

Determinants of Work Related Attitudes and Willingness to Participate in Service Recovery: A Discussion

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Abstract

There is an increasing recognition of the positive outcomes of effective service recovery. Previous research has demonstrated that effective service recovery enhances repurchase intention, results in positive word of mouth, enhances trust & commitment and increases profitability. Given that effective service recovery is vital to 'recovery paradox', the frontline executives who play a central role in the service recovery need to demonstrate enhanced commitment towards service recovery. However to our knowledge, studies that have investigated personal characteristics & determinants of work related attitudes of front line executives and its impact on service recovery are sparse.

In this paper, we discuss research on organizational hypocrisy, burnout, stigma consciousness & demographics of customer care executives and their potential impact on effectiveness of service recovery. A new set of empirically testable propositions are also presented.

Key words: *service recovery, front line executives, work related attitudes*

Introduction

There is a near total agreement that service failures are unavoidable (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1990). Past studies (see Jayasimha, Nargundkar & Murugaiah, 2006) list various typologies of service failures based on dimensions like severity, criticality, nature of mistakes etc. Doing it correct second time mindset or creating a second time good impression the second time seems to guide service recovery efforts as service failures can impact the current and future profitability of service firms. There is also a strong need to have effective service recovery mechanisms as it can result in an enhanced customer satisfaction post recovery (recovery paradox). Much of the literature on service recovery captures customers' perspectives like reaction to service recovery, remuneration expected, satisfaction following failure-recovery etc. (Kelly & Davis, 1994). Carson, Carson & Roe (1995) have summarized various types of recovery actions in the form of an analytical model called 'CARE' (Compensation, Apology, Reparation and Empathy). Generally apology & empathy are referred to as 'psychological recovery' and compensation & reparation as 'tangible recovery'.

Whilst past studies on service failure and recovery have suggested measures to effectively deal with service failures like unconditional service guarantees, creating self managing teams, switching barriers etc. and there are very few systematic investigations of customer care executives who play a central role in service recovery.

The few studies (see Bowen & Johnston, 1999) that have acknowledged the important role played by customer contact executives in the service recovery (Bitner, 1990; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996) have suggested that customer contact executives should be capable of adapting their interpersonal skills to match the situational demands. For effective service recovery, it is also emphasized that customer contact executive executives must be flexible, because the service failures tend to be idiosyncratic (Holyoak, 1991). To successfully cope with the idiosyncratic service failures it also argued that customer contact employees should be significantly empowered (Jong & Ruyter, 2004). Paula et al (1998) argued that empowerment and willingness are independent dimensions and proposed a 2x2 matrix with four types namely, empowered neglecters (empowered but engage in recovery actions modestly), effective recoverers (empowered and engage in

recovery comprehensively), learned avoiders (un-empowered and minimal service recovery actions) and recovery riskers (un-empowered but engage in comprehensive recovery actions). They investigated the following work related attitudes - empowerment, career commitment, career satisfaction, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and job withdrawal intentions with frontline service personnel classified into above four types. They found empowered neglectors to have highest career commitment and career satisfaction, and that perception of empowerment was related to positive job attitude. In terms of organizational tenure, effective recoverers reported significantly longer tenure than empowered neglectors. They found job & career satisfaction as antecedent variables for psychological recovery and empowerment as the antecedent variable for tangible recovery.

Studies (Icobucci, 1998; Jong & Ruyter, 2004; Morrison & Phels, 1999) have also suggested that customer contact executives should increasingly involve in pro-active service recovery (unprompted recovery effort initiation). In spite of the near total consensus on the potential contributions that front line executives can make in service recovery efforts, front line employees are understudied (David & Robert, 1998).

Relatively little attention has been paid to attitudes, emotions and behaviors of the customer contact employees. This is lack of attention is surprising given that the fact service employees are known to expound the 'emotional labor' (Smith & Lewis, 2000). An exception to this is the work on psychology of internal service recovery by David & Robert (1998). They argued for internal service recovery to relieve the customer contact executives from stress, frustration and helplessness arising out of repeatedly tackling service failures. Whilst they offered the initial meaning, antecedents and consequences of the psychology of internal service recovery, in their own admission "there is clearly much more to address".

