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The Moderating Effect of Work Value Congruence on Service-Worker Customer Orientation

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Abstract

This paper draws upon person-organisation fit theory, and develops several hypotheses that suggest that the level of work value congruence will explain variations in job satisfaction, organisational commitment and organisational citizenship behaviours.

Introduction

Implementation of market orientation in service firms is accomplished through customer contact/service employees and their interactions with customers, (Donavan, Brown and Mowen, 2004, p. 128). For many organisations, customer contact employees are the first and only representation of a service firm. Inevitably, customers will often base their impressions of the organisation on the quality of service received from customer contact employees, (Hartline, Maxham III and O. McKee, 2000, p.35). In recent years, a growing number of companies have invested considerable resources into programs for enhancing the customer orientation of their customer contact employees (eg. Hallowell, Schlesinger and Zornitsky, 1996; Schlesinger and Zornitsky, 1991). Findings by Donavan, Brown and Mowen (2004), support the value of hiring and retaining customer-oriented service workers.

In the following section, we review briefly organisational-fit theory, highlight recent research findings in the marketing and organisational behaviour literature, and develop the study hypotheses.

Person-situation/organisation fit in organisations

Fit theory derives from interactional psychology, which suggests that the person and the environment or situation combine to affect the person’s behaviour (Chatham, 1991; Nadler and Tushman, 1980). In general, prior approaches to worker-environment fit can be grouped into the fit between the worker and the specific organisation (P-O fit); and the fit between the worker and the tasks associated with a particular job (P-J fit). The P-J fit pertains to the degree of match between the personality skills and ability of the worker and the requirements of specific job or job tasks. Employing person job-fit theory, Donavan, Brown and Mowen (2004), find that service worker customer orientation affects job responses, such as job satisfaction, job-fit, commitment to the firm and organisational citizenship behaviours, and that a customer service oriented employee is a more natural fit in a service job (Donavan, Brown and Mowen, 2004). They also find support for the proposition that customer orientation is more influential on service-worker satisfaction and commitment as customer contact employees spend more time in contact with customers. However, they found no support for the variable job fit to mediate the influence of customer orientation on commitment to the organisation. As Donavan, Brown and Mowen, (2004, p. 142) state, “we may not have assessed the kind of fit that is important for commitment. Satisfaction with a job
Building upon the work of Donovan, Brown and Mowen (2004), we argue that fit theory provides a rationale for the underlying customer orientation hypotheses that we develop herein. In this study, we address the fit between the worker and the specific organisation, in particular, the person-organisation fit, also known as work value congruence. Work value congruence may be defined as the match between the organisation’s values (or culture) and individual’s values (Kristoff, 1996; O’Reilly, Chatman and Caldwell, 1991). Value congruence is a significant form of person-organisation fit because values are relatively enduring beliefs that form a standard for guiding action, developing attitudes, justifying one’s own actions and judging others (Rokeach, 1968). Research on person-organisation fit has shown important implications for individual well being and organisational outcomes. For instance, fit between a person’s values and organisational values (work value congruence) are associated with behavioural and affective outcomes, such as longer tenure, greater organisational commitment and better job performance (O’Reilly, Chatman and Caldwell, 1991). Unless management makes concerted efforts to change organisational culture, employees who lack value congruence early in their tenure are likely to maintain some level of work value incongruence throughout their tenure in that organisation. This is because individual’s values are relatively stable over time (Erdogan, Kraimer and Liden, 2004).

Consistent with Schneider’s (1987) attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) model, researchers have found that individuals are more likely to choose organisations with values that match their own values (Cable and Judge, 1996; Judge and Bretz, 1992; Judge and Cable, 1997), be selected by organisations with whom their values match (Adkins, Russell and Werbel, 1994; Cable and Judge, 1997; Kristoff-Brown, 2000), and are more likely to leave the organisation if their values do not match (Cable and Parsons, 2001; Chatman, 1991; Saks and Ashforth, 1997). Despite the empirical support for the ASA model, argue (Erdogan, Kraimer and Liden, 2004, p.308), various biases during the interview process (Arvey and Campion, 1982) and efforts to foster heterogeneity (Schneider, Goldstein and Smith 1995) may lead organisations too intentionally or unintentionally hire employees who have low levels of work value congruence. Yet, when the employee’s values do not match the organisations’ value, the employee will likely be less satisfied (Chatman 1989). Indeed, recent results suggest that the level of fit with organisational culture is a strong predictor of career success, (Erdogan, Kraimer and Liden, 2004).

