



The Influence of Management Commitment to Service Quality on Employee Performance, and the Mediating Role of Employee Involvement: a Saudi Arabia Perspective

Awad Abomaleh ^a, Ibrahim Zahari ^b
Graduate Business School

Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN), Putrajaya Campus,
Malaysia

^aEmail: abomalah@yahoo.com

^bEmail: dr.ibrahimzahari@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the mediating role of employee involvement in the links between management commitment to service quality, and employee performance in the Immigration Department at Saudi international airports. In this regard, self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data. This questionnaire was distributed to frontline Immigration Department employees to measure management commitment to service quality, employee involvement, and employee performance. The questionnaire provided primary data. The study applied a quantitative research approach that involved SPSS v. 21 and AMOS v.21 were both used in the analytical process. Structural equation modeling (SEM) enabled the examination of the interactions among management commitment to service quality, employee performance, and employee involvement. The results of the analysis show that employee involvement has a full mediating role between management commitment to service quality and employee performance. Consequently, this study confirms that management commitment to service quality alone does not produce positive employee performance unless linked with employee involvement.

Keywords: Management commitment to service quality; employee involvement; employee performance; Saudi Arabia.

1. Introduction

From the service-oriented point of view, the public sectors, especially the service sectors, must regard their employees as the key component to ensuring the overall success of their departments. Such public employees are crucial because they reflect the image of the organization and influence the customers' perception of the quality of service that is given. Therefore, senior management in these service sectors must focus on improving the overall efficiency of their employees through training, empowerment, involvement, and rewards. When management commits itself to improving service quality, employees can obtain better resources for training, which can enhance their skills in dealing with unexpected situations at work and their competence for making sound decisions. In recent years, the growth of the public sector in Saudi Arabia has been remarkable; however, the number of approved posts has risen faster than applicants, and it is a feature of the public sector since the 1970s that

around one-third or more of established posts have remained vacant. More recently, there is growing concern that the sudden expansion of public sector employment, and the excess numbers of approved posts in the general budget, have resulted in many non-qualified applicants filling these vacancies, a situation that has led to overstaffing, managerial problems, and low productivity (Al-Shakhawi, 1994). Senior management must address the unacceptable outcomes that have accompanied the expansion of public sector employment such as poor employee performance and low customer satisfaction about the services provided to them. In this regard, management should give its employees the opportunity to participate in improving services by empowering them to have greater control over the different aspects of service delivery. Such an approach could give employees more discretion about their jobs and allow them to take more responsibility for solving problems and making decisions related to service policies and the service environment (Peccei & Rosenthal, 2001; Rees, 1995). For example, employees could be allowed to tailor their service organization's offerings to meet their customers' specific needs without going through the layers of bureaucracy common in large service organizations. Finally, management should communicate the organization's vision of service to the employees. When this vision is related to the well-being of employees, the latter will be more willing to make suggestions on how to improve the organization's services. Thus, employees would be driven by management's vision of service to become effectively involved in delivering services to customers. The study contributes to the service marketing literature by examining the common antecedent of employee's performance, and by integrating the literature on management commitment into employee involvement. Practically, the results of this study provide useful guidelines to implement employee involvement and improve performance of employees. The rest of this paper is structured as follows. First, this study review literature on management commitment to service quality, employee involvement, employee performance, and present four hypotheses. Next, this study describes the methodology and data collection procedure. Finally, this study report findings and discuss the implications.

2. Literature review and development of hypotheses

2.1 Management commitment to service quality and employee performance

Management commitment to service quality is defined as consciously choosing quality initiatives as operational and strategic operations for the organization, and engaging in activities such as providing visible quality leadership where the resources are considered for the adoption and implementation of quality initiatives (Ahmed and Parasuraman, 1994). According to Cheung and To (2010), there are three indicators of management commitment to service quality: management's service vision, reflecting a true commitment to service and not just paying lip service to it; management's personal involvement, providing personal input in the service delivery process; and empowerment, encouraging customer-contact employees to speak up and get the job done. Boshoff and Allen (2000) and Hartline and Ferrell (1996) highlighted that management commitment to service quality critically affects the excellence of the service that is delivered. Additionally, Reeves and Hoy (1993) stated

that neglect in this area may lead to service failure. Moreover, Jenkins (1992) and Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry (1990) focused on the neglect of management commitment to service quality that leads to failure of quality improvement programs. In the context of these issues, Forrester (2000) suggested that in order to objectively assess the initiatives relating to management commitment to service quality, employees' evaluations of such commitment are an appropriate tool to use.

Researchers (Babakus et al., 2003; Lytle and Timmerman, 2006) have identified that management commitment to service quality is manifested through a simultaneous emphasis by management on training, empowerment, and rewards. When management is committed to improving service quality, employees will be provided with more resources training. Such training may enhance the skills of employees in dealing with unexpected work problems and improve their competence in making appropriate suggestions for decision making (Cheung & To, 2010). Therefore, the following hypothesis has been developed.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between management commitment to service quality and employee performance.

