THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION AND EMPLOYMENT TENURE IN HOSPITALITY ORGANIZATIONS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Many hospitality organizations faces issues in retaining employees since they are unable to identify which factor are the contributor to both satisfaction and employment tenure of the employee. This study would endeavor to identify which factor could actually make employees stay in their current working place while at the same time to see the linkage between employee satisfaction and employee loyalty which leads to employment tenure. In order to do that, a business model called Service Profit Chain was used and applied in selected hotels in Malaysia. A fraction of the model that identifies employee satisfaction and employee loyalty had been used in the questionnaire which was then tested to see the linkage of both variables. The findings indicate the existence of strong relationship between employee satisfaction and employee loyalty. The relationship is evident in terms of relationship with supervisor, training programs and benefits package which corresponds with all three aspect of loyalty in this study, employment tenure, planning future career with company and recommending employment. In other words, if these three variables are well entertained by the organizations, the creation of employee satisfaction which leads to employee loyalty and eventually builds long term employment tenure is very much possible in the hospitality industry which is plagued by high frequency of employment turnover.

Keywords: service profit chain, employee satisfaction, employee loyalty, employment tenure

1. Introduction

Interest in service has seen a significant increase both in the industry and in the academic field over the past 20 years. The increased importance of service in the industry as well as in academia has seen many countries shifting from a manufacturing base towards a service base economy

(Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2006). As a result, studies of service management have grown to become an important element in academic field. The service profit chain model by Heskett, Sasser and Schlesinger (1997) as one of the significant conceptual framework in service management are being explained in further detail for the purpose of this study. Subsequently, a portion of the service profit chain that links employee satisfaction and employee loyalty in context of hotel industry were discussed in the literature.

In Malaysia, hotel industry has been recognized as a potential prospect in the growth of the service industry. However, the growth is impeded by the high turnover rates of employees in the hotel industry. Many organizations in hotel industry faces issues in retaining employees since they are unable to identify which factor are the contributor to both satisfaction and loyalty of the employee. This study would endeavor to identify which factor could actually make employees stay in their current working place while at the same time to see the linkage between employee satisfaction and employee loyalty.

The management of many organizations develops their training program, benefit package, performance appraisal and work system based on their company policy. Several policies emphasizes on developing loyal employee because the longer an employee work for one company the more valuable they become for the company (especially in the service industry). On the other hand, certain retail company would only be focusing on employee satisfaction since they don't prioritize on employee loyalty. This study would endeavor to identify which factor could actually make employees stay in their current working place while at the same time to see the linkage between employee satisfaction and employee loyalty, so that in the future, any programme being developed by organizations, have a significant component of employee satisfaction and loyalty attached to it. In order to do that, a business model called Service Profit Chain by Heskett, Sasser & Schlesinger (1997) was used and applied in hotels in Klang Valley area in Malaysia. A fraction of the model that identifies employee satisfaction and employee loyalty was used in the questionnaire which was then tested to see the linkage of both variables. However, a future extended study that evaluate a wider scope of employee satisfaction and loyalty factor in hotel industry should be conducted in order to ascertain their strongest and weakest link of factors and their linkage between each other.

2. Service Profit Chain

The service profit chain is a concept introduced by Heskett, Sasser and Schlesinger (1997). The model is created to answer why certain service organizations perform better than the others (Heskett et al, 1997). Service profit chain thinking maintains that there are direct and strong relationships between profit, growth, customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, the value of goods and services delivered to customers, and employee capability, satisfaction, loyalty, and productivity.

Heskett et al (1997) created the linkage by collecting empirical evidence from some 20 large service organizations, lending support to linkages stipulated in the service profit chain, consisting of profit and growth are linked to customer loyalty, customer loyalty is linked to customer satisfaction, customer satisfaction is linked to service value, service value is linked to employee productivity, employee productivity is linked to employee loyalty, employee loyalty is linked to employee satisfaction, and employee satisfaction is linked to internal quality of work life (Heskett et al, 1997). The internal quality of work life, according to Heskett et al (1997) simply means the feelings that employees have toward their jobs, colleagues, and companies.