However, little research has investigated the effect of work value congruence on service worker customer orientation. Identifying moderators of the work value congruence-job response outcomes may help organisations develop mechanisms to minimise the negative consequences of a lack of value congruence, whilst simultaneously benefiting from the diversity of perspectives associated with work value heterogeneity. Drawing upon person-organisation fit theory (Kristoff, 1996; Erdogan, Kraimer and Liden, 2004), and marketing theory, Kennedy, Goolsby and Arnould (2003), we argue that the relationship between service-worker customer orientation and internal job responses is moderated by work value congruence.

Recent work in the market orientation literature has focused on the customer contact employees who are responsible for translating a market oriented strategy into quality service, (Hartline, Maxham III and O. McKee, 2000). In particular, research has examined the customer orientation of service employees, or disposition to meet customer needs. Customer
orientation is defined as a surface-level personality trait within a hierarchical personality model, (Donavan, Brown and Mowen, 2004). As Mowen (2000) proposes, surface traits are enduring dispositions to act within context-specific situations. From this perspective, customer orientation is an enduring disposition (i.e. consistent over time) to meet customer needs, (Donavan, Brown and Mowen, 2004, p.129). This approach, argue Donavan, Brown and Mowen (2004) is consistent with the proposal that behaviour is a function of both person and environment, (Bowers 1973; Magnusson and Endler 1977). That is, customer oriented behaviour will result from the combination of person (e.g., personality, goals, functional motives) and environment (e.g., nature of the job, short-term situational effects), (Donavan, Brown and Mowen, (2004, p.129).

Findings illustrate suggest that customer orientation positively influences job satisfaction, commitment to the firm, and organisational citizenship behaviours. Results also suggest that customer orientation (personal variable) and contact time (situational variable) interact to predict job satisfaction and commitment; that is, customer orientation has a stronger influence on the job responses of workers who have high levels of contact time. Thus, employees who have higher levels of customer orientation thrive in services settings that allow a high degree of contact time with customers. In the following section, we present the hypotheses for the study.

**Study Hypotheses**

In this study, we focus on the perceived person-organisation fit of employees, (work value congruence). Theoretically, employees with low value congruence are less likely to achieve high levels of intrinsic career success through at least three mechanisms, (Erdogan, Kraimer and Liden (2004) :

(1) Individuals whose values diverge from the organisational values will have different standards for guiding actions and interpreting situational events (Rokeach, 1968). Hence they will find it more difficult to communicate and cooperate with other organisational members (Chatman and Barsade, 1995; Kallith, Bluedorn and Strube, 1999; Posner, Kouzes, and Schmidt, 1985).

(2) Employees with low value congruence are more likely to experience cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). According to cognitive dissonance theory, when individuals behave in ways that are inconsistent with their beliefs or values, they experience dissatisfaction with their experiences. Employees with low value congruence may have to act in ways that go against their own values, which may lead to feelings of alienation, resentment and dissatisfaction (Argyris, 1957).

(3) Individuals who have different values are less likely to identify with the organisation (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Cable and DeRue, 2002; Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1998). Research has found that employees who identify with the organisation tend to be more satisfied with various intrinsic needs such as autonomy and job challenge (Hall, Schneider, and Nygner, 1970).

**Job Satisfaction**
Donavan, Brown and Mowen, (2004), utilising person-job fit theory, find support for their proposition that service workers’ who have high degrees of customer orientation will express higher levels of job satisfaction, particularly in situations where the primary task is the serving of customers. Drawing upon person-environment theory, we argue that the level of work value congruence will moderate the relationship between service worker customer orientation and job satisfaction. Stated more formally:

\[ H_1: \text{The effect of service worker customer orientation on intrinsic job satisfaction will be stronger when work value congruence is high than when work value congruence is low.} \]

Organisational Commitment

Previous research on organisational market orientation argued and found support for the proposition that a market oriented organisation results in employees working towards a common goal of satisfying customers, a sense of belonging, and therefore a commitment to the organisation, (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993). Donavan, Brown and Mowen, (2004), argue and find support for the proposition that service-worker customer orientation will have a positive effect on organisational commitment, based on the premise that it is the fit of the context and the worker’s predisposition toward meeting customer needs that produces the opportunity for organisational commitment to develop.

