

The Relations of Transformational Leadership and Empowerment with Employee Job Satisfaction: A Study among Indian Restaurant Employees

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Accepted: September 11, 2010; Published: November 23, 2010

Abstract

This paper examines if transformational leadership and empowerment affect job satisfaction among Indian restaurant employees. This study utilized survey research (a non-experimental field study design). A total of 218 restaurant industry employees from the Punjab area of India were surveyed to assess their perceptions of transformational leadership, empowerment, and job satisfaction at their places of work. Positive relationships between i) employee perceived transformational leadership used by managers and employee perceived job satisfaction and ii) employee perceived empowerment and employee perceived job satisfaction were found. The paper makes recommendations to managers and owners/operators of the hospitality organizations for improving employee retention.

Keywords: Hospitality; Transformational Leadership; Empowerment; Customer-Contact Service Employees; Job Satisfaction.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine if the transformational leadership and empowerment affect employee job satisfaction in the Indian hospitality industry. India is known worldwide as an ancient and mysterious civilization. India is the second most populated country of the world after China, with a population of over one billion [1]. With increasing worldwide tourism and travel for leisure, business in the Indian hospitality industry is on the rise. In addition, India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world and the result is a sharp upward swing in the service sector. Such a positive outlook is also reflected in the hospitality and tourism industry in India [2]. However, the owners/operators of the hospitality organizations in India are facing the challenges of high employee turnover because of employee job dissatisfaction. In a study covering several industries, Umashankar and Kulkarni [3] found the highest employee turnover among Indian food and beverage employees.

One of the factors leading to job dissatisfaction in India is the lack of dignity of employees. Looking into Indian cultural history, it is not surprising to see that people give respect to the position rather than the person who is performing a certain task. This is evident in the Indian hospitality industry. For example, people working at the houseman's level in India are looked upon as individuals who hold those positions because they could not do or deserve much else. Umashankar and Kulkarni [3] explain that it is unfortunate though that the same houseman's position in Western cultures is looked upon as a job and sometimes even a career. Thus, the houseman in Western cultures is awarded the right degree of respect as a job and sometimes even as a profession.

Research on Indian work culture indicates that high power distance, collectivism, and affective reciprocity are major cultural values of Indian employees [4]. It is well established over several decades that India ranks relatively high on power distance [5, 6]. India's historical caste system contributed to this high cultural power distance. For example, people born into the lower castes did not have the right to have meals with those born into the upper castes, and were despised by them. Brahmins considered themselves superior to all other classes. Although this is still the case to some extent, the gap has decreased over time. India's former status as a colony of the United Kingdom for approximately 100 years may have also played a role in supporting caste differences. This high power distance leads to employee job dissatisfaction in the Indian hospitality industry [7].

Employee job dissatisfaction causes organizational performance problems such as poor quality of customer service, low productivity, and high labor costs. If retention of customers depends on the quality of service, which in turn, depends on employee job (dis)satisfaction then finding ways to improve employee satisfaction are tantamount to increasing customer retention. Transformational leadership and empowerment have been found to be the best strategies to improve employee job satisfaction [8, 9].

Burns [10] first proposed a theoretical definition of transformational leadership, and Bass [11] extended and operationalized transformational leadership as “leadership and performance beyond expectations.” In this study, transformational leadership is defined as “the process of influencing major changes in the attitudes and assumptions of organization members and building commitment towards (an) organization’s mission and objectives” [12].

The term “empowerment” in management literature appears to have come into general usage in the early 1980s [13]. The term “empowerment” refers to an individual’s belief in his/her ability to exercise choice and to make decisions. Campion *et al.* [14] define empowerment as the employees’ authority to make business decisions and to accept responsibility for the outcome of those decisions. Empowerment is also transferring power and responsibility to employees so that, within specified limits, they are able to provide the best possible customer service at their own discretion [15]. Although the term “empowerment” has been central to management thought, and has been practiced for well over two decades, most of the empirical research has centered on manufacturing rather than or service organizations. However, some research on empowerment has been conducted in the hospitality industry [16, 17, 18, 19, 20].

