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The Relationship of Emotional Intelligence to Job Stress, Affective Commitment, and Turnover Intention among Restaurant employees

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of emotional intelligence of employees on job stress, affective commitment, and turnover intention in the restaurant industry. Although emotional intelligence may play a critical role in the hospitality industry where there is a high component of human contact with the customers, few studies have been conducted to investigate how the emotional intelligence of employees influences work-related outcomes in the restaurant context. The sample for this study consists of 250 non-supervisory employees drawn from causal restaurants located in the Midwestern area in the U.S. The survey will be distributed to the respondents by the restaurant manager at each property during a shift meeting. Structural equation modeling with path analysis is used to test proposed hypotheses.

Keywords: *Emotional intelligence, Job stress, Affective commitment, Turnover intention.*

INTRODUCTION

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is defined as one's ability to recognize one's own feeling and others' feeling, to differentiate among them, and to use the information to manage one's thinking and behavior (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Recent empirical research examining the relationship between EI and work-related outcomes indicated that EI is related to job satisfaction (Carmeil, 2003; Lounsbury et al., 2003), effective leadership (Caruso, Mayer, & Salovey, 2001; Higgs & Aitken, 2003), and productivity (Boyatzis, Goldman, & Rhee, 2000).

Although EI has gained considerable attention through a wide variety of research, limited efforts have been made to study it within the hospitality industry. For example, Langhorn (2004) has investigated the relationship between EI of managers and performance in the pub restaurant and Sy, Tram and O'Hara (2006) have explored the effects of EI on job satisfaction and job performance in the restaurant setting. Furthermore, previous studies on EI have mainly focused on EI of managers, whereas few empirical studies have been conducted to examine EI of employees. It is important to examine EI of employees in the hospitality industry, given their frequently direct interaction with customers. Barlow and Maul (2000) found service providers' EI is strongly associated with customer satisfaction.

Given the scarcity of study on employees' EI in the hospitality industry, this study attempts to narrow the research gap by empirically examining how the EI of employees affects work-related

outcomes in the restaurant context. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of EI of employees on job stress, affective commitment, and turnover intention in the restaurant industry. More specifically, this study has four major objectives: (a) to determine the level of EI of restaurant employees, (b) to examine the effects of EI of employees on job stress, (c) to investigate the effects of EI of employees on affective commitment, and (d) to assess the effects of EI of employees on turnover intention in the restaurant industry. The results of this study would help restaurant managers to better understand the role of EI in employee behaviors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional intelligence (EI)

The concept of EI was first proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990, 1994, p. 773) who define it as “a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and action.” The ability model of EI proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990) consisted of four dimensions: (1) the ability to perceive, appraise and express emotion; (2) the ability to generate feelings when they facilitate thought; (3) the ability to understand emotion; and (4) the ability to regulate emotion. Goleman (1995) popularized Salovey and Mayer’s model to reinforce how emotional intelligence differs from cognitive intelligence in his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. Goldman went on to define EI as the ability to recognize and regulate our own feelings and the feeling of others. EI was described by Bar-On (1997, p.1) as “an array of personal, emotional, and social abilities, and skills that influence and individuals’ ability to cope with effectively with his or her given environmental demand and pressures.”

Although there are various definitions of EI, two distinct approaches exist in understanding the nature of EI. The ability approach mainly focuses on emotion-related cognitive ability to effectively join emotion and reasoning. The ability EI must be measured by maximum-performance tests (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). On the other hand, the trait approach, proposed by Bar-On (1997), involves emotion-related behavioral dispositions and self-perceived abilities and use self-report measures.

However, some researchers have doubted the validity and reliability of the EI construct. For example, EI has been criticized as an “invalid concept” (Locke, 2005). Although there are some criticisms regarding the various concepts and measurement of EI construct, there is also a growing body of literature emphasizing the importance of EI (Goleman, 1995; George, 2000; Law, Wong, & Song, 2004).

