

Hotel Star Ratings And Perceptions Of Servant Leadership And Service Quality Provided By Front-Line Service Workers

In Four-And Five-Star Hotels In Turkey:

An Exploratory Study

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Temmuz/July 2014, Cilt/Vol: 16, Sayı/Num: 3, Page: 03-09

ISSN: 1303-2860, DOI: 10.4026/1303-2860.2014.0251.x

Makalenin on-line kopyasına erişmek için / To reach the on-line copy of article:

<http://www.isguc.org/?p=article&id=549&cilt=16&sayi=3&yil=2014>

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Hotel Star Ratings And Perceptions Of Servant Leadership And Service Quality Provided By Front-Line Service Workers In Four-And Five-Star Hotels In Turkey: An Exploratory Study*

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Abstract

This research examined employee perceptions of servant leadership provided by their supervisors/managers and employees' reports of service quality provided to clients by their hotels by front line workers employed in four- and five –star hotels in Turkey. Data were collected from 221 front-line employees, a 37% response rate, 104 working in four-star hotels and 93 working in five-star hotels, using anonymously completed questionnaires. Consistent with other research on front-line workers, respondents were generally young, had relatively short organizational tenures, and had high school educations. Previously developed and validated measures of servant leadership (Liden, Wayne, Zhao & Henderson, 2008) and service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1998) were used and both were found to be highly reliable in this study. Respondents working in five-star hotels reported lower levels of servant leadership with respondents working in four- and five=star hotels indicating similar levels of service quality.

Keywords: Social Exchange Theory, perceived organizational support, organizational identity, helping behavior, Mediating Role,

Introduction

This research examines the relationship of perceptions of supervisor/manager leadership and quality of service provided by front-line employees of four- and five-star hotels in Turkey. There is considerable writing (see Kusluvan, Kusluvan, Ilhan & Buyruk, 2010; Kusluvan, 2003, for a review) that ways front-one workers are managed contributes to organizational performance and success. Effective leadership influence employee motivation and commitment, increases the quality of service provided to clients, increases client satisfaction and retention, and makes these organizations more competitive in a demanding marketplace.

Leadership may have greater importance in the tourism and hospitality industry given the negative image of working in this sector. Negative features include low levels of pay, seasonal work, long work hours, the routine nature of many of the jobs, high turnover rates among front-one workers, and the presence of poorly trained and autocratic supervision (Ayupp & Chung 2010; Baum, 2007; Kusluvan, Kusluvan, Ilhan & Buyruk, 2010). Human resource management policies and practices have historically received low levels of attention in this sector.

The tourism sector in most countries is facing several challenges including a low educated workforce, high turnover among front-line employees, low job satisfaction and low pay, poor working conditions such as very long hours, and autocratic and untrained supervision (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2001; Yesiltas, Ozturk & Hemmington, 2010). Improved leadership is one possible avenue for addressing these challenges.

Quality of service

Providing a high quality of service is important in contributing to the success of organizations in the hospitality and tourism sector. But assessing service quality can be complicated since service quality is primarily subjective involving an interpersonal experience of an individual providing a service and an individual receiving service. Service is

an intangible. This suggests the use of quantitative measures of perceived quality. These perceptions are also different from satisfaction with services provided.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1998) describe in great detail the development of a multidimensional scale for measuring perceptions of service quality. They define perceived service quality as a global judgment about the superiority of the service provided. Satisfaction, on the other hand, relates to a particular transaction. Service quality then includes several dimensions. Their measure was used in this investigation.

Servant leadership emerged as a potentially important leadership concept in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Greenleaf, 1977; George, 2003; Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). It emerged as a response to the dysfunctional, greedy, self-serving and failing leadership exhibited during this time. Servant leadership focusses on serving the needs of employees and larger communities inside and outside an organization. Servant leaders help employees reach their full potential. Servant leadership builds trust by helping others first (Greenleaf, 1977).

Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson (2008) developed and validated a multidimensional measure of servant leadership and found that it predicted community citizenship behaviors, organizational commitment and in-role performance in a sample of 164 employees and 28 supervisors from a single production and distribution company. We use the Liden et. al. measures in this investigation.

Method

Procedure

Data were collected from men and women working in four- and five-star hotels in Nevsehir Turkey using anonymously completed questionnaires between April and July 2012. Hotel managers were contacted and asked for help in the distribution and administration of the questionnaires. A total

of 600 questionnaires were delivered to fourteen hotel managers who agreed to take part. A total of 221 questionnaires were received, a response rate of thirty-seven percent with 104 employed in four-star hotels and 93 in five-star hotels. All held front-line service jobs in these properties.