The strongest relationships suggested by the data collected in early tests of the service profit chain according to Heskett et al (1997), were those between: (1) profit and customer loyalty, (2) employee loyalty and customer loyalty, and (3) employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction (Heskett et al, 1997). Heskett et al (1997) suggested that in service settings, the relationships were self- reinforcing. That is, satisfied customers contributed to employee satisfaction, and vice versa.

According to Heskett et al (1997), the chain starts with the productivity and quality of the output from the employee which has a linkage with employee loyalty; employee loyalty has a linkage with employee satisfaction is link with employee capability. The customer value equation suggest the value of goods and services delivered to customers is equivalent to the results created for them as well as the quality of the processes used to deliver the results, all in relation to the price of a service to the customer and other costs incurred by the customer in acquiring the service.

Furthermore, Heskett et al (1997) has found that value defined in this way is directly related to customer satisfaction. Subsequently, customer satisfaction has been found to have a linkage with customer loyalty, which eventually, according to Heskett et al (1997), theory, leads to revenue growth and profitability as the main objective.

3. Materials and Method

This is a descriptive study using statistical data to generate results. This research uses a survey method in which focuses on contemporary events and does not require control over behavior of events. A survey questionnaire had been developed based on a close ended questionnaire format in order to assess employee satisfaction and employee loyalty in hotels in Malaysia that had participated in this study. The questionnaire was taken from the literature, especially from Loveman (1998) questionnaire that was used to measure employee satisfaction in retail banking. In addition to that, the questionnaire item was also taken from Fosam et al (1998) questionnaire measuring employee satisfaction and employee loyalty. The questionnaire includes 19 items all together with each item consisting of few sub questions. The questionnaire had been divided into 3 sections between demographic, employee satisfaction and employee loyalty. The remaining items in the questionnaire used for this study was adapted from existing questionnaires that have been taken from the literature with appropriate adjustments. All the items in the questionnaire have an established validity and reliability based on Loveman (1998) and Fosam et al (1998) questionnaire item.

The questionnaires were distributed to the employees of front of the house and back of the house of the participating hotels in Klang Valley in Malaysia. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed and a total of 258 questionnaires were able to be used for the purpose of this study.

4. Results and Discussion

All the data in employee satisfaction had been tested using frequencies, in order to identify factors that led to employee satisfaction. After that, the entire item in the employee satisfaction section had been tested together with the items in the employee loyalty section using cross tabulations test. This was done in order to identify factors in employee satisfaction section that led to employee loyalty in three forms: employment tenure (working period), planned career in the future with the company (duration of work with company as career) and recommendation of employment to others. This test was also conducted in order to assess the linkage of employee satisfaction and employee loyalty.

According to Figure 1, most employees were basically satisfied. Their satisfaction stems from several factors. However, the studies also found that employees place certain elements of their satisfaction as more important than the others. This seems to be true when the general tone of the employees says they were satisfied, and when being asked of each item in the questionnaire, some variables were found to be better than the other (refer Figure 2).

Figure 3 shows all the correlation of employee satisfaction and employee loyalty which had been done by using cross tabulations. Before assessing whether the variables have any significant relationship. A Pearson Chi Square test is conducted to see the degree of confidence. The stated confidence level is the percentage equivalent to the decimal value of 1- α , and vice versa. When the 95% confidence interval is to be found, $\alpha = 0.05$, since 1 - 0.05 = 0.95, or 95%. When $\alpha = 0.01$, then $1 - \alpha = 1 - 0.01 = 0.99$, and the confidence interval is 99%. For the purpose of this study, a confidence level of 95% is used.

