

Review paper

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SERVICE ORIENTATION OF THE EMPLOYEES IN SERBIA'S TOURISM AGENCIES

Milos Marjanovic*

Faculty of Sciences, University of Novi Sad, Novi Sad, The Republic of Serbia

In a time of fierce competition in the tourist services market, it is very important to pay attention to businesses' service orientation towards end users. Service orientation can be considered as a competitive advantage on the demanding tourism market. In this study, the relationship between service orientation, job satisfaction and empowerment among the employees of Serbian travel agencies is examined. A survey was conducted through an online questionnaire. The survey included a total of 94 respondents. The study is aimed at investigating the connection between employee service orientation, job satisfaction and empowerment. The paper also investigates whether there are significant differences between the measured variables among the employees with and without tourism education. The results showed that job satisfaction had a significant impact on service orientation. The impact of empowerment on service orientation proved to be a less significant statistical variable. According to the research study, job satisfaction occurs as a mediator between empowerment and service orientation. Also, there is no statistically significant relationship between the measured variables and tourism-related education.

Keywords: service orientation, job satisfaction, empowerment, travel agencies, tourism education, prosocial service behavior

JEL Classification: L83

INTRODUCTION

The human potential is companies' core strength in the business world, where there is great competitiveness. Tourism employees play a significant role when the provision of quality services and problem solving are concerned, especially so when the customer is dissatisfied. Given the fact that employees are in direct contact with clients, their behavior directly affects

clients' decision-making process, as well as clients' perception of the quality of the services provided (Malhotra & Mukherjee, 2004). Service orientation is a very important element of an organization responsible for the creation of the conditions that encourage employees to work and, in turn, provide high-quality services. Employee service orientation can be a major factor of competitiveness on the market. A service-orientated employee is an important actor who makes a difference between competitors. Employees play the major role when speaking about the provision of quality services and problem solving. They are in direct contact with clients, constantly interacting with

* Correspondence to: M. Marjanovic, Faculty of sciences, University of Novi Sad, Trg Dositeja Obradovića 3, 21102 Novi Sad, the Republic of Serbia;
e-mail: milos.marjanovic@mail.com

them. Their behavior influences clients' perceptions of the quality of the services provided, as well as clients' decision-making regarding their potential new visit to the same organization or purchase of the same product (Malhotra & Mukherjee, 2004). R. Deshpandé, J. U. Farley and Jr. F. Webster (1993) point out the fact that service-oriented employees put their customers in the first place, and then all other stakeholders (managers, owners) come, in order to develop profitable businesses and ensure long-term success. Many researchers have had a focus on service orientation. Many of them have come to the conclusion that there is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty, and between customer satisfaction and their aspirations to recommending suppliers to other customers as well (Hartline & Jones, 1996). Creating a loyal customer is one of the main goals of travel agencies. A loyal customer stems from the service orientation of the service employee. Therefore, it is very important that the company management should constantly be working on the identification of the conditions that affect each individual in order to be service-oriented and contribute to the positive business of the company (Lee, Nam, Park & Lee, 2006). Service orientation is one of the key factors when creating a superior value for the customer. Many research studies have shown that customer satisfaction, loyalty, an increase in the profit and the growth of the organization are directly the result of the company's service orientation. On the other hand, a lack of initiative to establish a service orientation policy, and a lack of the measurement and management of employee service orientation, may reduce long-term organizational performance (Lytle, Hom & Mokwa, 1998).

Service orientation can be defined as an employees' additional effort directed towards the organization itself or towards its customers (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997). A lot of research has addressed the precondition for service orientation. Work satisfaction (Netemeyer, Boles, McKee & McMurrian, 1997), empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995; Lytle *et al.*, 1998), training (Lux, Jex & Hansen, 1996), as well as the reward system (Lytle *et al.*, 1998) have a great influence on employee service orientation.