Although, research on job satisfaction started in the last century when Herzberg *et al.* [21] formulated an influential Dual-Factor, or “Hygiene-Motivator” theory, there has been a very little research conducted on the Indian hospitality industry to test the effect of i) transformational leadership and employee job satisfaction and ii) empowerment on employee job satisfaction. This study contributes to the literature on transformational leadership, empowerment, and job satisfaction in at least two ways. First, it fills in the gap of limited research conducted on Indian hospitality organizations, which tend to be labor-intensive in creating quality and customer value. Transformational leadership and empowerment have been shown to hold great promise for advancing the quality of service businesses in Western Cultures because transformational leadership and empowerment may mitigate or even largely eliminate the deeper issues of employee job dissatisfaction and create new paradigms for the service industry [22, 23, 24]. Since transformational leadership and empowerment hold great promise for improving employee job satisfaction for the service industry; this study explores these affects and relationships on customer contact service employees (CCSEs) in the Indian hospitality industry where a cultural difference relative to Western cultures may mitigate their effectiveness.

Second, although the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction has been tested [8, 25] as has been the relationship between empowerment and job satisfaction [9, 26, 27], the relative impact of transformational leadership and empowerment on job satisfaction have rarely, if ever, been tested in relation to each other, particularly in the Indian hospitality industry. Therefore, this study adds substance to the existing theory by validating the relationships between transformational leadership, empowerment, and job satisfaction within the context of the Indian hospitality industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Employee Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction, in the context of this study, is defined as the pleasurable emotional state that results from the appraisal of one’s job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one’s job values [28]. The Indian CCSEs face the challenge of a multi-lingual work environment that features many unplanned or unforeseen workload peaks [29] on a daily basis, which in turn, negatively affect job satisfaction.

Transformational leadership is a tool that enhances subordinate satisfaction. Job satisfaction also comes from the ability of workers to have a clear understanding of the goals and the objectives of the organization. Transformational leadership clarifies mission, goals, and objectives for employees, which in turn, reduces the tension of CCSEs related to their daily tasks and thus increases their job satisfaction. Berson and Linton [8] indicate that transformational leadership improves employee job satisfaction by increasing positive employee attitudes and clarifying the role of employees. Studies [25] have also found that transformational leadership improves employee job satisfaction by increasing positive employee attitudes and clarifying the role of employees.

2.2 The Relationship between Empowerment and Job Satisfaction

Empowerment plays an important role in improving employee job satisfaction. In Western cultures, Job satisfaction comes from the ability of workers to have control over the jobs, or feelings of empowerment in their lives at work [26, 27]. Front-line service workers desire to have some control over their jobs to solve service related problems (e.g., customer complaints related to food items, slow

service, etc.) that they face on a daily basis. Empowerment has been described as a venue to enable employees to make decisions [30]. The increased discretion and flexibility experienced by empowered CCSEs likely make them feel better about their jobs and heighten job satisfaction. Nedd [31] also found that, as a byproduct of satisfaction, empowerment improves employee intent to stay with the same organization.

Hechanova *et al.* [32] found a positive relationship between empowerment and employee job satisfaction in the hospitality industry. More recently, Dickson and Lorenz [33] found positive relationship between empowerment and employee job satisfaction. Karia and Asaari [9] also indicate that employee empowerment significantly enhances job satisfaction. Therefore, unless cultural differences moderate the relationship, empowerment is expected to have a positive influence on attitudinal and behavioral responses of CCSEs in the Indian hospitality industry.

In summary, the reviewed literature shows positive relationships between i) transformational leadership and employee job satisfaction and ii) empowerment and employee job satisfaction in Western Cultures. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: The higher the level of transformational leadership used by managers, the higher will be the level of CCSE job satisfaction in the Indian hospitality industry.

H2: The higher the level of employee empowerment, the higher will be the level of CCSE job satisfaction in the Indian hospitality industry.

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study utilized survey research, a descriptive field study design. $P < .05$ significance level was used to accept or reject the null hypotheses.

3.2 Measurement

In order to remain (for comparison and reference reasons) consistent with previous research, the measurement instruments were taken from two referent studies; which, in turn, are based on previous studies in marketing, management, and psychology. All measurement instruments pertaining to i) transformational leadership were taken from Dubinsky *et al.* [25] and ii) employee empowerment and job satisfaction were taken from Hartline and Ferrell [16].

All the scale items were pre-tested for construct validity. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with each item (statement), using a five-point Likert scale providing an interval level of measurement.