In terms of age, most of the respondents are aged between 21 and 34. This is an indication that the majority of the respondents are also a representation of Generation X (born between 1996 and 1982). The finding was that the majority of the respondents are loyal and the literature shows that Generation X have the tendency to be more loyal towards their employers than generation Y (born between 1978 and 1994). However, their loyalty is only as long as the business they are working with is still good. In other words, Generation X value loyalty at the workplace as long as the mutual need between employee and employer had been fulfilled.

The respondents also seem to place high regards about career path and the opportunities to learn and grow offered by their organization. This finding agree with Walker Information's 2005 study that found satisfied employee will become loyal when they perceive their organization offering the opportunities to learn, grow and at the same time providing a clear established career path the employee can pursue in the organization. In addition, studies of employee commitment by Carlson (2005) agrees that in order for the employee to be committed, which is used in broader definition of loyalty, they look forward to the opportunities of continuous learning in order to improve their skills and knowledge.

Performance appraisal plays a role in the linkage of employee satisfaction and employee loyalty in this study. According to Jawahar (2006), the performance appraisal is an important element of satisfaction because it is positively related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment and negatively related to turnover intentions. Jawahar (2006) mention that performance appraisal is related positively to job satisfaction and then organizational commitment, which is used in a broader definition of loyalty. Then, performance appraisal is also negatively related to turnover intentions. When mentioning turnover, it implies that the employee would not be loyal if performance appraisal system is not fair and it does not accurately reflect employee true performance. Therefore, the findings agree with Jawahar (2006) findings that employee satisfaction have a linkage with employee loyalty.

Subsequently, employee's role which is also a factor towards employee satisfaction has a link with employee loyalty in this study. The study of employee's role found empowerment could lead employee to a higher level of satisfaction and better quality of work life. Studies of employee empowerment/involvement programs, The Center for Effective Organizations at the University of Southern California surveyed Fortune 1000 companies in 1987, 1990, and 1993 to determine the degree to which firms are adopting practices that redistribute power, information, knowledge and rewards, and the effects (E. E Lawler III, S. S. Mohrman and G. E. Ledford, Jr., 1992, 1995). The 1990 and 1993 data from this sample, a mixture of manufacturing and service firms, suggest that empowerment may have a positive impact on a number of performance

indicators. However, in service context, before the management decides to give certain level of empowerment to their employees, especially to those that are in constant contact with customers, the management must ensure they are given empowerment in the most proper way that can benefit both the company and the employees. This is done, to make sure, the employees are satisfied with their job and the way they are performing it, and the company are happy with the work produced by the employees. This is in line with the Customer Oriented Service Employee (COSE) construct by Kelley (1992).

Hennig-Thurau (2004) defines COSE as the extent to which the employee's behavior in personal interactions with customers meets those customer needs. It is important to note that the conceptualization of COSE as suggested here implies that all four dimensions (technical skills, social skills, motivation and decision making power) are indispensable to a certain extent to enable employees to behave in a customer oriented way. In order for the employees to perform all the other three dimensions, employees should be allowed a certain degree of decision making power, or they are empowered to decide what is best for the customer, however, this should only be carried out when the employee are able to fulfill all the other three dimensions.

Recognition and rewards are also one of the elements that have been found to link with employee loyalty in this study. Schneider (1994) alleges that customers report superior service when employees indicate that they work in a positive climate for service. Such climate refers to employee perceptions of the practices, procedures and behaviors that get rewarded, supported and expected with regard to customer service and customers service quality (Schneider, White, and Paul, 1998). The notion of employee as customer has been previously developed. For example, Berry (1981) states that whether managing customers or employees "the central purpose remains the same: the attraction of patronage through the satisfaction of needs and wants".

In both cases individuals and organizations are involved in exchange. The nature of what is exchanged may vary, but the importance of satisfying needs and wants remains constant, meaning that the management of employees is often similar to the management of customers. Similarly, employee needs and wants are satisfied when they perceive that rewards from the organization (e.g. pay, promotion, recognition, personal growth, meaningful work) meet or exceed their expectations (Hackman and Oldham, 1980; Locke, 1976).