The subject matter of the research study carried out in this paper is the level of job satisfaction, service

orientation and empowerment in Serbian travel agencies. The aim of this study is to formulate and empirically test an integrated model of interrelationships and impacts between service orientation, job satisfaction, and empowerment. The author made several hypotheses on this basis that will be tested. A survey questionnaire, distributed online, was used to collect the data. The target group is the employees of Serbian travel agencies, regardless of their position in the company. The paper consists of several sections. The topic, subject matter and objectives of the research study are presented in the Introduction. After that, a review of other authors' research studies on service orientation, job satisfaction, empowerment and education is given through a review of the consulted literature, which is followed by the section in which the used methods and the discussion of the obtained results are outlined. The Conclusion provides considerations about the topic of this paper.

SERVICE ORIENTATION

The concept of Service Orientation (SO) can be viewed at two levels. The first level is the organizational level, and the second is the individual level. The organizational level of orientation is directed towards what the management of the organization consider to be significant when delivering a high quality. The individual level of orientation refers to the service orientation of the employee him-/herself, which, in his/her opinion, is important for the delivery of high-quality services (Saura, Contrí, Taulet & Velázquez, 2005). An approach like this is discussed in this paper. One of the most important factors that influence the quality of the service provided in the service industry is the service orientation of employees (Petrović & Marković, 2012). Employee service orientation plays the key role in the perception of the quality of a service and the level of customer satisfaction (Sergeant & Frenkel, 2000). Working in tourism, or working in travel agencies, requires a high level of interaction with consumers. Therefore, understanding the concept of service orientation should play an important role in service businesses. In the literature, beside employee service orientation, there is also the term "service orientation of the

organization", which can be defined as the overall climate of the organization or as the perceptions, beliefs and opinions of all of its employees (Lytle *et al.*, 1998).

There is no unique definition of service orientation. Numerous theorists have given their definitions of service orientation. Some authors define it as employees' desire to meet their clients' needs (Brown, Mowen, Donava & Licata, 2002), or employees' desire to serve their clients in a useful, cooperative and kind manner. Many studies have confirmed the fact that the availability and courtesy of staff are more important to guests than the organization's expertise and technique (Dienhart, Gregoire, Downey & Knight, 1992). Service orientation can be viewed as a business resource (Zablah, Franke, Brown & Bartholomew, 2012). Service-oriented employees will not only provide the service within the scope of their competences, but they will also endeavor to provide an additional quality (e.g. inform the client about additional content at the destination, propose an arrangement in accordance with the price/quality ratio, bring some personal or other experiences from the destination, indicate the disadvantages of the arrangement). This behavior will certainly have a positive impact on the client, and the client will feel that he/she has received an "extra" service. Clients will feel closeness with the employee and the agency, which will affect his/her perception of the quality of the service (Lee, Park & Park, 1997). Perceived service orientation of customer contact service employees in the firms: The structural relationship between organizational values and employees's attitudes. Many research studies indicate that kindness, accessibility and open communication with employees are more important to the client than their competences and work organization (Čerović, Raičević, Todosijević and Tomka, 2002).

JOB SATISFACTION

A large number of theorists believe that Job Satisfaction (JS) can strongly affect the overall business of a company. Job satisfaction is a strong indicator of the good business performance and well-being of the organization. This further implies that the employees

who are satisfied rarely leave the collective. Job satisfaction is one of the most researched phenomena in the field of management. A large number of authors have done research in the elements that influence job satisfaction. A high level of job satisfaction has proven to lead to increased performance and commitment to work, whereas a low level of job satisfaction may cause a decrease in motivation (Locke, 1976; Brown & Peterson, 1993). There are numerous definitions of job satisfaction, most often mentioned by E. A. Locke (1976), who says that job satisfaction is a positive emotional reaction of an employee, which comes from his/her work responsibilities or experience. Job satisfaction can be defined as an employee's positive or negative feelings about their job (Odom, Boxx & Dunn, 1990). M. Hartline and O. Ferrell (1996) say that job satisfaction in an organization is very important, because it affects the quality of the provided service.