The current study is an attempt to bring out a fresh set of determinants of work related attitudes and the potential influence on the effectiveness of external service recovery. Whilst the previous study on internal service recovery focused on how to help the customer contact executives recover from the potential negative outcomes of external service recovery on the individual, the current study focuses on what are the work related attitudes and its determinants that might determine the 'extent of involvement' of customer contact employees in service recovery efforts.

Theory & Hypothesis

Extant literature in the fields of organizational psychology, social psychology and services marketing is reviewed and a new set of empirically testable propositions are presented. Organizational hypocrisy, employee burnout, stigma consciousness and demographics of customer care executives are conceptualized as predictors of effectiveness of service recovery.

Organizational Hypocrisy

Whilst the concept of organizational hypocrisy appeared in the literature in the early part of 1970's, subsequently it has received very little research attention. Argyris & Schon (1974) are credited for their pioneering work on organizational hypocrisy. In their seminal work 'Theory in practice', they consider any form of disconnect (namely covert, obvious, implicit and explicit) between what organization members say and what they do. In simple terms, organizational hypocrisy is the inconsistency between words, previous actions and subsequent actions of organizational agents (managers/management). Inconsistency is also regarded as non-conformance to expectations (Kouzes & Pozner, 1993). On when a perceived inconsistency would be interpreted as organization hypocrisy, Thomas & Jerry (2005) state that "when inconsistencies rise to the level that violates any critical expectations". Study of organization hypocrisy is of critical importance as previous studies (see Koehler, 2004) have suggested that it might affect the employees' job satisfaction, commitment and

intention to leave. It also results in conflict and false expectations when there is inconsistency between talk, actions and organizational goals (Fernandez & Robson, 1999). Thomas & Jerry (2005) empirically established organizational hypocrisy as a valid concept with three constructs namely, perceived managerial actions, perceived organization culture and perceived rewards.

For a long time, organizational psychologists have viewed employee-organization relationship from a social exchange perspective. Social exchange paradigm rests on symbiotic exchanges and reciprocity belief (Blau, 1964). As organizational hypocrisy represents inconsistency and non conformance to expectations it shakes the very foundation of employee-organization relationship based on social exchange. Organizational hypocrisy might also result in reduced role clarity (or increased role conflict) as hypocrisy results in a conflict. This in turn affects the pivotal outcomes such as organizational commitment and job performance (see Raymond, Ngo & Sharon, 2006). *Hence we posit that organizational hypocrisy negatively influences the attitude of customer care executives about service recovery.*

Burnout

Role conflict and work overload are the two most important antecedents of employee burnout. And two most important consequences of burnout are increased turnover intention and reduced organizational commitment (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Burnout which is conceptualized as a state of mental strain is said to consist of three components, namely, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment (Ali & Hamdy, 2005; Pines and Maslach, 1981). Lee et al (1996) have found emotional exhaustion to be highly correlated to depersonalization. Of the three, depersonalization is of relatively more importance from the service delivery, service failure-recovery point of view as it results in display of detachment and cynicism towards clients and other organizational members (Maslach, 1982). However, this is not to undermine the greater

consequences of diminished personal accomplishments.

As noted by Hasida & Dana (2005), the relationship between service provider and service receiver (client) is an asymmetrical one. Even when clients are rude, customer contact executives are expected to display good behavior. Hence the professional norm compels the customer contact executives into emotional labor (see Hochschild, 1983). As listed by Hasida & Dana, Dormann & Zapf (2004) found significant burnout among customer contact providers in the form of depersonalization.