The link between employee satisfaction and employee loyalty had been found between working conditions (employee satisfaction factor) and employee loyalty in the form of recommending employment, employment tenure and planning to work longer in the future with the company. In the service profit chain model, the antecedents of employee satisfaction are variables related to "internal service quality" and include workplace and job design. According to Schneider, (1994), customers report superior service when employees indicate that they work in a positive climate for service.

Subsequently, Walker Information's 2005 found that employee are more loyal when they feel their job is secure, which is one of the items in working condition section in this study. In addition, studies of employee's satisfaction had identified areas that seem to be important for the satisfaction of the employees. The areas include a well managed, supportive and prosperous work environment, ongoing professional development, career growth potential, challenging and exciting work, teamwork, acknowledgement of work well done, work life balance and the work culture (Tarasco & Damato, 2006). The study by Tarasco & Damato (2006), seems to agree in most aspect of the findings of this study.

However, the strongest correlation between employee satisfaction and employee loyalty for this study came from relationship with supervisor, training program, and benefit package. In terms of relationship with supervisor, it is related strongly with all three aspect of employee loyalty: planning to continue career with the company, employment tenure and recommending employment to others. Sturgeon (2006) states that worker's relationship with their immediate supervisor is very important to employee since both are working in the same organization and share the same workplace. Anonymous (2005) reported that, when employee leave their job because they are not satisfied, they don't leave their job and company, but they are divorcing their manager or supervisor. In addition, he added fostering satisfaction among subordinates is often largely affected by the capabilities of the manager or supervisor.

On the other hand, training was also found to be a major contributor to employee satisfaction and training is the only section in the questionnaire that was found to correlate entirely with all aspect of employee loyalty. Sturgeon (2006) also agrees that training is one of the main drivers of employee satisfaction. Tarasco & Damato (2006) identified training in the form of ongoing professional development as important in employee satisfaction. in addition to that, Walker Information's 2005 also found that training and development to be one of the biggest factor that leads to employee loyalty. According to the report, employees want the opportunity to grow, and they want career path and opportunities that allow them to do so with the company.

Benefits package which are correlated with employee loyalty measures include the amount of vacation, sick leave policy, amount of health care paid for by the organization, and dental benefits.

5. Conclusion

This finding brings back the support to the linkage of employee satisfaction and employee loyalty, whereby the increase of employee satisfaction for the operation staff could actually result in loyalty in similar manner as the management is loyal towards the company. Basically employee satisfaction relies on benefits package, training and development, relationship with supervisor, working conditions, teamwork and cooperation, recognition and rewards, empowerment and communication.

On the other hand, employee loyalty is a result of satisfaction that stems from communication, established career path, opportunities to learn and grow, performance appraisal, employee' role, recognition and rewards, working conditions, and the strongest link came from relationship with supervisor, training program and benefits package. The linkage appears to be strong between relationship with supervisor, training program and benefits package which corresponds with all the three aspect of loyalty in this study: employment tenure, planning career with company and recommending employment. The findings appear to agree with Heskett et al (1997) model of the service profit chain that shows there is a relation between employee satisfaction and employee loyalty. In addition to that, the findings of this study appears to agree with Heskett et al (1997) that workplace conditions, job design/decision making latitude, rewards & recognition, information & communication, and adequate "tools" to serve customers are factors that leads to employee satisfaction. The findings could be used by managers in organizations in developing their employee satisfaction and loyalty programme and thus would be able to tailor their programme in order to satisfy the employee while retaining them (loyalty). However, a future extended study that evaluate a wider scope of employee satisfaction and loyalty factor in hotel industry should be conducted in order to ascertain their strongest and weakest link of factors and their linkage between each other.

