Effects of Workplace Friendship on Employee Job Satisfaction, Organizational Citizenship Behavior, Turnover Intention, Absenteeism, and Task Performance

JungHoon (Jay) Lee
Hospitality Management and Dietetics
Kansas State University

and

Chihyung Ok
Hospitality Management and Dietetics
Kansas State University

ABSTRACT

Today's hospitality employees spend a large portion of their lives at work. Accordingly, friendships between/among employees are often formed at work. Findings of prior studies have suggested that workplace friendship has a variety of positive functions for both individuals and organizations. Workplace friendship facilitates increased communication, respect, securities, and trust among employees. These rewarding benefits have meaningful implications for the employees' job-related outcomes in the hospitality industry. Thus, this study will examine the direct effect of workplace friendship on hotel employees' attitude toward their job and its direct and indirect effect on organizational citizenship behavior, turnover intention, absenteeism, and task performance.

Keywords: *workplace friendship, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, turnover intention, absenteeism, task performance*

INTRODUCTION

As employees spend a large portion of their lives at work, interpersonal relationships and friendships between/among employees at work are often formed. According to a Gallup survey, about 30% of employees in the U.S. responded that they had a best friend in their workplace (Rath, 2006). Further, the survey reported that slightly over half (51%) of those who responded that they have a best friend at work reported that they work with passion and feel a profound connection to the company, compared with only 10% of those who have no best friend. Also, 75% of respondents who had a best friend at work planned to be with the company for at least another year, compared with 51% who didn't have a best friend. Similarly, researchers have consistently reported that workplace friendship (WF) positively affects employees' work-related attitudes and behaviors which, in turn, enhance organizational outcomes. People may gain help, assistance, guidance, advice, feedback, recommendations, or information from workplace friends on a variety of work-related matters such as completing jobs, performing tasks, and handling issues with co-workers, subordinates, supervisors, and/or clients (Hamilton, 2007).

The importance of WF is more apparent in the hospitality industry than in other non-

service oriented industries because of its service-oriented nature (Brymer, 1995). Because of less reliance on machinery and other forms of technology that reduces the need for human labor, successful performance of an employee's service work frequently depends upon harmony with co-workers (Bandy, 1995). Further, the rewarding benefits of WF may have significant implications in the hospitality industry with respect to the industry's major issues such as high turnover rate, long work hours, low pay, diversity, and emotional labor.

Despite a variety of potential benefits of WF, not much attention has been paid to the topic of WF in the hospitality industry (Song, 2005). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the effects of WF on employees' job related attitudes, intentions, and behaviors in the hospitality setting. Specifically, this study will examine the direct effect of WF on employee attitude toward their job and its direct and indirect effect on job-related outcomes such as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), employee task performance, turnover intention, and absenteeism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace Friendship Defined

According to Fehr (1996), friendship is "a voluntary, personal relationship typically providing intimacy and assistance" (p. 20). The definitions of WF, however, are distinct from general types of friendship because workplace friendship is focused on friendship occurred in the workplace (Song, 2005). Berman et al. (2002) define workplace friendship as "nonexclusive voluntary workplace relations that involve mutual trust, commitment, reciprocal liking and shared interests and values" (p. 218). WF is a phenomenon that is beyond mere behaviors engaged in friendly ways among people in an organization; there should be "trust, liking, and shared interests or values" rather than being only mutual acquaintances (Berman et al., 2002, p. 218).

Functions Workplace Friendship

WF has been considered valuable for both individuals and organizations. According to Fine (1986), WF increases support and resources that help individuals to accomplish their job, reduce work stress, and provide increased communication, cooperation, and energy. Hamilton (2007) also suggested that when in a friendship at work, people might feel comfortable with their workplace friends and reduce feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. They also share more information and empathies with workplace friends about work-related problems and concerns. Jehn and Shah (1997) further argued that employees in a friendship exchange words of encouragement, confidence, trust, respect, and critical feedback, which may increase enthusiasm and a positive attitude.

Workplace Friendship and Job-related Outcomes

Based on these functional values of WF, previous empirical research in psychology, sociology, and management commonly revealed that WF can influence employees' work-related attitudes, intentions, and behaviors such as job satisfaction, OCB, job performance, turnover

intention, and absenteeism (Riordan & Griffeth, 1995; Ross, 1997). Dotan (2007) suggested that when employees have trustful friends at work, they can get help or advice from their friend co-workers and, therefore, gain feelings of security, comfort, and satisfaction with their job at work. Also, employees in friendship tend to engage in altruistic behaviors by providing co-workers with help, guide, advice, feedback, recommendation, or information on various work-related matters (Hamilton, 2007). This aspect of WF as a source of work assistance is linked to the altruism dimension of OCB. Research further suggested that WF may enhance organizational performance because employees in friendships like to help each other with tasks, communicate with morale-building behaviors, have few communication difficulties and thus can increase their effort and rate of production (Bandura, 1982). Additionally, research has shown that individuals who have a close friend at work are less likely to be absent or leave the organization than individuals who do not because they gain a sense of belongingness and obligation to the workplace friends who have accepted, understood, and helped them at work (Morrison, 2004; Sias & Cahill, 1998).

Hypotheses

Based on the review of previous research, following hypotheses are derived:

H1a: Employees' perceptions of strong friendship in the workplace positively related to their job performance.
H1b: Employees' perceptions of strong friendship in the workplace negatively related to turnover intention.
H1c: Employees' perceptions of strong friendship in the workplace negatively related to absenteeism.
H1d: Employees' perceptions of strong friendship in the workplace positively related to their job satisfaction.
H1e: Employees' perceptions of strong friendship in the workplace positively related to organizational citizenship behavior.
H2a: The relationship between workplace friendship and turnover intention will be mediated by job satisfaction.
H2b: The relationship between workplace friendship and absenteeism will be mediated by job satisfaction.
H3c: The relationship between workplace friendship and absenteeism will be mediated by organizational citizenship behavior.
H3b: The relationship between workplace friendship and turnover intention will be mediated by organizational citizenship behavior.
H3a: The relationship between workplace friendship and organizational performance will be mediated by organizational citizenship behavior.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data Collection

The sample of this study will be approximately 1,200 employees in hotels in the U.S. Online survey questionnaire will be used to collect data necessary to meet the purpose of the

study. The 1,200 hotel employees will be selected from various online hospitality-professional social networking sites. The sample will consist only of line-level employees and mid-level managers. Four-hundred responses will be targeted for data analysis.

Instrument Development and Data Analysis

WF will be measured using a 6-item scale developed by Nielsen, Jex, and Adams (2000). Respondents' job satisfaction will be measured using the scale developed by Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, and Klesh (1979). OCB will be measured using Podsakoff and MacKenzie's (1994) modified 18-item OCB scale which taps the five dimensions of OCB suggested by Organ (1988). Turnover intention will be measured using the modified 4-item scale from Kelloway, Gottlieb, and Barham (1999). Absenteeism will be measured by asking respondents to indicate total days absent during the last six month. Finally, task performance will be measured using a 7-item self-report scale developed by Babin and Boles (1996). Structural equation modeling using AMOS will be employed to examine the proposed direct and indirect relationship (through mediators) among constructs.

Limitations

The use of self-report methodology has been considered to lead to exaggerated relationships among variables, and thus the data in this study would be biased by social desirability and common method variance in statistical analysis (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). The cross-sectional design of the study will also be a limitation. Because the data for this study will be collected at one point in time, inferences about the causal nature of the relationship examined in this study are difficult (Bobko & Stone-Romero, 1998).

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