The manager's main task is to constantly maintain and increase job satisfaction of his/her employees in order to achieve positive business results, on the one hand, and to constantly have satisfied clients, on the other (Rogers, Clow & Kash, 1994). Job satisfaction has an impact on employee loyalty (Williams & Hazer, 1986) and service orientation (Hoffman & Ingram, 1992). Some authors have shown that job satisfaction has a positive effect on job performance (Birnbaum & Sommers, 1993). The more satisfied the worker is, the more he/she will strive for their performance.

Therefore, the first hypothesis states:

H1: Job satisfaction has a positive impact on service orientation.

EMPOWERMENT

Organizational support, i.e. Empowerment (EM), can be defined as the degree of the support and understanding a person receives from his/her superior. The focus is on the leader who gives guidance to his/her employees, treats them with respect, and considers their contribution to the organization's operations worthwhile (Netemeyer, Boles, McKee & McMurrian, 1997). Some authors define empowerment as allowing employees to

make their own decisions in the day-to-day service of clients. Empowerment is very important for the provision of the services that are heterogeneous and need to be tailored to customers' requirements. In this case, the employee has a complete freedom to tailor the service to clients' needs (Jha & Nair, 2008). R. Brymer (1991) believes that empowerment implies a manager's willingness to give more freedom to his/her employees in the workplace. A good leader supports employees by facilitating their path to their goals, thereby increasing their job satisfaction, all with the aim of increasing productivity and achieving the goals of the company (Brown & Peterson, 1993). Some authors have put the leader at the forefront of organizational support (Webster, 1988). Since tourism is a service activity, and employees are often in contact with clients, empowerment is necessary, because employees need to solve all problems in order to satisfy the customer (Hartline & Ferrel, 1996). B. Shimko (1994) states that empowerment can be manifested as the freedom of employees to bypass standard work procedures, all with the aim of meeting clients' needs.

Organizational support has multiple effects. Empowerment increases an employee's self-esteem and increases his/her loyalty to the organization (Lee, Park & Park, 1997), as well as his/her job satisfaction (Spreitzer, Kizilos & Nason, 1997). In addition to the fact that organizational support affects job satisfaction and employee loyalty, it also affects employees' work performance (Lee *et al*, 2006).

Therefore, the additional hypotheses are:

- H2: The organizational support has a positive effect on job satisfaction.
- H3: The organizational support has a direct impact on service orientation.

EDUCATION

Qualified human resources are of great importance for the productivity of a company. This is especially significant insofar as their education is related to the area of the business conducted by the company. P. Barron (2008) states that education in the service

sector, and above all in tourism, is one of the factors that will play a crucial role in the future when the quality of the service provided is concerned. It is very difficult to find and retain the highly-skilled workers in the service industry who will be able to provide high-quality services to the current and future clients. Therefore, education plays a very important role in the future development of this service sector. V. Stefanović and Ž. Gligorijević (2010) state that education in tourism is very important, because there is no continuous economic prosperity without continuous education. Employee education may have quite a big impact on employee satisfaction. A. Lillo, A. Ramon and M. Sevilla (2007) state that the amount of the knowledge and skills that each individual possesses are the major elements of human capital. The same authors state that an individual's competences depend on the level of investment in formal education and the strengthening of practical knowledge through work experience.

The paper will examine whether there are statistically significant differences in the job satisfaction degree and the attitudes towards organizational support and service orientation between the employees who have tourism education and those who do not. In this context, the hypothesis H4 can be formulated as follows:

- H4: There is a difference in the job satisfaction degree and the attitudes towards empowerment and service orientation between the employees who have tourism education and those who do not.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this research study were collected from the employed in Serbian travel agencies. The database of the travel agency *Euroturs* was used for the submission of this questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed by means of software for communication with partners. The questionnaire was forwarded to tour operators and subagents. The questionnaire was sent to a total of 380 e-mail addresses, and a total of 94 respondents participated in the survey.

Quantitative measurement was performed in order to cover the assertions related to job satisfaction, employee service orientation, and empowerment through a structural questionnaire. A Likert scale consisting of the five agreement levels was used for this questionnaire, in which 1 means "Disagree at all", 2 means "Disagree", 3 means "No opinion" 4 means "Agree", and 5 means "Strongly agree".

