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THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONALITY TRAITS ON SERVICE RECOVERY PERFORMANCE IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY OF MALAYSIA

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Abstract:

Service recovery in the hotel industry is really valuable as it ensures the happiness and loyalty of consumers. In addition to intensive jobs, lengthy and unpredictable working hours and routines are the standards for hotel workers, which could give a significant effect on the job efficiency of the hotel staff. Regarding the efficiency of service recovery, a large number of studies have been published. The number of studies on personality characteristics for the success of service recovery, however, is small. This present research was carried out to provide a conceptual framework for future researchers to explore and give empirical evidence that exists between personality traits and service recovery performance among hotel workers in Malaysia based on the problems and study gaps in this industry. Five functions of personality characteristics were included in this conceptual work; extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotional stability and openness to experience on service recovery performance. In conclusion, the outcomes could lead to the relevance of service recovery performance in the hotel industry.

Keywords:

Service Recovery Performance, Personality Traits, Hotel

Introduction

The tourism industry has been one of the most powerful actors in economies worldwide in recent decades. Malaysia tourism industry contributed 14.9% to the national Gross Domestic Product in 2018 and is expected to continuously grow in 2028 at a growing rate of 3.8%. Under its classification, this significant industry has many infrastructures and business

institutions, of which the hotel industry is the most important infrastructure (Masoud & Hmeidan, 2013).

Since hotel customers demand premium service, the success of hotels depends on the reliability of their service delivery. It is often difficult to provide a quality service as it requires a high degree of commitment from the workers to the customers (Lewis & McCann, 2004) with high consumer demand often allowing the service to slip behind their standards (Cheema, Shah, Phanwar, Aftab & Zia, 2015; Norhamizan Hamir, Issham Ismail, Mohd Salehuddin Mohd Zahari & Abdullah, 2018). Moreover, owing to the heavy competition in the hotel industry from the popularity of alternative lodging houses including homestays and guest houses, hotels in Malaysia are currently suffering from operation loss. Thus, the probability of service failure would be high. Rasid (2019) mentioned that these concerns have therefore led to the closure of several hotels in Malaysia. Service recovery is a significant effort by the hotel industry to preserve customers' trust, whereas the quality of service recovery itself is also dictated by the actions of the hotel employees (Masdek, Aziz, & Awang, 2011; Masoud & Hmeidan, 2013).

Study on service recovery in the hotel industry is inadequate in developing countries because, despite several studies carried out in the developed countries, only two studies were performed in Malaysia (Masdek et al., 2011; Norhamizan Hamir et al., 2018). Moreover, several researchers have analysed organisational variables that can affect employees' service recovery but do not include personal factors like personality characteristics (Javed, Ahmad, & Zakaria, 2018). Therefore, this investigation seeks to resolve the void in the literature by exploring the role of personal attributes in the success of hotel workers in Malaysia regarding service recovery.

Literature Review

Personality typically means the feelings, perception and action patterns of an individual (Kassin, 2003). MacKinnon (1944) defined personality characteristics as regulators of people's behaviour. For the last two decades, there has been an agreement that a considerable amount of human personality can be clarified by five components of the five-factor model, which is also called the Big Five. The Big Five includes (1) extraversion (2) conscientiousness (3) agreeableness (4) emotional stability (5) openness to experience. Each personality trait is discussed below:

Extraversion

In the conceptual model, extraversion is the first personality trait factor found. An extroverted person is sociable, assertive, talkative, fun-loving and involved, meanwhile relaxed, silent and reserved people are the opposite of extroverts (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Such features produce the expertise and resources of a person that can contribute to the capacity to provide quality service. The connection is well known between extraversion and work performance.

Meta-analysis findings from several studies, for example, have demonstrated a favourable association between extraversion and work performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Chiaburu, Oh, Berry, Li, & Gardner, 2011), job performance (Chu, 2012), job involvement (Liao & Lee, 2009) and job satisfaction (Judge & Ilies, 2002). Employees who are high in extraversion are also required to contribute to their organisation in terms of service recovery by performing better. This study then suggested the hypothesis as follows:

H1: Extraversion has a positive relationship with Service Recovery Performance.

