound construct validity in terms of item homogeneity. Nonsignificant chi-squares were attained at the $p > .05$ level for the (a) coworker support scale ($X^2[15] = 16.10$, SSE= .024), (b) supervisory support scale ($X^2[6] = .58$, SSE = .002), (c) standards for service scale ($X^2[10] = 9.53$, SSE = .038), (d) guest orientation scale ($X^2[10] = 6.03$, SSE = .024), (e)

job satisfaction scale ($X^2[3] = .05$, SSE = .002), (f) organizational commitment scale ($X^2[28] =$ 16.80, SSE = .067), and (g) intent to quit scale ($X^2[1] = 10$, SSE = .0004). The items' principal factor loadings and scale reliabilities (Cronbach's a) are reported in Table 1, and the scale-level descriptive statistics and correlations are reported in Table 2.

Test of the Model of Customer Service Behavior and Outcomes

The test of the hypothesized model of customer service climate is presented as Figure 2. The standardized path coefficients are reported for each hypothesized path in the model. The model demonstrated a very good fit to the data (GFI = .95, AGFI = .89, NNFI = .92, RMR = .04).[1] Each of the hypothesized relationships in the path model was significant at the $p < .01$ or $p < .001$ levels and provides support for the model as presented.

The test of Hypothesis 1 revealed a positive, significant relationship between coworker support and standards for service (path coefficient = .43, $p < .001$), and the test of Hypothesis 2 was supported through a positive, significant relationship between supervisory support and standards for service (path coefficient = .29, $p < .001$), indicating that support's influence on standards for service is perceived to be a function of influences from both peers and superiors. Standards for service was significantly related to guest orientation (path coefficient = .42, $p < .001$), job satisfaction (path coefficient = .86, $p < .001$), and organizational commitment (path coefficient = .91, $p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 3 and strongly supporting Hypotheses 4 and 5. Hypothesis 6 and Hypothesis 7 were supported by significant, negative relationships between job satisfaction and intent to quit (path coefficient = -.63, $p < .001$) and organizational commitment and intent to quit (path coefficient = -.40, $p < .01$).

Post Hoc Analyses

To ensure that the hypothesized model produced a better fit than competing models, Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) approach to testing nested models was employed. In this process, five models were tested and evaluated based on changes in X^2 statistics and Akaike's (1987) information criterion (AIC). If the hypothesized model is better suited to the data than competing models (i.e., saturated, independent model, alternatives), the change in the $\%2$ statistic should be statistically significant and the AIC for the hypothesized model should be more similar to the saturated model AIC than the null model AIC (Byrne, 1998).

The null model is produced by LISREL output so it is completely independent, the saturated model is specified so the number of estimated parameters equals the number of data points (i.e., just identified) (Byrne, 1998). The alternative models were selected to identify relationships that may alternatively model the data based on theoretical considerations. Alternative model one was created by removing the mediating link between supervisory support and standards for service and job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The modified model specified direct paths from supervisory support to job satisfaction and organizational commitment because prior research has indicated a direct effect between elements of support and job affect (Wayne et al., 1997). Alternative model two returned the mediating effect of standards for service between supervisory support and job satisfaction and organizational commitment but added direct links between coworker support and job satisfaction and organizational commitment while removing standards for service as a mediating effect.

The fit statistics and an examination of changes in X^2 values across the model are presented in Table 3. In each case the hypothesized model produced a significant change in X^2 when compared with the competing models ($\Delta X^2_{[\text{null}-\text{hypothesized}]} = 634.40, p < .001;$

$\Delta X^2_{[\text{alternative 1}-\text{hypothesized}]} = 141.83, p = 01$; and $\Delta X^2_{[\text{alternative 2}-\text{hypothesized}]} = 10.18, p = .02$). Comparisons were not made between the Saturated Model and the Hypothesized Model because negligible differences were anticipated. Furthermore, the AIC statistics for the hypothesized more closely approximated the AIC statistics for the Saturated Model compared with the alternative models, supporting the retention of the Hypothesized Model as presented. It should be noted, however, that Alternative Model 2 demonstrated good fit statistics, but not superior to the Hypothesized Model.