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Appendix

	•	satisfaction va			
Variables	Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Agree
	strongly	somewhat		Somewhat	Strongly
Corporate communications		13.3%	19.6%	54.4%	12.7%
Employee Trust company		10.8%	15.8%	57.0%	16.5%
Communication between dept		3.2%	13.3%	53.2%	30.4%
Established Career Path		5.1%	15.2%	57.0%	22.8%
Opportunities to Learn & Grow		3.2%	15.2%	50.0%	31.6%
Performance Appraisal reflect		8.2%	29.75	49.4%	12.7%
Performance					
Performance Appraisal is Fair	0.6%	8.9%	28.5%	46.8%	15.2%
Authority to make decisions	0.6%	7.6%	12.0%	58.2%	21.5%
Contribute to Company Mission			12.0%	58.9%	29.1%
Materials & Equipment to do job		7.0%	10.1%	60.1%	22.8%
well					
Good Work results in more		7.0%	17.7%	50.0%	25.3%
money					
Good Work results in Promotion		13.3%	35.4%	37.3%	13.9%
Employee valued at company	0.6%	6.3%	22.2%	51.9%	19.0%
Recognition for good job	0.6%	6.3%	17.7%	55.7%	19.6%
Salary equals the responsibilities		9.5%	22.8%	49.4%	18.4%
Feel part of a team working		6.3%	13.3%	60.1%	20.3%
toward a shared goal					
Politics at company kept to	4.4%	27.8%	29.7%	29.7%	8.2%
minimum					
Feel committed to work toward a	0.6%	10.1%	12.7%	53.8%	22.8%
shared goal					
My job is secure		4.4%	10.1%	65.8%	19.6%
Physical work conditions are		7.0%	8.2%	69.0%	15.8%
good					
Deadlines are realistic		10.8%	17.7%	55.1%	16.5%
Workload is reasonable	0.6%	8.2%	15.2%	57.6%	18.4%
Keep balance between work and	0.6%	5.7%	5.7%	56.3%	31.0%
personal					
Supervisor treats me fairly	0.6%	1.9%	11.4%	62.0%	24.1%
Supervisor treats me with respect	0.6%	0.6%	11.4%	65.2%	22.2%
Supervisor handles work related		10.1%	15.2%	54.4%	20.3%
issues satisfactorily					
Supervisor asks for my input	1.9%	7.6%	15.8%	54.4%	20.3%
Supervisor is an effective	3.2%	6.3%	17.1%	50.6%	22.8%
manager					
Company provide as much initial		5.1%	24.1%	48.1%	22.8%
training as needed					

Figure 1: Employee satisfaction variables

Company provides as much	0.6%	11.4%	27.8%	39.9%	20.3%
ongoing training as needed					
Received the training needed to	0.6%	8.2%	20.3%	48.1%	22.8%
do my job					
Training helps to improve my		6.3%	18.4%	55.7%	19.6%
work performance					
Satisfied with comp' benefit		2.5%	14.6%	69.0%	13.9%
package					
Satisfied with amount of vacation	1.3%	1.9%	15.2%	68.4%	13.3%
Satisfied with sick leave policy		0.6%	10.1%	77.2%	12.0%
Satisfied with amount of health	0.6%	4.4%	8.2%	74.1%	12.7%
care paid for					
Satisfied with dental benefits	7.6%	13.9%	22.2%	44.9%	11.4%

Figure 2: Percentage of employee satisfaction items in the questionnaire

Items in the Questionnaire	Employee
	Satisfaction (%)
I'm satisfied with the sick leave policy	89.2%
I feel I am contributing to the company's mission	88%
My supervisor treats me with respect	87.4%
I can keep a reasonable balance between work and personal life	87.3%
I'm satisfied with the amount of health care paid for	86.8%
My supervisor treats me fairly	86.1%
My job is secure	85.4%
My physical working conditions are good	84.8%
There is adequate communication between departments	83.6%
I have enough materials & equipment I need to do my job well	82.9%
Overall, I am satisfied with the company' benefit package	82.9%
I am satisfied with the amount of vacation I received for my benefit package	81.7%
I have the opportunities to learn & grow	81.6%
I feel part of a team working towards a shared goal	80.4%
I have a clearly established career path at this company	79.8%
I am given enough authority to make decisions I need to make	79.7%
I feel committed to work towards a shared goal	76.6%
My workload is reasonable	76%
If I do good work, I can count on making more money	75.3%
This company gives enough recognition for work that's is well done	75.3%
The training helps me to improve my work performance	75.3%
My supervisor handles work related issues satisfactorily	74.7%
My supervisor asks for my input to help make decisions	74.7%
I feel I can trust what company tells me	73.5%
My supervisor is an effective manager	73.4%
Deadlines at this company are realistic	71.6%
I feel I am valued at this company	70.9%
I received the training I need to do my job	70.9%

