Employee’s Perceived Service Quality and Turnover: The Influence of Managerial Practices and Job-Related Characteristics

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Management - HRM (Physical Activity)  
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)  
Abstract 2017-433  
Saturday, June 3, 2017  
4:25 PM  
Room: Harvard

Over the past few decades, scholars (e.g., McDonald, Sutton, & Milne, 1995; Ko & Pastore, 2005) have examined service quality and related outcomes in a variety of sport settings. From a customer behavior perspective, service quality has been linked to positive organizational outcomes such as purchase intention (Kouthouris & Alexandris, 2005), brand loyalty (Alexandris, Douka, Papadopoulos, & Kaltsatou, 2008), and overall consumer satisfaction (Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008). Others have explored service quality from a more organizationally related perspective, examining how customers’ views on service quality affect employee and managerial behaviors such as turnover intention (Xie, 2005), job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Babakus, Yavas, & Karatepe, 2003).

Many of the service quality studies in sport management scholarship have explored the relationship with customer outcomes in team-based sport settings, both professional and intercollegiate (e.g., Theodorakis, Kambitis, & Laios, 2001; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996). One of the primary reasons for examining customer-focused service quality stems in the idea that customers are the better judge of the overall service experience. Considering that service quality is based heavily on the interaction between the organization and the client (Chelladurai & Chang, 2000), this trend is sensible. However, understanding service quality from the organizational perspective (i.e., the front-line employees) is an area that has been under-researched. Prior research indicates that perceptions of front-line employees are related to several outcomes of interest for sport organizations (Martinez, Miller & Koo, 2016; Slatten, Svensson, & Svaeri, 2011). Therefore, it is within reason that exploring service quality, and its related antecedents and outcomes, from the employee perspective would be a useful endeavor.

Despite the copious amount of research regarding service quality, very few have examined how employee perceptions of service quality affect employee behaviors – both in and out of sport settings. One of the few studies on this topic, Slatten et al. (2011) examined both antecedents and consequences of employee perceptions of service quality. The authors found that, in organizational settings, managerial aspects and job-related characteristics (i.e., training, empowerment and rewards) influenced employee perceptions of service quality, which in turn affected turnover intentions. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine both the antecedents and outcomes of employees’ perceived service quality.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

In a general sense, service quality focuses on the connection between customer’s expectations and actual experiences regarding services (Gronroos, 1984). An employee’s perceived service quality is their perceived judgment of how they handle their job duties and deliverance of customer service. Slatten et al. (2015) describe employees perceived service quality as an employee’s personal evaluation of the service quality that he or she delivers to customers. A positive perceived service quality is usually correlated to low turnover intentions, higher role clarity, commitment and empowerment. Perceived service quality is also linked to an employee’s ability to recover from a service failure (Babakus et al., 2003).

Building on this relationship, organizations play a vital role, through training and mentoring, in forming the employee’s actual service delivery. As previously mentioned, the present study focuses on employees’ perceptions of service quality. Specifically, this study examines the antecedents such as training, empowerment and rewards, and the eventual related outcome of turnover intention.
Goal orientation (Farr, Hofmann, & Ringenbach, 1993) and organizational learning culture (Marsick & Watkins, 2003) comprise the theoretical basis for the present study. Goal orientation focuses on the purpose-driven components of why employees perform certain tasks, which in the present study helps explain the attitudinal relationship of perceived service quality and turnover intention (Kaplan & Maehr, 2007). Organizational learning culture suggests that learning within an organization occurs at three levels: 1) the individual level, 2) the team or group level, and 3) the organizational level (Yang, 2003). For the present study, organizational learning at the individual level helps clarify the antecedent relationship of training, empowerment, and rewards in respect to employee’s perceptions of service quality.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are presented:

H1: Employee’s perception of service quality is related to turnover intention.
H2: Training is related to employee’s perception of service quality.
H3: Empowerment is related to employee’s perception of service quality.
H4: Rewards is related to employee’s perception of service quality.

Methods and Expected Results

Data is being collected using a 32-item questionnaire, adapted from previously published scales measuring the selected criterion variables. The convenience sample consists of front-line personnel in campus recreational facilities across the Southeast, using assistance by campus recreation administrators at university and colleges in the selected region. Fitness center employees were selected as the target sample for this study, citing the need for more research in the fitness setting (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2007; MacIntosh & Doherty, 2010). The online survey, contains three items for turnover intention (Boshoff & Allen, 2000), nine adapted items for measuring employee's perceived service quality (Mukherjee & Malhotra, 2006), and 16 items from Babakus et al. (2003) that measure managerial practices such as training, empowerment and rewards. Additionally, four demographic questions were included. Confirmatory factor analysis will be conducted to analyze model fit. Multiple linear regression analysis will be utilized to determine the influences of the selected variables in the study.

Proposed Implications and Conclusion

The potential findings from the present study have several implications for the field, both scholarly and practically focused. From a scholarly perspective, the findings would fill the gap in service quality research that has slowly included individual perceptions from sport organization employees. Second, findings could add to a better understanding of organizational learning and goal orientation and its application within sport and service-based organizations. This would build on MacIntosh and Doherty’s (2010) call for more research on managerial influences of organizational culture in sport settings. For practical purposes, the potential findings would provide managers with a better understanding of the practices that influence employee attitudes and eventual customer-related outcomes.