Discussion

In an attempt to create and validate measures to describe customer service behavior, the measurement model presented and tested above proved to be a good fit to the data. The scale reliabilities of the proposed measures all exceeded .70. A sample of managers and supervisors provided for the initial assessment of the organizational factors that describe service processes and related affective outcomes.

Confirmatory factor analyses reduced the number of items retained in the coworker support, supervisory support, standards for service, guest orientation, and commitment scales. Consequently, the majority of the items were removed due to violations of parallelism among the scales. The removal of the nonheterogeneous items aided in reducing multicolinearity to an admissible level. The resulting measures demonstrated sound construct validity in terms of item homogeneity and parallelism. The original measurement model as presented indicated a few changes were needed to reach statistical significance with this sample. When tested, the supervisory support scale initially demonstrated strong internal consistency. However, due to constraints in parallelism, supervisory support was reduced to 4 items. Similar reductions were

made in the coworker support scale, the standards for service scales, and guest orientation scales. As presented in prior research, the job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit measures remained stable and reliable among this service-based managerial sample, with only one commitment item being excluded from the final measurement model. The dimensionality of the constructs presented here supports their use in assessing service-based organizations in terms of process and outcomes and addresses measurement concerns cited in previous research (Petrillose et al., 1998; Susskind et al., 2000). Specifically, the support and standards dimensions are presented as process variables. Support is actualized in terms of both coworkers and supervisors independently, and standards for service is presented as a central perceptual construct, mediating coworker and supervisory supports' influence on the outcome measures of guest orientation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions.

The tests of the path models revealed several notable findings. First, the relationship between coworker support, supervisory support, and standards suggests managers' perception of support is multidimensional, and coworker support is viewed as a stronger influence on standards than supervisory support. Coworker support is most likely perceived as informal, independent of the organizational hierarchy, and is likely to act as a worker's first mechanism to attain job-related support, but occurs on the front lines of service where standards are most likely executed and evaluated by customers. Coworker support alone is likely insufficient to accomplish all of one's service-related duties and requires supervisory support as well. In service-based organizations, supervisory support represents a primary form of organizational support. Supervisory support facilitates the service process and influences workers' standards for service. Ultimately, standards for service mediate the perceptions of support influences on guest orientation and job-related affect. Therefore, individuals' efforts to align themselves with their

guests' service needs does not, by necessity, make them more satisfied or committed but relates them to the core goals of a service-based organization and workers' desire to reach those core goals. Guest orientation is best described as an outcome variable of the service process demonstrated by a stronger relationship to evaluative factors such as standards, rather than affective responses such as job satisfaction or organizational commitment. Additionally, the strong positive relationship between standards for service, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment suggests that if individuals believe the organization upholds high standards for service and perceive the standards as valuable to the customer service process, they will be more satisfied with and committed to their jobs. Yet, the relationship between standards for service and guest orientation, although significant at the $p < .001$ level, appears to be less influenced by standards than the organizational-based affective outcome variables. This also highlights the point that service workers perceive organizational-based characteristics differently than customer- based characteristics, further supporting the contention that a multidimensional model of customer service behavior is primarily process based. Additionally, the relationship among job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions was supported as hypothesized and is consistent with the findings from a number of different studies (Susskind et al., 2000; Tett & Meyer, 1993). This suggests that job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit continue to be important outcome variables in the study of organizational behavior in service-based organizations.

