

Chapter 62

Organizational Citizenship Behavior: A Field Study in the Italian Hospitality Industry

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyzes organizational citizenship behavior of permanent versus contingent employees in the Italian hospitality industry. The empirical data were derived from a questionnaire survey conducted in three regions of Southern Italy. Survey respondents were 848 frontline employees from 63 hotels. Findings show that contingent employees exhibited less helping behavior than permanent employees but no difference in their voice behavior. In addition, work status was found to make more of a difference in both helping and voice in less work centrality organizations. Hotel managers are encouraged to focus attention on individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization. Particularly in Italy, it would be advantageous to develop retention strategies for talented people that exhibit a high degree of organizational citizenship behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The hotel industry is a significant contributor to the global service economy. The contemporary hospitality industry is usually characterized by a high number of contingent employees, with low

and unstable wages (Krakover, 2000; Bernhardt, Dresser, & Hatton, 2003), a requirement to provide high levels of customer service to all guests for continual business (Lashley, 2001; Grandey, 2003), and an environment where employees often serve as the single point of contact with custom-

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ers, representing the entire service provision. How employees interact with customers determines to a great extent how customers perceive the service quality. Individual employee uniqueness in terms of personality, attitudes and skills, means that the quality of service that they deliver is very often inconsistent. Additionally, hotel service is a highly interactive process, and both employees' and customers' physical well-being and moods influence the service experience. Thus, the mix of the workforce (i.e., replacing permanent employees with contingent employees) significantly influences customer evaluations, overall customer satisfaction, and customer perceptions of the organization's service quality (Johnson & Ashforth, 2008).

In the present study, contingent employees includes those who are employed under various forms of contractual arrangements. Traditionally in the tourism industry contingent work is used to meet short-run labor needs, so contingent employees are employed on the basis of an explicit and implicit contract that the work relationship will be for a specific and finite duration (Gallagher & McLean Parks, 2001; Connelly & Gallagher, 2004; Ismert & Petrick, 2004). Shortages of traditional, permanent employees have caused many organizations to increase their dependence on contingent employees (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004; Buonocore, 2010).

These trends in workforce recomposition, however, may have unintended, negative consequences on employee behaviors (especially discretionary behaviors) which may offset the benefits associated with reduced labor costs. To date, the comparison of contingent and permanent employees has focused on differences in job related attitudes such as satisfaction and commitment, without examining job behaviors, despite calls for research on potential differences in behavior (Barling & Gallagher, 1996; Gallagher & McLean Parks, 2001).

The present research is based on Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which claims that individuals are likely to participate in an exchange with others if they believe that they are likely to gain benefits without incurring unacceptable costs. This approach views social situations economically, as people compare alternatives and choose that which they perceive to have the most value (Emerson, 1976). Social exchange involves behaviors that are dependent on rewards from others, and results in mutually beneficial relationships (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

The workplace organization forms an important part of the core social support system for its employees (He, Lai, & Lu, 2011). It follows that when employees feel that their workplace organization is acknowledging their contributions, meeting their socio-emotional needs, and taking their well-being into consideration, they will feel obligated to care about the organization's welfare and to help the organization reach its objectives because of the norm of reciprocity (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

This chapter analyzes this structural relationship, specifically highlighting the similarities and differences in helping and voice in relation to the role of work status and work centrality among frontline employees.

The norm of reciprocity further explains the positive relationship between Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) and professional development. Ackfeldt and Coote (2005) conclude that professional development positively affects frontline employees' OCB, especially in those who are young. In addition, professional development has been found to be positively related to job attitudes (Hart et al., 2000). Employees are more inclined to reward their company with extra-role behavior when they are provided with learning opportunities. From an organizational perspective, professional development may be considered an investment in the human capital which not only

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