The variables used to measure job satisfaction were adapted from the research done by W. G. Kim *et al* (2005). The questionnaire from the research done by R. Dienhart *et al* (1992) and W. G. Kim, J. K. Leonga and Y. K. Lee (2005) was adapted in order to measure service orientation. Empowerment was measured by the questionnaire constructed by G. Spreitzer (1995) and adapted from his research study. An analysis of the papers that addressed these variables preceded the creation of this questionnaire.

The questionnaire consists of four parts. The first part covers the variables related to the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents (i.e. the gender, age, the level of education, etc.). Job satisfaction was measured in the second part, whereas in the third part, the questions were about service orientation. In the fourth part, organizational support was measured.

The data analysis was performed by using the SPSS 25.0 statistical software. Descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and an independent T-test were used for the analysis. Descriptive statistics were applied when presenting the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents. Regression analysis was applied so as to predict the impact of the independent variables of job satisfaction and organizational support on service orientation. The T-test for the two independent samples measured a potential difference between the gender and tourism-related education. The Cronbach's alpha test was used to test the reliability (internal consistency) of each measuring instrument in the questionnaire, i.e. the group of the questions used to evaluate the same dimension (in this case, JS, SO, EM).

RESULTS

Analyzing the data, it was found that a much higher percentage of participation accounted for women

(80.85%) and less than one-fifth of the respondents were men (only 19.15%). About one-third of the respondents were in their thirties, while 30.83% of the respondents were under 31 years of age. Regarding the respondents' level of education, a total of 19.15% of them were with a high-school diploma, 58.51% had higher education, and 22.34% had a master's degree. A total of 65.96% of the respondents had tourism-related education. Among the survey participants, 35.11% of them had an experience in tourism lasting up to 5 years, and 21.27% of the respondents had over 20 years of experience in tourism (Table 1).

Table 1 The respondents' sociodemographic characteristics

Variables	Number	Percent %
Gender		
Male	18	19.15
Female	76	80.85
Age		
20 and under 20	3	3.18
from 21 to 30	26	27.65
from 31 to 40	31	32.97
from 41 to 50	17	18.10
51 and over	17	18.10
Education level		
High school	18	19.15
College of applied studies	55	58.51
Master's	21	22.34
Education related to tourism		
Yes	62	65.96
No	32	34.04
Years of work experience		
from 1 to 5	33	35.11
from 6 to 10	18	19.15
from 11 to 20	23	24.47
20 and more	20	21.27

Source: Author

Table 2 shows the mean, the standard deviation, and the correlation coefficient for all the three measured variables. It can be seen that service orientation and job satisfaction have a stronger degree of linear dependence ($r = 0.618$) than the moderate degree of linear dependence between job satisfaction and organizational support ($r = 0.498$), and service orientation and organizational support ($r = 0.437$).

The obtained results show a high level of statistical significance, which means that a high level of empowerment is accompanied by a high level of job satisfaction. A simple linear regression tests the impact of empowerment on job satisfaction (Table 3). The results show that there is a statistically significant influence ($sig = 0.000$) and that the influence is as follows:

$$JS = 1.712 + 0.567 * EM$$

This prediction model explains 20.8% ($R^2 = 0.208$) of the variance of job satisfaction.

The results indicate that job satisfaction has a significant impact on service orientation and that the introduction of this variable in the regression model renders that the influence of empowerment is insignificant. This means that job satisfaction is a mediator between service orientation and empowerment.