The company provided as much initial training as I needed	70.9%
My salary is fair for my responsibilities	67.8%
Corporate communications are frequent enough	67.1%
My last performance appraisal accurately reflect my performance	62.1%
The performance appraisal system is fair	62%
I am satisfied with the dental benefits	56.3%
If I do good work, I can count on being promoted	51.2%
"Politics" at this company are kept to a minimum	37.9%

Figure 3: Factors that led to employee loyalty

No	Items in the questionnaire that found significant relation between employee satisfaction and
	employee loyalty
1	Employee trust company * Recommendation of employment to others
2	Communication between departments * Duration of work as career
3	Established career path * recommendation of employment to others
4	Performance appraisal reflects performance * recommend of employment to others
5	Performance appraisal reflect performance * duration of work
6	Performance appraisal is fair * recommendation of employment to others
7	Performance appraisal is fair * duration of work with company
8	Authority to make decisions * duration of work as career
9	Materials & equipment to do job well* recommendation of employment to others
10	Good work results in promotion * recommendation of employment to others
11	Employee feel valued at company * recommendation of employment to others
12	Recognition for a good job * recommendation of employment to others
13	Salary equals responsibilities * recommendation of employment to others
14	Salary equals responsibilities * duration of work as career
15	Feel part of a team working towards a shared goal * recommendation of employment to
	others
16	Politics at company kept to a minimum * recommendation of employment to others
17	Feel committed to work towards a shared goal * recommendation of employment to others
18	My job is secure * working period
19	My job is secure * recommendation of employment to others
20	Physical working conditions are good * recommendation of employment to others
21	Physical working conditions are good * duration of work as career
22	Deadlines are realistic * recommendation of employment to others
23	Workload is reasonable * recommendation of employment to others
24	Workload is reasonable * recommendation of employment to others
25	Workload is reasonable * duration of work as career
26	Keep balance between work and personal * recommendation of employment to others
27	Supervisor treats me fairly * duration of work
28	Supervisor treats me fairly * recommendation of employment to others
29	Supervisor treats me with respect * Duration of work as career
30	Supervisor handles work related issues satisfactorily * recommendation of employment to
	others
31	Supervisor handles work related issues satisfactorily * duration of work as career

32	Supervisor asks for my input * recommendation of employment to others
33	Supervisor asks for my input * duration of work
34	Supervisor is an effective manager * recommendation of employment to others
35	Supervisor is an effective manager * recommendation of employment to others
36	Supervisor is an effective manager * duration of work
37	Company provide much initial training * working period
38	Company provide much initial training * recommendation of employment to others
39	Company provide much initial training * duration of work
40	Company provide as much ongoing training * working period
41	Company provide as much ongoing training* recommendation of employment to others
42	Company provide much ongoing training * duration of work as career
43	Received the training needed to do my job * recommendation of employment to others
44	Received the training needed to do my job * duration of work as career
45	Training helps to improve my work performance * recommendation of employment to
	others
46	Training helps to improve my work performance * duration of work as career
47	Satisfied with company's benefits package * duration of work as career
48	Satisfied with amount of vacation * working period
49	Satisfied with amount of vacation * duration of work as career
50	Satisfied with sick leave policy * duration of work as career
51	Satisfied with amount of health care paid for * duration of work as career
52	Satisfied with dental benefits * working period
53	Satisfied with dental benefits * recommendation of employment to others
54	Satisfied with dental benefits * duration of work as career