Transformational leadership (TL) is operationally defined as the extent to which managers motivate and encourage employees to (1) use their own judgment and intelligence to solve problems while performing their jobs, (2) transfer missions to employees, and (3) express appreciation for good work. Dubinsky *et al.* [25] used the twelve-item multifactor leadership scale [34], which measures a sales person's relationship with their managers. We selected seven items to measure "TL." Scale items were reworded to apply to CCSEs in the hospitality industry and the reliability of these re-worded items was re-tested. The Cronbach alpha on the responses of the thirty employees who participated in the pre-test of the above scale items was 0.89.

Employee empowerment (EE) is operationalized as the extent to which CCSEs feel that their managers allow them to use their own initiative and judgment in performing their jobs. Hartline and Ferrell [16] used the eight-item tolerance-of-freedom scale [35], which measures the degree to which managers encourage initiative, give employees freedom, and trust employees to use their own judgment. Based on confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) loading scores, four items were selected to measure the "empowerment" dimension. Scale items were reworded to apply to CCSEs in the hospitality industry and the reliability (internal consistency) of these re-worded items was re-tested. The Cronbach alpha on the responses of the thirty employees who participated in the pre-test of the above scale items was 0.89.

Job Satisfaction (JS) is operationalized as the extent to which service employees are satisfied with their job security, pay, supervisor, organization's policies, and advancement opportunities. Hartline and Ferrell [16] used eight items scale for their studies. Based on CFA loading scores, five items were selected to measure the "JS" variable. Scale items were reworded to apply to CCSEs in the hospitality industry and the reliability of these re-worded items was re-tested. The Cronbach alpha on the responses of the thirty employees who participated in the pre-test of the above scale items was 0.82.

3.3 Sample

The Punjab area (Chandigarh, Ludhiana, and Banga) of India was chosen as the research site to collect data. Given that the population is "abstract" (i.e., it was not possible to obtain a list of all members of the focal population) [36, p. 101], a non-probability (purposive) sample was obtained. In a purposive sample, participants are screened for inclusion based on criteria associated with members of the focal population. The focal population was comprised of restaurant (fast food and full service) service workers in the Punjab area of India. The survey was in English since restaurants in the region hire CCSEs who can read, write, and speak English. The instruction sheet indicated that participants could contact the researchers by telephone and/or email regarding any questions or concerns they might have about the research.

An exhaustive list of restaurant employees' names and phone numbers in the Punjab area of India was created to enable trained volunteers to contact, screen, and invite qualified service workers to participate. Survey questionnaire bundles coupled with an instruction sheet were provided to participating volunteers for distribution.

More than 700 surveys were distributed and 201 surveys were returned, 3 of which were not usable, for an overall response rate of roughly 29%.

4. Study Procedures

4.1 Confidentiality

Participants were assured that their names would not be disclosed and that confidentiality would be strictly maintained. In addition, participants were explicitly asked not to disclose their names on the questionnaire, and were free to decline responding to any survey question that they felt might reveal their identities.

5. Analysis

5.1 Data Analysis Methods

Measures of central tendency, variance, skewness, and kurtosis were calculated on responses to all of the items. Skewness measures for all of the items were within the range of: +0.191 to +1.024, which is considered to be an excellent range for most research that requires using statistics appropriate to normal distributions. Therefore, we used statistics that assume scalar values and symmetric distributions to test our hypotheses. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) on the sixteen items was performed. Using Principal Components, as an extraction method, followed by Varimax rotation of components with Eigenvalue greater than 1.0, the data "unfolded" into three (3) factors. These three factors explained 63.40% of the variance in the sixteen items (see Table 1), and, in terms of convergent validity, all of the items loaded on the expected factors (see Table 2).

Table 1: Total Variance Explained – Rotation Sums of Square Loadings.

Component	Total Variance Explained		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.118	25.738	25.738
2	3.339	20.867	46.605
3	2.687	16.794	63.399

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Table 2: Rotated Component Matrix.