However, notwithstanding this new theoretical development, research has found that individuals with different values to the organisation are less likely to identify with the organisation, (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Cable and DeRue, 2002; Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994; Hall, Scheider and Nygren, 1970). Conversely, employees who identify with the organisation tend to be more satisfied with various intrinsic needs such as autonomy and job challenge (Hall, Scheider and Nygren, 1970), and those who are psychologically attached to their organisations feel greater career satisfaction (Romzek, 1989). Posner, Kouzes and Schmidt (1985) found that employees who evaluated their values as highly congruent with the organisation reported a variety of positive effects, including higher organisational commitment. Similarly, value congruence has been found to be a determinant of job satisfaction and organisational commitment in a number of studies. For example, this relationship has been documented for junior level accountants (Chatman, 1991), executives in the public sector, (Boxx, Odom and Dunn, 1991), and MBA students, senior accountants, and middle level managers (O’Reilly, Chatman and Caldwell, 1991). Thus, based on the above we argue that the level of work value congruence will have a major impact in explaining variations in organisational commitment. Stated more formally:

\[ H_{2a}: \text{The effect of service worker customer orientation on organisational commitment will be stronger when work value congruence is high than when work value congruence is low.} \]

Organisational Citizenship Behaviours

Organisational citizenship behaviours are defined as the non-compulsive behaviours that are directed to the organisation or to its members (Bateman and Organ 1983; Podsakoff and MacKenzie 1994). Donavan, Brown and Mowen, (2004) find support for the proposition that service worker customer orientation will exert a positive influence on OCB-altruism. This is based on the premise that customer-oriented employees are motivated to help colleagues in
order to satisfy customers. That is, customer oriented employees who are inclined to meet customer needs will go beyond the call of duty to assist co-workers. Kennedy, Goolsby and Arnould (2003) found that when staff members do not share a personalised, internalised vision, their efforts are not coordinated with or guided by a common purpose. Without a common purpose, staff members become advocates for their own situation and become relatively insensitive to other’s needs. Previous research on work value congruence suggests work value congruence may affect extra-role behaviours. Extra role behaviours are defined as pro-social acts that are not directly specified by an individuals’ job description and that primarily benefit the organisation as opposed to the individual (Chatman 1989). O’Reilly and Chatman (1986) found that congruence between individual and organisational values predicted a higher likelihood of extra-role behaviours, such as helping others, even when it was not required by their formal job description. Drawing upon organisational-fit theory, we expect that customer oriented employees with values similar to the organisation will be more predisposed to help colleagues. Stated more formally:

\[ H_{3a} \]: The effect of service worker customer orientation on OCB-altruism will be stronger when work value congruence is high than when work value congruence is low.

**Managerial Implications**

Identifying whether work value congruence is an important moderator between service worker customer orientation and a variety of desirable job-response outcomes as hypothesised above, has several implications. In the first instance, recruitment policies may need to be re-designed to ensure a close match between the values of the employee and organisation. Secondly, support mechanisms and a variety of training programmes may need to be developed to modify or alter employee values in the direction of the organisation. Finally, the role of the supervisor in managing and supporting the service worker may need to be re-conceptualised.

**Discussion**

This paper suggests that service workers in high-customer contact positions may not find the greatest level of satisfaction, commitment and OCB-altruistic behaviours, unless there is congruity between individual and organisational values. Placing a worker with a high degree of customer orientation in a high-contact position, whose values mismatch those of the organisation, may lead to both dissatisfaction for the employee, and also the customers served by the employee. The proposal by Donavan, Brown and Mowen, (2004) to identify customer oriented employees and place them in high-customer contact positions, may have unintended negative consequences, based on the arguments outlined above. Empirical research can help answer these questions.
References


