

# Service Practices and Service Quality

## Mediating Effect of Organizational Citizenship Behavior

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### Abstract

The effect of service quality in the competitiveness of service firms cannot be denied. This fact must motivate the management to explore ways that can improve service quality. One of the ways to achieve such a goal is through the design and implementation of service-oriented organizational practices. However, research in services marketing has hardly examined the influence of these practices on organizational service quality. To fill this gap, this paper examines the relationship between a consistent configuration of organizational practices aimed at delivering excellent service (OSP) and perceived service quality (PSQ) in hotels.

In addition, this work examines the mediating effect of the so-called construct service-oriented Organizational Citizenship Behavior (service-oriented OCB) on the relationship OSP-PSQ. In line with recent research, we treated service-oriented OCB as an organizational level variable that refers to what is considered the standard mode of behavior in an organization. The mediating effect of service-oriented OCB is important since, if it exists, managers could positively influence the perceived service quality by increasing service-oriented OCB in their firms.

This study seeks to achieve three objectives: (1) verify if service-oriented organizational practices influence the perceived service quality; (2) to examine the potential mediating effect of service-oriented OCB on the relationship between OSP and organizational performance, defined in terms of service quality, and (3) to examine a contextual variable, chain affiliation, as a moderator of the relationships between the considered constructs. These relationships have received little attention in the hospitality industry.

### Introduction

In the current competitive context, service companies must consider the provision of a quality service as a critical outcome to obtain customer satisfaction and loyalty, and, thus, growth and profitability (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Heskett *et al.*, 1997; Schneider & Bowen, 1993). In their study of Spanish hotels, Claver *et al.* (2006:42) state: “When comparing the differences in performance between these two groups of hotels [average commitment with quality and high commitment with quality], results show that those with a higher commitment with quality management are the ones that obtain significantly higher levels of economic performance, interest groups’ satisfaction (customers and employees) and gross profit per room and day”. According to Carrillat *et al.* (2009:96), “service quality plays a pivotal role in helping firms build relationships

with customers because it has a large impact on customer satisfaction, attitudinal loyalty, and purchase intentions”; furthermore, the results of their meta-analysis show that service quality has both a direct and an indirect effect on attitudinal loyalty and purchase intentions. Indeed, to prove their commitment with quality, managers should develop process approaches, based on the implementation of service oriented organizational practices as a means to achieve service excellence (Testa & Sipe, 2006).

Moreover, in the service encounter, employees are performers rather than workers, and their behavioral performance is an important part of service quality that customers perceive. Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) refers to employee voluntary behavior (Yoon & Suh, 2003:598). This voluntary behavior, which customers can observe during physical and social interactions with employees, may affect the evaluation of the service provided.

In this context, the main aims of this research are three. First, to examine how several organizational practices influence perceived service quality. To do so, this study analyses the effect of the dimensions of a construct named “organizational service system” (OSS) on perceived service quality (PSQ). Second, to examine the mediating role of customer-contact employees’ OCB on the relationships between SSO and PSQ. Third, as the hotel sector has suffered, in recent history, a strong pressure towards concentration, to examine the moderating role of affiliation to chain in the relationships between the considered constructs. These relationships have received little attention in the hotel sector.

To achieve these objectives, we first carry out a literature review that aims to appropriately support the posed hypotheses. Next we present the empirical analysis carried out on data collected from managers and employees from hotels. This methodology helps us avoid “common method variance bias”; in line with Karatepe *et al.* (2006: 558), “future empirical studies should employ multiple sources to avoid this problem [common method variance bias]”. Subsequently, we display and comment our results.

## **Service quality**

Service quality refers to a global assessment regarding the service’s superiority (Parasuraman, 1987; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). The literature on service quality is extensive (Camisón, 1996; Carrillat *et al.*, 2009; Zeithaml, 2000). However, as Serrano *et al.* (2007:252) indicate: “regardless of the huge role services have on most of today’s economies, research on quality management on this sector is not as developed as in the industry”. Recently, there has been an increased interest in analyzing quality in specific service sectors (see, among others, Akbaba2006; Alén & Fraiz, 2006).