Conscientiousness

In the conceptual model, conscientiousness is the second personality trait component. A person with conscientiousness is defined as careful, coordinated, trustworthy, hard-working and accomplishment-oriented (Barrick & Mount, 1991). According to Razali, Ramlan and Hashim (2017), this element can help to achieve goals or targets in the company effectively. Many previous researchers argued that conscientiousness most positively influences employee performance. In this dimension, a bad score indicates a lazy, disorganised and unreliable person. In a way, conscientiousness can indicate a job orientation such as being able to do the job properly or please the clients (Brown, Mowen, Donovan & Licata, 2002).

Past research findings have demonstrated that conscientiousness has a beneficial correlation with work success (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Nelson, 2011) and service performance (H. Liao & Chuang, 2004). A meta-analysis performed by Barrick and Mount (1991), for example, reported that conscientiousness in all occupational classes is favourably linked to work performance. Besides, an important beneficial association between conscientiousness and efficiency of employee service had also been noticed by H. Liao & Chuang (2004). Thus, the following theory was suggested through this research:

H2: Conscientiousness has a positive correlation with Service Recovery Performance.

Agreeableness

The conceptual model also identifies agreeableness as a personality trait in explaining service recovery performance. According to Razali et al. (2017), agreeable people are easy to accept other ideas, respect in a team environment and organisational morale. Barrick & Mount, (1991) defined agreeable people as good-natured, forgiving, courteous, supportive, charitable and cooperative. People who are strong in this trait seem to be great team members and get along well with peers, clients and other stakeholders. However, people that have opposite attitude will try to argue, not cooperate and feel warm with the people surrounding (Judge & Illias, 2002).

Empirical studies showed that agreeableness predicts better coalition with others in the workplace and interpersonal trust from co-workers (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; Mount, Barrick, & Stewart, 1998). Regarding service quality, Brown et al. (2002) mentioned stronger social relations and a higher tendency to meet consumer expectations as among the implications of great agreeableness. It is predicted that workers who rank high in agreeableness will probably apply more effort to manage customer grievances and restore any service shortfall that arises between customers and the company. This study then suggested the hypothesis as follows:

H3: Agreeableness has a positive relationship with Service Recovery Performance.

Emotional Stability

The fourth personality trait element in the conceptual model is Emotional Stability. Individuals with high emotional stability are defined by Barrick & Mount (1991) to be good at handling tension by staying relaxed, concentrated and self-confident. Neuroticism is the opposite of

emotional stability, which is associated with depression, frustration, nervousness, uncertainty, concern and unpredictability.

Empirical evidence such as that obtained by Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt and Barrick (2004), Judge and Ilies (2002) as well as Rothmann and Coetzer (2003) shows that people with emotional stability are more inclined to make more effort to do their jobs, whereas other studies mentioned that these people are happy with their work (Cleare, 2013; Judge & Ilies, 2002) and aim for achievement (Barrick & Mount, 1991). More so, according to Oriarewo, Ofobruku, Agbaeze and Tor (2018), workers' emotional states influence how customer service is delivered, which influences the levels of repeat business and levels of customer satisfaction. Therefore, it is expected that individuals with high emotional stability would respond to their organisation by providing quality service to customers and preventing service failure. Thus, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

H4: Emotional Stability has a positive relationship with Service Recovery Performance.

Openness to Experience

In the conceptual model, the last personality trait described is openness to experience. According to Barrick & Mount (1991), open people are imaginative, ambitious and artistically sensitive, as opposed to being closed-minded. An imaginative person is always aware of others' feelings and sometimes willing to entertain novel ideas (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). Besides, the person with openness to experiences have a deeper emotional as they can control their happiness or unhappiness (Klang, 2012). The researchers also added that people with a high score on this trait are more inclined to have a constructive response to learning activities.

The association has been confirmed by Erdheim, Wang and Zickar (2006) hypothesising that people with a high level of openness to experience are more exploratory and more likely to try work alternatives than those with a low level of this attribute. It will also encourage individuals with this trait in becoming more effective for coping with the pressures and challenging circumstances such as satisfying the demand of consumers or restoring unhappy customers. This analysis then suggested the following hypothesis:

H5: Openness to Experience has a positive relationship with Service Recovery Performance.

Conceptual Framework

To conduct this study, personality traits served as an independent variable (IV), which comprises five major constructs: Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Emotional Stability and Openness to Experience. Meanwhile, service recovery performance was labelled as the dependent variable (DV).