In services marketing, there is an unequivocal support for customer contact employees as the primary channel of service delivery. Historically, creation and delivery of service has been conceptualized as a theater like performances performed by service personnel. Customer contact employees are supposed to make services tangible, which otherwise are intangible (Berry, 1990). In services marketing, there is also an immense recognition of the fact that customer satisfaction is significantly influenced by the amount of effort service personnel expend as perceived by the customers. Hence many past researchers have argued for appropriate, unexpected voluntary extra role performance from the service personnel to delight customers (Mohr & Bitner, 1995; Bettencourt & Brown, 1993). Intuitively, service personnel suffering from burnout (specifically depersonalization) are unlikely to indulge in extra role behavior that is necessary. *Hence we posit that attitude toward service recovery is negatively influenced by burnout of customer contact executives.*

Stigma Consciousness

Elizabeth Pinel is credited with putting forth the concept of stigma consciousness. Pinel (1999) conceptualized stigma consciousness as "the extent to which one expects to be stereotyped". It is important to note that stigma consciousness refers to negative stereotypes and it is not just about individuals being categorized but the perceived associations formed by the out group members about the in-group members. High stigma consciousness is

expected to result not only in one's changed behavior but also likely to alter the behavior of others involved in the interaction with the target (Pinel, 2002). Originally Pinel (1999) conceptualized stigma consciousness as a uni-dimensional construct which Subramanian, Edward & Sridhar (2005) disagree with and have proposed a three-dimensional construct comprising of stigma awareness, stereotype threat and stereotype induced behavior.

In their review of other constructs that come closer to stigma consciousness, Subramanian, Edward & Sridhar (2005) list 'stereotype threat' as the one closest to stigma consciousness. They also present the potential outcomes of stigma consciousness amongst customers in their pioneering effort to use stigma consciousness in marketing. Needless to say there is sparse evidence of stigma consciousness being used in the services marketing context. From a services marketing point of view, stigma consciousness presents a unique dual challenge of dealing with stigma conscious service receivers, who play a significant role in creation of many services as 'co-producers' and stigma consciousness (servitude perception) of front line executives and its outcomes. Vivienne (2004) who studied stigma consciousness among restaurant servers found stigmatized individuals' 'intention to leave the job' to be significantly high. Previous research has found Intention to leave as a significant predictor of employee turnover (Raymond, Ngo & Sharon, 2006). Past research has also found a negative relationship between organizational commitment and intention to leave (Reid & Sirola, 1998). Based on the above discussion, *we posit that there is a negative relationship between stigma consciousness among customer care executives and their attitude towards service recovery.*

Life Stage of the Employee

There is enough evidence to suggest that 'youth employment' in the service sector has become a norm rather than exception. Catherine & Julian (2001) list many studies that report the magnitude of youth employment in different countries. In North America 80% of high-school

students are reported to be involved in paid labor on part-time basis. Many reasons including need for more disposable income, fostering an understanding of personal & social responsibilities, helping the transition to adulthood, managing teenage alienation, learning skills useful for future etc. are attributed to this growth in part-time, weekend employment of generation X & Y (Barling & Kelloway, 1999; Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986; Mortimer et al, 1996). Most of these jobs are non-standard (temporary).

Research in occupational psychology & organizational psychology have identified the distinguishing feature of the young workers. They represent a heterogeneous group, aged between 15 - 24, work part-time, evenings, weekends or in the summer along with attending school. Historically, research has focused on full-time workers in large organizations ignoring the part-time workers. Also family influences on work related attitudes of youngsters have been studied ignoring the influence of their own work experience (Catherine & Julian, 2001).

Greenberger, Steinberg & Ruggiero (1982) have opined that adolescent jobs should be compared along three dimensions - namely, opportunities for learning or opportunities to learn a skill, social interaction and taking initiatives. However as noted by Garson (1988) significant part of young part-time workers are involved in routine, lower level service jobs. Given the poor quality of employment, the job provides very few opportunities for learning new skills hence they feel less motivated and have lower work values (Stern et al, 1990; O'Brien & Feather, 1990). This is alarming as teenagers are likely to be more influenced by their work environment than adults (Lorence & Mortimer, 1985). Teenage workers becoming cynical, suffering from lack of motivation and decreased work values presents a bigger challenge as many of them represent the future work force (Catherine & Julian, 2001). Based on the above discussion, *we posit that attitude towards service recovery is influenced by the biographical of the customer care executives.*

Conclusion

Given the critical role customer care executives play in the creation & delivery of service and service recovery situations, it is necessary to understand how their work attitudes and behaviors are shaped and its impact on the work output. The current study discussed a few of the determinants of work related attitudes of organizational members in a service context. Empirical testing of the relationships proposed would result in creating a “better second impression”.

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