2.2 Management commitment to service quality and employee Involvement

Peccei and Rosenthal (2001) and Rees (1995) suggested that when management is committed to improving service quality, and when employees are given increased control over different aspects of service delivery, employees enjoy more discretion and can take more responsibility for solving problems and making decisions relating to service policies and the service environment. For instance, employees could be allowed to tailor the service firm's offerings to meet the specific needs of their customers without going through the layers of bureaucracy common in large service firms. According to Cheung and To (2010), when management communicates the firm's vision of service, and when this vision is related to employees' well-being, such employees are willing to make suggestions on how to improve services. Thus, employees are driven by management's vision of service to become effectively involved in delivering services to customers. Thus, the following is posited.

H₂: There is a significant relationship between management commitment to service quality and employee involvement.

2.3 Employee Involvement and employee performance

Lawler et al. (1992) defined employee involvement as the extent to which employees have a sense of control over their work. Employee involvement is also signaled by job competence and job autonomy (Peccei & Rosenthal, 2001) and is closely associated with perceptions of service quality (Liao & Chuang, 2004) and job satisfaction and job performance (Scott et al., 2003; Witt et al., 2000).

One of the predictors for better service performance is employee involvement because the involvement of employees provides opportunities for them to enhance their skills. It also provides discretion to enable employees to enjoy their work (Cheung & To, 2010). Further, Schneider et al. (1998) stated that employee involvement is a human resource practice that

helps employees to deliver a service effectively. In addition, when employees are effectively involved in decision making, they are more willing to voice opinions on improving service performance (Peccei & Rosenthal, 2001). Therefore, the following is posited.

H₃: There is a significant relationship between employee involvement and employee performance.

2.4 The Mediating role of Employee Involvement

The hypotheses stated above suggest that employee involvement is a reasonable mediator among management commitment to service quality, and employee performance. According to the concept of field theory (Lewin, 1951), it can be argued that work attitudes and employee behavior depend on distal causes (Lewin, 1951), while reactions to these causes are considered proximal causes. Based on this, management commitment to service quality is a distal construct. Therefore, this current study argues that mediators such as employee involvement may be necessary to extend the effects of management commitment to service quality onto employee performance. Thus, it can be illustrated that when employees are given the chance for involvement, they gain access to valuable information on understanding customer evaluations on service delivery, enjoy job autonomy, and enhance their work skills through the exchange of ideas on service decisions. The result is that employees with a higher level of job competency are more able to handle service jobs, and with a greater sense of autonomy they will enjoy their jobs to a greater extent. When employees are motivated to exert a greater effort in delivering services, the customers who use the services will rate their service performance more highly. Thus, the following hypothesis has been developed.

H₄: Employee Involvement has a mediating role between management commitment to service quality and employee performance.

3. Materials and methods

3.1 Context of the research – the Immigration Department at Saudi international airports

The population in this study is the frontline employees of the Immigration Department who work at international airports in Saudi Arabia. Thus, the unit of analysis is related to Immigration Department frontline employees who work at the King Abdulaziz International Airport (Jeddah) and the Prince Mohammad Bin Abdulaziz International Airport (Al Madinah Al Munawarah). The unit of analysis in this case is at the individual level (each individual frontline employee).

3.2 Measurement instruments

One questionnaire was developed for Immigration Department frontline employees. It included a demographic section and items for management commitment to service quality, employee involvement, and employee performance. The items selected for the constructs were adapted from prior studies to ensure content validity. All items, except demographic data, were rated on a five-point likert scale ranging from 1 = “Not at all” to 5 = “Frequently,

if not always.”

3.1.2.1 Management commitment to service quality. Based on the literature on management commitment to service quality, this study adopts nine items of training, six items of empowerment, five items of employee rewards, and five items of information from Babakus et al. (2003).

3.2.1 Employee Involvement. This study adopts nine items of internalization of service excellence, six items of job competence, and five items of job autonomy in order to measure employee involvement from Peccei and Rosenthal (2001).

3.2.2 Employee performance. This measures two components of employee performance (in-role performance and extra-role performance) by using a self-appraisal approach. In-role performance is adopted based on the scale developed by Williams and Anderson (1991). Extra-role performance is evaluated using the scale from Eisenberger et al. (2010).

3.3 Data collection

After obtaining an approval letter to conduct this study at Immigration Departments that work at Saudi international airports. The decision was made to deliver the questionnaires by hand to ensure a good response rate to obtain the information required to support the hypotheses. In total, 544 frontline Immigration Department employees were obtained. Out of the 544 employees, 91.4 percent were male. The mean age of the employee respondents was ranges from 26 to 30, 35.5 percent of them had a secondary education, and 46 percent had been working with the Immigration Department for less than 9 years.