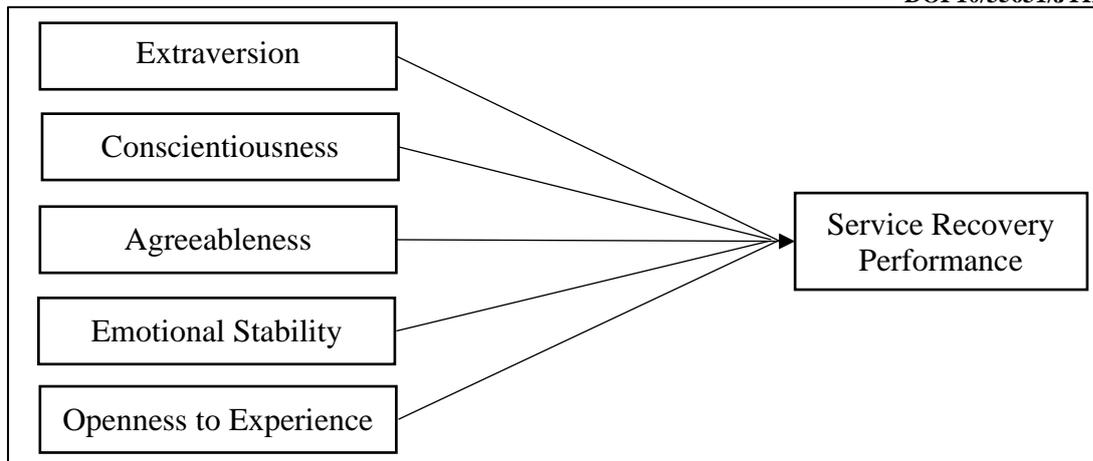


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Based on the framework above, the hypotheses will be tested as the following:

- H1: Extraversion has a positive relationship with Service Recovery Performance.
- H2: Conscientiousness has a positive correlation with Service Recovery Performance.
- H3: Agreeableness has a positive relationship with Service Recovery Performance.
- H4: Emotional Stability has a positive relationship with Service Recovery Performance.
- H5: Openness to Experience has a positive relationship with Service Recovery Performance.

Methodology

This study seeks to analyse the relationship between personality traits and frontline employees' performance in the hotel industry. A correlation study will be undertaken to test the overall variable of personality traits towards service performance. The variables proposed in this conceptual study will be used as the predictors for the dependent variable. The G*Power software version 3 was used to verify that the sample size is sufficient. The acceptable sample size was determined using five predictors, the medium effect size convention of 0.15 and a significance threshold of 0.05. This research produced a sample size of 74 at a statistical power of 0.95. Convenience sampling is a type of non-random sampling in which members of the target population are selected for the study (Rashid, Sah, Ariffin, Ghani & Yunus, 2016). It is expected that dual-language (English and Malay) questionnaires are distributed to all respondents. The future correlation results of this study will be used to answer the research questions. Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS) and Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Model PLS-SEM will be used for data coding, processing and analysing. The source of instruments and the reliability of the constructs are presented in Table 1 as below:

Table 1: Source of Instruments

Variables	Source
Service Recovery Performance	(Boshoff & Allen, 2000)
Personality Traits	(Mukherjee, Malhotra, Sawyerr, Srinivas, & Wang, 2009)
Extraversion	
Conscientiousness	
Agreeableness	
Emotional Stability	
Openness to Experience	

Conclusion and Future Research

This literature review study has combined research central to service recovery performance. Service recovery performance is a relatively emerging research field with the existing research offering significant initial insights into personal factors (personality traits) that are linked to service recovery performance. However, the findings of this study led to the author suggesting a need for more investigation due to the scarce existing knowledge on the topic and secondly, a large portion of investigations that share similar factors including organisational factors. To further enhance the knowledge on the service recovery performance, future researchers need to study the personal factors on service recovery performance identified in this study. This study might be an effort to attract marketing, business and management scholars to contribute to the emerging research topic and offers a solid foundation to conduct further research on service recovery performance.

A limitation of this paper is that the conceptual framework proposed does not address the issues of cultural differences. In addition, at the conceptual level, this study failed to address the issues of individual differences, nor industry differences. Studying these differences will require a long-term comprehensive study.

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