Limitations

This study used a cross-sectional design. With cross-sectional designs, the measured effects are based on instantaneous and simultaneous influence among the variables (Judge &

Watanabe, 1993), making it possible that a longitudinal influence among the variables may have been more descriptive of the respondents' perceptions of customer service behavior and outcomes. Additionally, only self-report questionnaires were administered to the respondents. It is possible that the data suffer from the problem of common method variance (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). The noted pattern of responses may have been a function of the method in which the data were collected, rather than true differences in perceptions and attitudes (Doty & Glick, 1998).[2] We believe it is crucial that future research investigations of this type include multiple measurement techniques to avoid potential problems with common method variance. Items such as the customer satisfaction index or actual turnover data are likely to serve this purpose well.

Additionally, social desirability or a self-serving bias remains a concern with the use of self-report measurement when addressing a topic such as organizational performance among managers. The respondents demonstrated sufficient variability in their responses to the questions presented evidenced by normal standard deviations among the scale values (see Table 2), implying that they may have been less influenced by social desirability than one would believe (Ones, Viswesvaran, & Reiss, 1996). Also, several reverse-coded items were included in the questionnaire to help contrast the sensitivity of the questions. It should be noted that the sound reliabilities and the strong interrelationships among the measures suggest that the participants consistently responded to the potentially sensitive items presented. Regardless, great care should be taken in the presentation of topics to groups of respondents where response bias may occur.

Conclusion

This investigation surveyed respondents from more than a single organization to assess managers' perceptions of organizational behavior and processes in service- based organizations. The results of this study indicate that managers with varying service-based responsibilities react to and view work performed by service providers consistently. However, each organization is also likely to have unique features that are not found among other organization types. Therefore, it is possible that additional variance in customer service behavior also can be accounted for at the organizational level. This implies that other organizationally-specific factors— such as organizational type and size, job characteristics (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), leader-member exchange and organizational citizenship behavior (Wayne et al., 1997), team-member exchange (Seers, Petty, & Cashman, 1995), and communication patterns and relationships (Muchinsky, 1977; Susskind, Miller, & Johnson, 1998)—can exert influence on service providers' perceptions of their work environment.

Future Research

These findings highlight several directions for future research. First, it would be valuable to assess the relationships proposed in this study over time. Longitudinal analyses may reveal patterns that were not evident in this cross-sectional design (Judge & Watanabe, 1993). Second, it would be useful to collect a sample of both managerial-supervisory personnel and line-level personnel from the same organization in addition to multiple organizations to examine customer service behavior between and within service organizations and hierarchical level.

Despite the dynamic nature of the customer service process, it appears that the management personnel represented in this investigation understand the elements of the service

process. Managers' perceptions are crucial to the alignment of an organization's delivery of

service and their customers' needs and expectations for service. Developing and maintaining

customer, employee, and management satisfaction and commitment is a complex process

(Schneider & Bowen, 1995) and has great implications for the training, socializing, and retention

of a service- oriented workforce (Kelly, 1992).

NOTES

1.   As suggested by one of the anonymous reviewers, the full structural equation model with

all the retained indicators was tested. Results indicated that the full model could be

substantially improved on (GFI = .80, AGFI = .77, NNFI =.84, RMR = .065). As noted

above, the model's fit was improved by testing the latent model apart from its indicators

based on the recommendations of Hayduck (1987) and Williams and Hazer (1986).

Given that the measurement model was thoroughly assessed before performing the

structural equation model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), it is therefore appropriate to

aggregate psychometrically sound scale variables and test their relationships in a latent

model to better control for error variance among the variables.

2.   To mitigate concerns over common method variance in these data, we applied a post hoc

Harman one-factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Although this test is by no means a

perfect discriminator of common method variance, it does alleviate some concerns. With

Harman's one-factor test, all of the variables in question were entered into a blind factor

analysis. The resulting unrotated factor solution was then examined to ensure that more

than one factor emerges or that variance explained among the resulting factors was well

distributed across the factors (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). In our case, the analyses

suggested between six and eight factors, explaining 63% of the variance with a roughly

equal distribution of variance across the factors. The first factor accounted for 30% of the

variance; the remaining seven factors accounted for the remaining 34%. Based on prior

applications of this procedure (Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson, & Anthony, 1999; Podsakoff,

Todor, Grover, & Huber, 1984; Schriesheim, 1979), it remains unclear what percentage

of variance among the first factor determines whether a general factor is present among

the data. We remain cautious in stating that common method variance is not present

among these data.