4. Results

4.1 Measurement model

The measurement model relates the observed and unobserved variables that justify the use of the latter in estimating the former (Byrne, 2010). The estimation of the measurement model through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is a prerequisite in validating the structural model that is of interest in a piece of research. Upon subjection of the measurement items of CFA (see Table 1), the χ^2/df ratio was 2.673, which enhances the acceptability of the model as it is within the acceptable range of 2 to 5 (Marsh and Hocevar, 1988). Other fit parameters of the comparative fit index (CFI = 0.992), as well as the root mean square of approximation (RMSEA = 0.052), enhance the reliability of the model as they satisfy the minimum requirements.

Table 1: Results of the measurement model (n = 544)

Name of category	Name of index	Index value
Absolute fit	RMSEA	0.052
	GFI	0.965
Incremental fit	CFI	0.992
Parsimonious fit	Chisq/df	2.446

4.2 Structural model analysis

SEM was used to assess the conceptualized model and thus the proposed hypotheses. The Chi-square value for the conceptual model was $\chi^2 = 138.591$ ($df = 57$, $p < 0.001$) with $RMSEA = 0.051$, $CFI = 0.992$, and $Chisq/df = 2.431$. Though the Chi-square χ^2 indicates the model to be suitable, the other model fit variables ($RMSEA$, CFI , and $Chisq/df$) are below their acceptable levels (see Byrne, 2010). The first three hypotheses were supported and indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: The regression weight for the final structural model

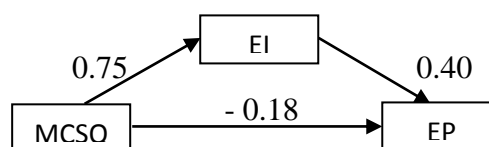
	Standardized estimate	Critical t-rat	P-value	Result
Hypothesis of direct path analysis				
H1: MCSQ \rightarrow EP	0.058	-2.785	0.005	Supported
H2: MCSQ \rightarrow EI	0.032	25.648	***	Supported
H3: EI \rightarrow EP	0.053	6.143	***	Supported
Notes: n = 544; MCSQ = Management commitment to service quality; EP = Employee performance; EI = Employee involvement				

The last hypothesis is mediating. Thus, the standardized regression weights and the probability values were obtained, all of which indicated the significance for the respective paths. The required information is given in Table 3, and the triangle as shown in Figure 1.

Table 3: The regression weights and their significance for each path

	Standardized estimate	P-value	Result
Hypothesis of indirect path analysis			
H1: MCSQ \rightarrow EP	-0.180	0.005	Significant
H2: MCSQ \rightarrow EI	0.753	0.001	Significant
H3: EI \rightarrow EP	0.399	***	Significant
Notes: n = 544; MCSQ = Management commitment to service quality; EP = Employee performance; EI = Employee involvement			

The procedure for testing as follows:



- 1) The indirect effect = $0.75 \times 0.40 = 0.3$
- 2) The direct effect = -0.18
- 3) Both indirect paths, MCSQ to EI and EI to EP, are significant
- 4) Since indirect effect $>$ direct effect, mediation occurs
- 5) The type of mediation here is partial mediation because the direct effect is still significant after the mediator enters the model

Figure 1: Standardized path coefficients

From the prior steps, Table II and figure 1 give the results of testing the mediation effect of employee involvement in the relationship between management commitment to service quality and employee performance, and this means that hypothesis 4 was supported.

5. Discussion

5.1 Summary of the study

The study aimed to explore the mediating role of employee involvement in the links between management commitment to service quality, and employee performance in Immigration Department at Saudi international airports. Results indicate that employee involvement is a common predictor management commitment to service quality and employee performance. Moreover, management commitment to service quality is positively related to employee involvement, and this involvement is positively associated with employee performance. In addition, employee involvement partial mediates the relationship between management commitment to service quality and employee performance. Employee involvement provides a prior way for diverting management commitment to service quality into employee performance. Hence, this result contributes the missing link between management commitment and employee performance in the prior literature on public sector.

5.2 Implications

The impact of management commitment to service quality on employee performance is higher with existence of employee involvement. Given the salience of employee involvement, practitioners of service management should be directed to set a clear service vision, provided sufficient training, and empower subordinates.

A neglect of a single one of these areas may lead to service failure, because management commitment to service quality is perceived by employees as a kind of investment in human resource development (Cheung & To, 2010). Moreover, the practitioners should provide effective ways for collecting the suggestions of employees on decisions of service.

5.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study has some limitations that give room for further empirical inquiry. First of all, it is a cross-sectional study. A longitudinal study may depict how the management commitment to service quality and employee involvement effect on employee performance. Second, the measurement of management commitment to service quality was limited and could include of investment in technology and management of standardized service quality. Finally, structural and cultural differences may limit the generalization of mediation model. For instance, the span of control of employees in Immigration Department is different from that in the public sector.

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