Simple linear regression tests the impact of empowerment on service orientation. The results show that there is a statistically significant influence ($sig = 0.000$) and that the influence is as follows:

$$SO = 2.547 + 0.431 * EM$$

Table 2 Cronbach’s alphas, the mean, the standard deviation and the correlation coefficient

Variable	Cronbach’s alpha	Questions	Mean	St. dev.	Correlation coefficient		
Job satisfaction	.906	7	3.87	.74117	Job satisfaction	Service orientation	Empowerment
Service orientation	.696	3	4.19	.65529	.618**		
Empowerment	.711	6	3.81	.59704	.498**	.437**	

Note: ** The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Source: Author

Table 3 The impact of empowerment, job satisfaction and service orientation

Model	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	Significance	R ²	sig. R ² change
	B	Std. error	Beta				
1 (constant)	2.547	.416		6.129	.000	.154	0.000
EM	.431	.108	.393	4.007	.000		
2 (constant)	1.741	.386		4.511	.000	.379	0.000
EM	.164	.104	.150	1.575	.119		
JS	.471	.084	.533	5.611	.000		

a. The dependent variable SO

Source: Author

This prediction model explains 15.4% ($R^2 = 0.154$) of the service orientation variance.

Multiple linear regression tests the impact of empowerment and job satisfaction on service orientation. The results show that there is a statistically significant influence ($\text{sig} = 0.000$) and that the influence is as follows:

$$SO = 1.741 + 0.164 * EM + 0.471 * JS$$

This prediction model explains 37.9% ($R^2 = 0.379$) of the service orientation variance. Compared to the first model, the second introduces a significant improvement ($\text{sig. } R^2 \text{ change} = 0.000$). In the second model, job satisfaction is a predictor with statistically significant predictive power. Unlike in the first model, empowerment is no longer a predictor with statistically significant predictive power in the second model. This indicates the correlation between the two predictors, as was confirmed earlier.

In Table 4, it can be seen that the T-test of the independent samples compares the results of service orientation, job satisfaction and empowerment for the employees with tourism education and those with a different educational background. The results show that there is no significant statistical difference

between the groups with tourism education ($M = 3.81$, $M1 = 4.14$, $M2 = 3.81$), and those without it ($M = 3.99$, $M1 = 4.27$, $M2 = 3.82$).

In Table 5, the T-test of the independent variables shows how the measured variables manifest in the male and female populations. The obtained results show that there is no statistically significant difference between the male and female respondents.

DISCUSSION

This study is aimed at formulating and empirically testing an integrated model of interrelationships and impacts between service orientation, job satisfaction, and empowerment. This was achieved through an analysis of the adequate literature and statistical data processing. The results of the analysis show that job satisfaction has a positive effect on service orientation, thus confirming the hypothesis H1. This confirms the author's assertion that there is a positive relationship between job satisfaction and employee service orientation. K. Hoffman and T. Ingram (1992) describe the sense of satisfaction in the workplace as a result of kindness, sensitivity, concern for the needs of others, understanding, and many other character

Table 4 The comparison of the measured variables by tourism education

Tourism education	Job satisfaction		Service orientation		Empowerment	
	Mean (M)	p	Mean (M1)	p	Mean (M2)	p
YES	3.81	.284	4.14	.364	3.81	.897
NO	3.99		4.27		3.82	

The T-test is significant at the * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** and $p < 0.001$.

Source: Author

Table 5 The comparison of the measured variables by the gender

Gender	Job satisfaction		Service orientation		Empowerment	
	Mean (M)	p	Mean (M1)	p	Mean (M2)	p
Male	4.01	.397	4.31	.423	3.96	.263
Female	3.84		4.16		3.78	

The T-test is significant at * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** and $p < 0.001$.

Source: Author

traits that are believed to be inherent in the service-oriented staff. Job satisfaction also affects employees' maximum respect for customers, especially so in the service sector. Accordingly, researchers point out the fact that job satisfaction has a positive impact on service orientation. A high level of job satisfaction is accompanied by a high level of service orientation. Therefore, the main task of the company manager is to achieve and maintain a high level of job satisfaction in his/her collective, which further leads to positive economic results, which is the basic goal of every company's existence.

Further results show that empowerment, i.e. support from superiors, positively influences job satisfaction, which is in line with the study by G. Spreitzer *et al* (1997). This confirms the author's assertion in the hypothesis H2. Organizational support leads to an increase in employees' self-esteem, which further affects their job satisfaction. A satisfied employee will maximize his/her ability to reach or exceed customer requirements in the service delivery process. Empowerment can influence the creativity and imagination of tourism workers when creating tourist products, based on direct sales experience. When service orientation is inserted into the research model, it is possible to conclude that the impact of organizational support is not significant for employee service orientation, thus rejecting assertion in the hypothesis H3, which says that empowerment has a direct impact on service orientation. Here, the role of the mediator is assigned to job satisfaction, which leads to the conclusion that organizational support does not have a direct impact on service orientation.