	Component		
	1	2	3
To what extent does your immediate manager/supervisor.....?			
TL1)encourage you to be "team player?"	0.692	0.193	0.278
TL2)get the group to work together towards the same goal?	0.723	0.101	0.242
TL3)show respect for your personal feelings?	0.710	0.213	0.257
TL4)inspire others with his/her plans for the future?	0.764	0.243	0.230
TL5)transmit a "sense of mission" to you?	0.739	0.228	0.154
TL6)enable you to think about old problems in new ways?	0.702	0.123	0.206
TL7)let you use your intelligence to overcome obstacles?	0.698	0.177	0.206
To what extent does your immediate manager/supervisor.....?			
EE1)permit you to use your own judgment?	0.305	0.128	0.766
EE2)encourage you to handle problems?	0.276	0.133	0.828
EE3)trust your judgment?	0.303	0.194	0.692
EE4)allow you freedom in your work?	0.238	0.258	0.666
To what extent are you satisfied with.....?			
JS1) your job security (stable work)?	0.098	0.698	0.224
JS2) your current salary or wages?	0.204	0.819	0.192
JS3) your immediate manager/supervisor?	0.175	0.772	0.160
JS4) your organization's policies?	0.201	0.824	0.077
JS5) advancement opportunities in your organization?	0.251	0.718	0.094

Notes: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization
 Rotation converged in 4 iterations

Cronbach's Alpha on the above indicated clusters of items: TL 0.8874; EE 0.8246; and JS 0.8595.

The question subsets were analyzed in order to enable the calculation of the weighted factor scores. In terms of the weighting of the items comprising the factors: the seven TL, four EE, and five JS, loaded approximately equally.

Table 3 provides the Pearson correlation for the variables that we used in the regression model. We found that the employee job satisfaction is positively correlated with transformational leadership used by managers and empowerment. The positive correlations indicate that transformational leadership used by managers and empowerment improves the employee job satisfaction in the Indian restaurant industry.

Table 3: Pearson Bivariate Correlation Analysis.

	TL	EE
JS	0.494**	0.452**
TL		0.632**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

JS = Job Satisfaction

TL = Transformational Leadership

EE = Employee Empowerment

6. Results

6.1 The Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Employee Job satisfaction

A positive relationship between TL and JS (see Table 4) was found; that is, the perceived JS of CCSEs is related to the perceived TL used by managers in the Indian hospitality industry.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients ^{a, b}.

R² = 0.244; SEE = 0.872; F = 63.35; ANOVA's Test Sig. = <0.0005					
Regression Equation: JS = 1.418 + 0.494TL					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients ^c	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.418	0.062		<0.0005	N.S.
TL	0.494	0.062	0.494	7.959	<0.0005

^aDependent Variable: JS

^bIndependent Variables: TL

^cLinear Regression through the Origin

SEE = Standard Error of the Estimate

Note that around 24.40% ($R^2 = 0.244$) of the variance in the employee job satisfactions is explained by the variance in the perceived transformational leadership of their managers in the Indian hospitality industry (see Table 4).

6.2 The Relationship between Empowerment and Employee Job satisfaction

A positive relationship between EE and JS (see Table 5) was found; that is, the perceived JS of CCSEs is related to their perceived empowerment in the Indian hospitality industry.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients ^{a, b}.

R² = 0.204; SEE = 0.894; F = 50.24; ANOVA's Test Sig. = <0.0005					
Regression Equation: JS = 3.559 + 0.452EE.					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients ^c	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	3.559	0.064		<0.0005	N.S.
EE	0.452	0.064	0.452	7.088	<0.0005

^aDependent Variable: JS

^bIndependent Variables: EE

^cLinear Regression through the Origin

Note that around 20.40% ($R^2 = 0.204$) of the variance in employee job satisfactions is explained by the perceived empowerment in the Indian hospitality industry (see Table 5).

As is shown in Table 4 and Table 5, the ANOVA's tests are also significant at <0.0005.

7. Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to determine whether perceived transformational leadership and empowerment are related to perceived job satisfaction of CCSEs in the Indian hospitality industry. Data was collected by surveying restaurant service employees in the Punjab area of India. These employee perceptions and judgments are the basis of our findings that perceived employee job satisfaction is associated with their perceived transformational leadership of managers and their perceived empowerment. One finding of this study is consistent with the findings of Berson and Linton [8] in which they theorized that transformational leadership

improves employee job satisfaction by increasing positive employee attitudes and clarifying the role of employees. The other finding of this study supports the findings of Nedd [31], Hechanova *et al.* [32], and Dickson and Lorenz [33] in which they indicate that empowerment improves employee job satisfaction. Since the findings of this study on CCSEs in India supports the findings of studies on CCSEs in the west, we are led to the conclusion that the relationship among employee perceived transformational leadership of managers, employee perceived empowerment, and employee perceived job satisfaction are universal.