Table 1. Principal Factor Loadings and Scale Reliabilities for the Service-Environment Variables

	Cronbach's α	Loading
Coworker support	.75	
I find my coworkers to be very helpful in performing my customer service duties.		.62
When performing my customer service duties, I rely heavily on my coworkers.		.46
My coworkers provide me with important work-related information and advice which make performing my job easier.		.56
My coworkers make it difficult for me to provide service to my customers.[a]		.66
I find my coworkers do not care about providing good service to our customers. [a]		.59
I could perform my job better without help from my coworkers.[a]		.58
Supervisory support	.76	
I find my supervisor to be very helpful in performing my customer service duties.		.83
My supervisor provides me with important work-related information and advice which make performing my job easier.		.77
My supervisor makes it difficult for me to provide service to my customers. [a]		.60
I could perform my job just as well without help from my supervisor.[a]		.47
Guest orientation	.80	
It is best to always ensure that our customers receive the best service available at this organization.		.72
If possible, I meet all requests made by my customers.		.69
I frequently want to tell customers NO when they make special requests or require special attention.[a]		.42
As an individual responsible for providing customer service, customers are very important to me.		.80
I believe providing timely, efficient service to customers is a major function of my job.		.73
Standards for service	.72	
The managers at my job believe that employees who deal with customers are just as important as the customers.		.67
I feel my employers really want me to provide excellent customer service.		.63
In our organization, we set very high standards for customer service.		.61
Management believes that if workers are happy, excellent customer service will result.		.62
To get ahead in this organization it is more important to get along with others than to provide excellent customer service.[a]		.40

Job satisfaction	.72	
Generally speaking, I am very satisfied with this job.		.64
I am generally satisfied with the kind of work I do in this job.		.66
Most people on this job are very satisfied with their job.		.62
Organizational commitment	.88	
I am quite proud to be able to tell people who it is I work for.		.79
This organization appreciates my accomplishments on the job.		.83
What this organization stands for is important to me.		.75
I feel like part of the family in this organization.		.63
This organization does all it can to recognize employees for good performance.		.65
I work for an organization that is unable to achieve its mission.[a]		.57
The people I work with do not care about what happens to me.[a]		.57
My efforts on this job are largely ignored or overlooked by the organization.[a]		.70
Intent to quit	.75	
I frequently think of quitting this job.		.71
People often think of quitting this job.		.71

Note: $N = 250$; only the principal factor's loadings are reported for each scale.
a. denotes a reverse coded item.

Table 2. Correlations and Descriptive Statistics of the Scale Variables

Variable	M	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
(1) Coworker support	4.17	.55	—						
(2) Supervisory support	3.75	.77	.47*	—					
(3) Standards for service	4.02	.64	.40*	.45*	—				
(4) Guest orientation	4.62	.44	.25*	.22*	.30*	—			
(5) Job satisfaction	3.88	.65	.42*	.35*	.52*	.27*	—		
(6) Commitment	3.80	.70	.44*	.46*	.69*	.22*	.67*	—	
(7) Intent to quit	2.44	.85	−.36*	−.33*	−.56*	−.12	−.64*	−.70*	—

$N= 250$, using a one-tailed significance test.
* $p <.001$.