Given the fact that ever-increasing attention is being paid to worker education today, the link between employees with tourism education and those without it was examined. The research shows that there are no statistically significant differences between employees with tourism-related education and those whose education is not tourism-related; those differences are random instead. This rejects the author's assertion expressed in the hypothesis H4 that there is a difference in the measured parameters among the respondents with tourism education and those without it. Certainly, continuous education

is needed, because the market in which travel agencies operate is heterogeneous, services are not standardized and demand constantly changes. Trained managers can anticipate changes in the market and adapt business policies to contemporary trends. In the last two decades, an ever-greater number of tourism schools have intensively been opened in Serbia, so that educated staff will be available to companies, which further implies an easier achievement of a business policy. The attitudes of the male and female populations towards service orientation, job satisfaction and empowerment were also compared. The result obtained indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship and that the differences are of random nature. It is a fact that a significantly larger number of women work in the tourism industry, but the number of male workers is increasing, given the fact that this sector is becoming increasingly demanding.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, an attempt was made to expand the knowledge of employee service orientation, organizational support and job satisfaction in Serbian travel agencies. The mutual influence of these three variables was tested. The hypotheses set by the author were either confirmed or rejected with the help of statistical data processing. The results show that job satisfaction has a significant impact on service orientation. If an employee is not fully satisfied with his/her job, he/she is unable to provide a high-quality service. On the other hand, when empowerment is introduced into the model, it can be concluded that it indirectly affects employee service orientation. The impact of organizational support on service orientation is felt through job satisfaction. This means that job satisfaction is the mediator between organizational support and service orientation. This study also highlights the importance of continuous employee education. Tourism is a service industry in which demand rapidly changes and trends need to be constantly monitored so as to keep up with the competition.

The results of this research study may be useful for managers in travel agencies because, based on employees' behavior and attitudes, they can improve service standards. As the support of superiors affects job satisfaction, the role of managers would be to strive to create a comfortable working atmosphere in the organization and have an open relationship with their employees. An effective system for measuring the performance of a company's employees provides an opportunity for executives to align performance with the company's strategy. Every company is a heterogeneous system requiring a unique model for creating a work environment in which service orientation will be in the forefront. It is necessary to find a way to motivate individuals to provide the highest-quality services (Domanovic, 2013). Precisely, this is the mission of every service-oriented company.

By analyzing all of the foregoing, we can see that this paper has certain limitations that may serve as an idea for some future research. The survey was conducted at Serbian travel agencies. The survey included tour-operator travel agencies and travel agencies brokers for sale arrangements (subagents). Future research could address a specific type of agency, i.e. research could be conducted so as to only cover tour operators or subagents, since there are significant differences between the two types of travel agencies. The results of the tested categories for both types of travel agencies could also be compared. Another limitation is that all employees of the given agencies participated in the survey, regardless of their position in the company (sales, commercial, guides). Future research could be conducted by taking into consideration the job positions that would identify significant differences between the positions that are in constant contact with customers (the sales service, travel guides and escorts) and the positions that are not often in contact with customers (product creation services). Another limitation lies in the fact that the research study was conducted at agencies in the territory of Serbia. Future research could address the testing of the same variables in the neighboring countries or on tourism-leading markets, after which the findings of such research would be compared. In this paper, only three categories were tested (service orientation, job satisfaction and organizational

support). Future research could be based on how the reward system affects job satisfaction and loyalty to the company, or how job satisfaction reflects in the provision of "extra" customer service, or yet how internal communication affects service orientation.

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Milos Marjanovic is a PhD student at the Faculty of Sciences and Mathematics, University of Novi Sad, in the field of geoscience (tourism). His area of interest is his motivation in tourism, geotourism, regional geography.