Hypothesis development

Job Stress (JS) refers to one’s emotional response to work environment that appears threatening to workers (Gill, Flaschner, & Shachar, 2006). The work environment in the hospitality industry is characterized by long working hours, excessive workload, and low pay. Furthermore, when hospitality employees confront demanding and difficult customers, they are usually required to face with customers with a smile and friendliness in order to meet customers’ need. Recent studies have argued that such organizationally expected emotions are closely related to occupational stress and burnout (Grandey, 2002; Morris & Feldman, 1996; Tolich, 1993; Wharton, 1993). EI significantly contributes to reducing job stress by better identifying feelings of frustration and stress and, consequently, regulating those emotions. For example, employees with high EI tend to have ability to understand the causes of stress and to promote

positive work environment which makes them suffer less job stress (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a negative relationship between EI and JS.

Affective Commitment (AC) is defined as “the positive feelings of identification with, attachment to, and involvement in the work organization” (Meyer & Allen, 1984, p.375). EI plays a primary role in job outcomes such as organizational commitment and turnover intention (Clark & Isen, 1982; Isen & Levin, 1972; Mayer et al., 1991; Mischel et al., 1973). The logic of this argument is that people with high level of EI are more capable of placing themselves in positive affective states. It is possible because they may be able to be knowledgeable about the determinants of emotions and develop a strategy to alleviate negative moods. Although few empirical studies have shown evidence to support this argument, Carmeli (2003) examined the relationship between emotional intelligence of senior managers and work attitudes and found that emotional intelligence was positively associated with affective commitment. We suggest the following hypothesis:

H2: There is a positive relationship between EI and AC.

Turnover intention (TOI) is an important work-related outcome in the hospitality industry, given the hospitality industry has a notoriously high turnover rate. EI may play an important role in reducing the high turnover rate in the hospitality industry because employees with higher EI are more likely to see the positive side of things by modulating their perception of the work environment. That is, they will be better able to take advantage of and regulate their emotions and less likely to leave their job. Carmeli (2003) indicated that EI of senior managers was negatively related to turnover intention. The following hypotheses are suggested:

H3: There is a negative relationship between EI and TOI.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and date collection

In order to examine the relationships among EI, job stress, affective commitment, and turnover intention, a total of 250 non-supervisory employees drawn from restaurants are to be surveyed. A pilot test will be performed to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, using 50 restaurant employees from restaurants participating in this study. Based on the suggestions received from the pilot test, a complete questionnaire will be designed. Survey instruments are to be randomly distributed by the restaurant manager at each property to non-supervisory employees during a shift meeting. Throughout the data gathering, participants are clearly informed that their responses are anonymous and confidential and that their participation is voluntary. Upon completion of the survey, participants are asked to return the completed survey in a secure envelop to a collection box that the researcher set up for survey drop-off in each property.

Measures

Previously validated measures that are used widely in other empirical studies are used to measure EI, JS, AC, and TOI. A 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1= *strongly disagree* to 7= *strongly agree* is used for all study items except JS item and TOI item (5 point Likert scale).

To measure emotional intelligence, the 16- item developed from Law et al (2004) is used. Previous study using this scale provided acceptable internal consistency, convergent, and discriminant validity (Law et al., 2004; Wong & Law, 2002).

Job stress is measured by a four item scale developed and validated by Motowidlo et al. (1986). The scale assesses agreement with statements regarding their job stress.

Affective commitment is measured by a four item scale validated by Allen and Meyer (1990). High scores represent that participants are more likely to emotionally attach to the organizations they work.

Turnover intention is measured by a four item scale developed by Mitchel (1981). All responses are summated, forming a single turnover intention index. Higher scores point out that participants are more likely to leave their job.

Participants are asked to provide demographic information such as gender, age, education, and tenure at their current organization. Gender will be recorded as 1 being female and 2 being male. Age will be recorded in years, and tenure will be recorded in months. Education will be measured with six categories, 1=high school degree, 2=some college, 3=associate degree, 4=bachelor's degree, 5= master's degree, and 6=other.

Data analysis

First, descriptive statistics are used to determine frequency distribution for profile of respondents. Second, a structural model and path coefficients are performed on the data to analyze the effect of EI on JS, AC, and intention to leave. Structural equation modeling (SEM) is appropriate for testing the model paths and model fits (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

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