Table 3. Comparison of the Nested Models

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta \chi^{2a}$	Significant Δ	AIC	GFI	AGFI	NNFI	RMR
Hypothesized	43.60	13	—	—	79.84	.95	.89	.92	.04
Null	677.90	21	634.40	.001	691.90	—	—	—	—
Alternative 1	185.43	13	141.83	.012	301.12	.79	.55	.58	.11
Alternative 2	53.78	12	10.18	.023	86.82	.94	.87	.89	.07
Saturated	—	—	—	—	56.00	—	—	—	—

Note: AIC = Akaike's information criterion, GFI = goodness of fit index, AGFI = adjusted goodness of fit index, NNFI = non-normed fit index, RMR = standardized root mean squared residual.

a. A χ^2 is calculated by subtracting the hypothesized model statistic from the comparison model statistic.
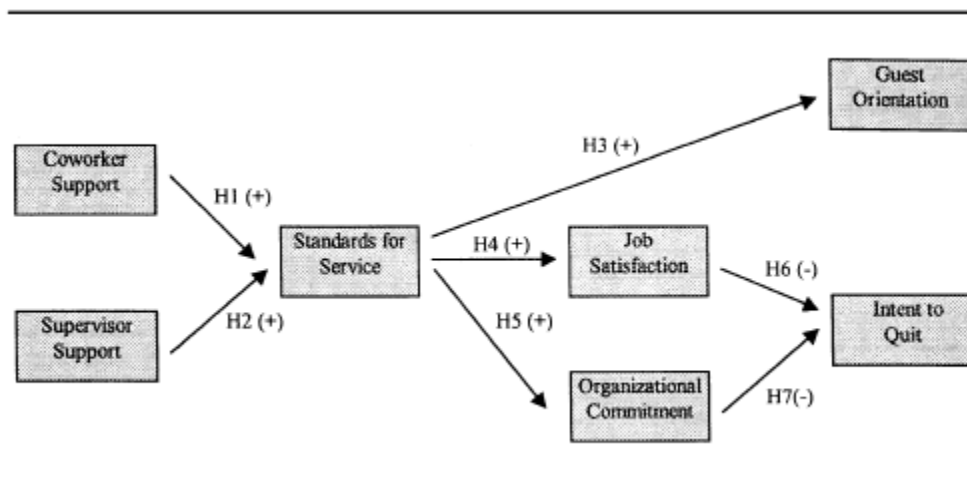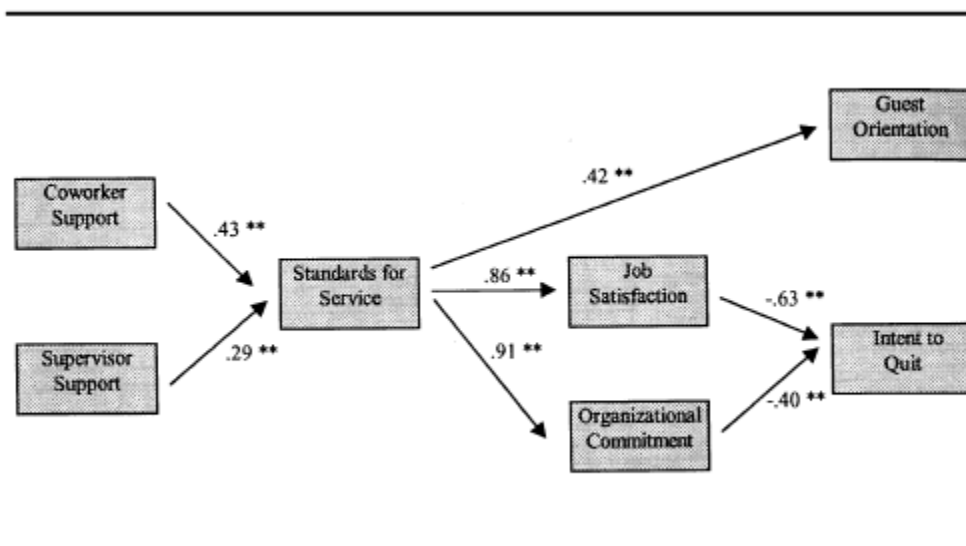
Figure 1. Hypothesized Model of Customer Service Processes and Outcomes.

a. Path coefficients are standardized..
* *p* < .01.
** *p* < .001

Figure 2. Test of the Model of Customer Service Processes and Outcomes3

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