Three general hypotheses were considered. First, employees working in four- and five-star hotels would be similar on personal and work situation characteristics (e.g., gender, age, organizational tenure). Second, employees working in five-star hotels would perceive the quality of servant leadership provided to them by their supervisors/managers as lower than that provided to employees of four-star hotels. Supervisors/managers in five star hotels have greater responsibilities and therefore less time available to spend with their employees and they also see their positions as having higher status thereby lessening their interest in developing others. Third, employees of five-

star hotels would rate the quality of service provided to clients higher reflecting not only their expectations of an association of star rating and quality of service, but the tangible high quality and ambience of the hotel itself and the quality of its offerings (food, gift shop, gym, etc.)

Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the sample. Slightly over half were male (60%), most were 27 years of age or younger (56%), most had 5 years of less of organizational tenure (74%), most had a high school education (53%), most worked in the food and beverage department (36%), and respondents were equally divided into four- and five-star hotels (53% and 47%, respectively). There was a slightly higher percentage of males in Front Office and food and beverage departments and a slightly lower percentage of males in Accounting and Housekeeping

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Sample

<u>Gender</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Males	122	59.8	18 – 22	41	21.8
Females	82	40.2	23 – 27	64	34.0
			28 – 32	49	26.1
			33 – 37	23	12.2
			38 or above	17	8.8
<u>Education</u>			<u>Organizational tenure</u>		
Elementary	36	18.3	1 – 5 years		
High School	104	52.8	6 – 10	130	73.9
University	57	29.0	11 or more	33	18.8
				13	7.4
<u>Department</u>			<u>Hotel rating</u>		
Front office	40	20.3	4 star	104	52.8
Food & beverage	71	36.0	5 star	93	47.2
Accounting	21	10.8			
Housekeeping	38	19.3			
Other	27	13.7			

Measures

Personal and work situation characteristics

Six personal and work situation characteristics were assessed by single items. These were: gender, age, level of education, organizational tenure, department, and whether respondent worked in a four- or five-star hotel.

Servant leadership

Servant leadership was measured by a 28 item scale developed by Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson (2008). Respondents indicated the degree to which each item described their supervisor/manager on a five point scale of agreement (1=strongly disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 5=strongly agree). This scale had seven dimensions. In addition, a four item measures of Role model was created specifically for this study. Each scale was found to have high levels of internal consistency reliability (α). Emotional healing ($\alpha=.82$), Creating value for the community ($\alpha=.79$), Conceptual skills ($\alpha=.80$), Empowering ($\alpha=.78$), Helping employees grow and succeed ($\alpha=.85$), Putting employees first ($\alpha=.85$), Behaving ethically ($\alpha=.86$), and Role model ($\alpha=.81$); A composite measure based on the eight dimensions had a reliability of .91. Scores on the eight dimensions were all positively and significantly inter-correlated ranging from a high of .69.

Service quality

Perceptions of the quality of service provided by the hotel to clients was measured by a 22 item instrument, SERVQUAL, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988). Respondents indicated their perceptions of the quality of service provided to clients on a five point scale (1=strongly

disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 5=strongly agree). This measure had five dimensions: Tangibles (4 items, $\alpha=.86$), physical facilities, equipment, appearance of staff; Reliability (5 items, $\alpha=.87$), provide promised service, dependable, and accountable; Responsiveness, 4 items, $\alpha=.82$), willingness to help clients and providing prompt service; Assurance (4 items, $\alpha=.79$), knowledgeable and courteous staff able to inspire trust and confidence, and Empathy, (5 items, $\alpha=.86$), individual and caring attention to clients. The total SERVQUAL scale, 22 items, had an internal consistency reliability of .94), Scores on the five dimensions were all positively and significantly correlated, with a mean inter-correlation of .70.

Results

Five -star versus four-star hotel differences

Table 2 presents the differences on all study measures for respondents working in five-star and four-star hotels. The following comments are given in summary. First, considering personal demographic items (top third of Table 2), no star rating level differences were present, confirming our hypothesis. Second, moving to perceptions of levels of servant leadership provided to respondents by their supervisors/managers, significant differences were present on all eight dimensions and on the total score. Respondents working in four-star hotels rated the levels of servant leadership provided to them higher in each case, again confirming our hypothesis. Finally, considering perceptions of quality of service provided to clients presented in the bottom third of Table 2, no differences were observed between four-star and five-star hotels, findings counter to our expectations.