Among the topics that have received attention in the service quality literature those related to the measurement and identification of the construct dimensions have stood out. Several empirical studies have employed the SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988), whereas others have compared it with other very widespread measurement models, such as: SERVPERF, modified SERVQUAL, revised SERVQUAL, evaluated performance and normalized quality (Brady & Cronin, 2001).

Another topic that has received the researchers’ attention has been the analysis of the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction (Alén & Fraiz, 2006), and the effect of these constructs on customer loyalty. Currently, there seem to be consensus on: (a) service quality leads to customer satisfaction (Dabholkar *et al.*, 2000), as the first variable is a cognitive state, whereas the second one is an affective state; (b) service quality constitutes a general impression regarding the superiority/inferiority of

the organization and its services, whereas satisfaction refers to the outcome of specific transactions and the global service (Bitner & Hubert, 1994); and (c) attitudinal loyalty is formed from the accumulated satisfaction that results from multiple positive service experiences (Olsen, 2007). Several empirical results (Carrillat *et al.*, 2009; Gallarza & Gil, 2006) support the existence of the chain quality-satisfaction-loyalty.

Finally, a third line of research analyzes the problems found in the implementation of quality management programs. Studies about the application of TQM and human resources practices (Tsaur & Lin, 2004; Wilkins *et al.*, 2007), as well as the application of the EFQM model (Camisón, 1996), fall into this group.

### **Organizational service system and service quality**

The delivery of service quality requires an organized and system-wide effort. Organizational service orientation is defined as the set of organizational activities designed to create and deliver an excellent service (Lytle *et al.*, 1998; Schneider *et al.*, 1992). An organization's service orientation translates into a set of relatively long-lasting organizational practices; these activities impact on the attitudes and behavior of the employees. In their study of organizational service orientation, Lytle *et al.* (1998) identified ten practices in this construct, grouped into four basic dimensions, one of which is a service system designed to ensure quality customer service. Organizational service system includes (Lytle *et al.*, 1998): (1) service failure prevention and recovery practices, (2) service standards communication practices, and (3) service technology adaptation practices.

#### **Service failure prevention and recovery**

Preventing service failure and recovering from it are key determinants of service quality (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1994). No investigation, as far as these authors know, has directly analyzed the relationship between service failure prevention and recovery and service quality; however, the relationship can be examined indirectly. Boshoff and Allen (2000) find that effective service recovery affects the job satisfaction of the contact personnel. Furthermore, if the contact personnel are committed to the firm's aim of recovering the service they will be more likely to develop service delivery behavior. Consequently, the hypothesis can be enunciated as follows:

*H1: The greater the service failure recovery and prevention, the better the perceived service quality.*

#### **Service standards communication**

Briggs *et al.* (2007), in their study of Scottish hotels, show that a lot of customers are still seeking satisfaction, not excellence, on the most basic service standards, such as accuracy of information, cleanliness, timeliness, cost, quality of product and attitude of the staff. All managers, regardless of the hotel category, "saw standards as the key determinant of service quality" (p. 1011). Managers will achieve improved employees' attitudes and behaviors through effective communication of quality standards.

As it happened with the previous dimension, no study has been identified that empirically analyzed the direct relationship between service standards communication and PSQ. Indirectly, in the study by Hinkin and Tracey (1994), employees were satisfied with their leaders because they clarified their mission and their role in the firm. Mackenzie *et al.* (2001) indicate that transformational leaders significantly influence the OCB of contact personnel. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H2: The greater the effort made to communicate service standards, the better the perceived service quality.*

### **Service technology**

Technology is profoundly changing how services are delivered, and it is enabling both customers and employees to get and provide better, more efficient, customized services. The utilization of new technology is critical to creating a service system that delivers an outstanding service quality (Heskett *et al.*, 1997; Meuter *et al.*, 2000). Many customer expectations can only hope to be met with the assistance of sophisticated technologies. Technology, once a supporting element, has come to play a key role in quality. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H3: The greater the investment made in service technology, the better the perceived service quality.*

### **Mediating effect of service-oriented OCB on OSS-PSQ relationship**

Employees' behaviors have been differentiated conceptually between in-role - task-dependent behavior-, and extra-role -individual behavior that goes beyond the standard normally expected by employers (Organ 1988). Service quality depends heavily on how contact employees work with customers, co-workers, and their organization. For example, voluntary suggestions from a customer-contact employee as a boundary spanner might improve service quality (Yoon & Suh, 2003).