Since employee job dissatisfaction negatively impacts how CCSEs treat their customers, it is imperative to explore all potential human resource management practices that may improve job satisfaction. CCSEs play a boundary-spanning role in the hospitality industry where they interact with many individuals from inside (fellow employees and managers) and outside (guests) their organizations. This large role set requires CCSEs to satisfy frequently variegated needs and expectations of multiple parties. This requires that employees perform pro-social behaviors and often times, demonstrate dedication to their hospitality organizations [37, p. 332]. Therefore, since employee perceived managerial transformational leadership and employee perceived empowerment increase employee job satisfaction, it is important for the hospitality managers/supervisors to use transformational leadership and to empower their employees.

7.1 Implementation of Transformational Leadership Approaches

Gill and Mathur [37, p. 332] identified numerous organizational barriers that can make it difficult to implement TL approaches (e.g., lack of employee's understanding of the mission, goals, and objectives, communication barriers, lack of time, cultural barriers, shortage of staff, high employee turnover, and manager understanding the degree to which TL needs to be implemented). To overcome these challenges, Indian restaurant managers/supervisors need to communicate the organization's mission, goals, and objectives to CCSEs by "breaking-them-down" for each individual employee based on the service function performed (e.g., busboy, waiter/waitress, host/hostess, and service counter employee). Restaurant managers/supervisors should: i) foster upward, not just downward, communication; ii) provide regular on-floor training and coaching for every service employee; iii) practice effective listening skills; iv) demonstrate respect and concern for employees' personal feelings; and v) work to recognize and overcome communication and cultural barriers. Ultimately, this shifts the manager's role to that of a CCSE mentor, one who internalizes and demonstrates individualized consideration for employees, which is one of the components of TL [37].

In practice, although it may be difficult for some managers to increase their use of these TL behaviors and some employees may eye a change in management style with skepticism, the potential benefits far outweigh the costs, and such behaviors are able to be developed. The importance of such a leadership development process, however, must be championed and strongly supported by senior leadership.

7.2 Implementation of Empowerment Approaches

Empowerment is a bottom-up process rather than something that can be formulated as a top-down strategy. It is highly recommended that hospitality organizations implement transformational leadership before empowering employees because it will clarify the organizational mission, goals, and objectives. In addition, hospitality organizations must train employees, clarify responsibilities, and provide clear direction to the empowered employees. It is also important to ascertain employee desire to be empowered before empowering them. Restaurant managers should learn to trust employees, provide information for decision making, provide frequent feedback, and make employees feel rewarded and recognized for empowered behavior.

7.3 Limitations and Practical implications

The present study asks for responses using fixed format questions, which exclude provision of additional input. Even though techniques such as including postage paid mail, sending a cover letter, providing a deadline for returning the survey, and promising anonymity were applied in order to increase the response rate; the drop-off survey data collection method contributed to a low response rate. Even though the survey was made available to the entire population of CCSEs in the region, some of the possible participants may have been on vacation during the four-week study period.

The practical implications of this study are: (1) if employees perceive that their managers are using transformational leadership, those employees perceive their job satisfaction to be high; and (2) if employees perceive that they are being empowered, those

employees perceive their job satisfaction to be high. Since employee job dissatisfaction negatively impacts how CCSEs treat their customers, managers using transformational leadership will positively impact how CCSEs treat their customers.

7.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study clearly shows that perceived transformational leadership used by managers and employee perceived empowerment improve employee perceived job satisfaction, additional research issues and questions should be addressed. The additional relationships that should be researched include:

- The degree to which managers understand the consequences of empowerment.
- The degree to which managers understand how the job satisfaction of their employees affects the performance of their employees.
- The degree to which managers understand the desire of their employee to be empowered.
- The degree to which managers understand the consequences of transformational leadership.
- The relative importance of employee perceived managerial transformational leadership, employee perceived employee empowerment, and other factors on employee perceived employee job satisfaction.
- The relative importance of perceived job satisfaction and other factors on employee performance.
- The mediating and moderating roles of employee perceived employee empowerment on the relationship between employee perceived managerial transformational leadership and employee perceived job satisfaction.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions

AG developed the framework, carried out the final estimations and statistical analysis, and drafted the manuscript. IB collected data. AB and CS edited the final draft.

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