Table 2
Four – versus Five – Star Hotels

	<u>Four Star</u>			<u>Five Star</u>			<u>P</u>
	<u>X</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>N</u>	
<u>Personal demographics</u>							
Gender	1.4	.49	104	1.4	.50	93	NS
Age	28.2	6.72	94	26.9	5.70	90	NS
Tenure	3.8	3.0	87	4.2	3.44	85	NS
<u>Servant Leadership</u>							
Emotional support	3.8	.90	104	3.5	.77	93	.05
Creating value	3.7	.74	104	3.4	.79	93	.01
Conceptual skills	3.9	.78	103	3.4	.92	93	.001
Empowering	3.6	1.00	104	3.1	.78	93	.001
Helping others	3.6	.95	104	3.1	.94	93	.001
Employees first	3.1	1.02	104	2.9	1.03	93	.05
Behaving ethically	4.0	.97	101	3.7	.85	93	.01
Role model	3.7	.88	101	3.4	.88	93	.05
Total servant leadership	3.7	.73	101	3.3	.63	93	.001
<u>Service quality</u>							
Tangibles	3.9	.78	104	3.9	.62	93	NS
Reliability	4.0	.75	104	3.9	.65	93	NS
Responsiveness	4.0	.72	104	4.0	.64	93	NS
Assurance	4.1	.72	104	4.0	.66	93	NS
Empathy	4.0	.78	104	3.8	.64	93	NS
Total Service Quality	4.0	.67	104	3.9	.55	93	NS

Discussion

The findings obtained in this study make several important and useful contributions. First, as expected, employees working in four- and five star hotels were similar on personal demographic and work situation items (e.g., age, gender, tenure) ruling these out as possible explanations of other findings (see Table 2). Second, though employees generally rated the levels of servant leadership they received from their supervisors /managers fairly high, employees of four star hotels rated the levels of servant leadership they received from their supervisors/managers higher than did employees of five-star hotels (see Table 2). Third, there were no differences in views of levels of service quality provided to clients by

respondents of four-star and five-star hotels, contrary to expectations (see Table 2).

These findings raise some interesting questions. Five-star hotels, higher rated, supposedly offer higher quality of both tangible(physical plant, appearance, ambience) and intangible services (quality of food, quality of staff, quality of service), and as a result they can charge more for this more highly rated experience. Five star hotels can pay their staff higher wages, attract and recruit higher quality staff, and devote more resources to developing, training and rewarding their staff. But supervisors and managers of five-star hotels may have greater job responsibilities and higher performance expectations placed upon them. As a consequence they may be less able to perform the personal leadership behaviors associated with servant leadership.

Front-line service employees work very long hours for low pay under relatively poor supervision in all hotels. As a result, given this reality, perceptions of quality of service in four- and five-star hotels provided by over-worked and stressed front-line workers is likely to be similar. In addition, clients of five-star hotels are likely to have higher expectations of quality service than clients of four-star hotels, and are more likely to "complain" when their expectations are not being met.

And at another level, one can question the validity of some of the four- and five-star hotel ratings as well. Countries have created rating systems of quality of hotels to help consumers make informed choices about what to expect for the monies they pay. Higher rated hotels are "expected" to provide a "better" experience (higher quality) than lower rated hotels. Higher rated hotels offer a higher level of both tangible and intangible experiences to their guests.

Practical implications

Several practical implications follow from our findings. First, five star hotels should examine the quality of leadership, and the types of leadership (e.g., transactional, transformational, leader-member exchange) being provided by its supervisors and managers. Second, five-star hotels are seen as providing a higher quality of service and experience to clients, thus resulting in charging higher rates. Our findings indicate that employees working in five-star hotels do not perceive this to be the case. Third, we found that workers in both four- and five-star hotels perceiving a higher level of servant leadership being provided to them by their supervisors/managers also rated the quality of service they provided to clients at a higher level.

Future research directions

These preliminary results suggest that undertaking further research comparing the experiences and work outcomes of employees of four- and five-star hotels has merit. First, additional important work and well-being outcomes need to be included. The former would include levels of work engagement, intent to quit, engaging in employee voice and organizational citizenship behaviors; the latter would include work and family conflict, burnout, and psychosomatic symptoms. Second, including employee views on the features and ambience of their hotel would determine whether they see differences between hotels of different star levels in other related quality areas. Third, conducting this research in other regions in Turkey would add to our understanding of potential boundary conditions of our results. Fourth, using a longitudinal design and incorporating data from supervisors and their managers, would allow researchers to include indicators of absenteeism and turnover data as well as performance evaluation ratings of supervisors/managers. Fifth, it would also be possible to include client perceptions of service quality and their satisfaction with service provided as well as other more "objective" measures of hotel effectiveness. Sixth, an evaluation of efforts to enhance levels of servant leadership provided by supervisors/managers via training would also have potentially useful implications.

Limitations

Some limitations should be noted to put the results into a larger context. First, all data were collected using respondent self-reports raising the limited possibility of response set tendencies. Second, the sample, while reasonably large, may not be representative of all four-star and five-star hotel employees in Turkey. Third, all properties were located in one region of Turkey and again may not be representative of hotel employees working in other regions of the country. Fourth, this study examined on one type of leadership approach;

future research might profit by including assessments of other types of leadership approaches being taken by supervisor/managers.

Footnotes

* We thank the hotel managers and our respondents for their cooperation. Preparation of this manuscript was supported in part by Onsekiz Mart University, York University and the University of Texas at Tyler.

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