For customer-contact employee OCB, Bettencourt *et al.* (2001) use the term "service-oriented OCB". This construct has three behavior dimensions: loyalty, service delivery, and participation. Employee organizational loyalty indicates promotion of the firm to third parties (e.g. an employee may speak favorably about the firm to others both inside and outside the organization), protection and defense against external threats and commitment to the firm even in adverse circumstances. Employee organizational service delivery include: carrying out tasks conscientiously, responsibility, exhibiting respect for organizational rules (e.g. punctuality), showing a positive attitude, using company resources responsibly and trying to keep promises made to customers. A quality service will depend on the responsibility, competence and attitude of contact employees, and their obedience to the rules and instructions of the managers (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997). Finally, employee organizational participation reflects an interest in organizational issues (e.g. attending meetings), providing information for customer's needs and making suggestions to improve service.

Employees' perceptions of how they are treated by the organization affect their behavior. In a fast food restaurant franchise, Bienstock *et al.* (2003) demonstrate that there are specific actions that a service organization can take to motivate a particular behavior on the part of employees, enhancing service delivery according to organizational standards, and leading to more favorable customer perceptions of service quality. Hence, the hypothesis can be enunciated as follows:

*H4: Customer-contact employees' OCB mediates the OSS dimensions-PSQ relationships.*

## **Moderating effect of chain affiliation on the service-oriented OCB-PSQ relationship**

The moderating effect of chain affiliation on the relationships between the considered constructs can be justified theoretically on the basis of the theory of resources and capacities. It can be argued that hotels affiliated to chains will have more resources and capacities available than independent hotels; chain-managed hotels also practice more sophisticated management techniques. The greater competitive capacity of hotels affiliated to chains is perhaps one of the reasons explaining their increased numbers in recent years. Sigala *et al.* (2005) find that chain-owned hotels significantly outperform independently owned hotels in terms of combined productivity. For these reasons, we expect corporate affiliation to exert a positive influence on the relationships between the considered constructs:

*H5: Hotels affiliated to chain have stronger (a) SSO dimensions-SPQ, (b) SSO dimensions-OCB, and (c) OCB-PSQ relationships than independent hotels.*

### **Empirical study**

Hotels are a good setting to test the model. According to Carrillat *et al.* (2009:103), “as the customization and added value of the service increases, its quality becomes more important in terms of customer satisfaction and purchase intention”. The population of interest consisted of 255 hotels located in our community. The researchers interviewed managers and customer-contact employees (receptionists). We received a total of 168 matched cases; of these, 19 were unusable because of unacceptable levels of missing data, which left 149 cases for analysis. This number gives a rate of 58 percent. Regarding those hotels that did not respond, 33 were closed for the season, and 54 were unwilling to cooperate.

We handed out a questionnaire to both managers and customer-contact employees. Since the hotel receptionist is the person who usually has the first and often the only contact with the customer, the hotels’ receptionists were approached. The hotel manager answered questions regarding the employee’s OCB, whereas the customer-contact employee responded to questions regarding the OSS dimensions and PSQ. Frontline employees should make the most congruent assessments of customer service quality given their physical proximity to customers (Young *et al.*, 2009). Dyadic responses – managers and receptionists– ensure that “common variance error” is eliminated.

### **Measures**

Given their character of latent variables, OSS, OCB, and PSQ were measured through multi-item Likert-type scales of seven points, one meaning “strongly disagree” and seven meaning “strongly agree”. All measures used were drawn from prior studies in the related literatures.

*OSS dimensions.* They were measured using the items corresponding to the SERV\*OR scale, developed by Lytle *et al.* (1998). The service failure prevention and recovery, service standards communication and service technology scales had 4, 4, and 2 items, respectively. *Organizational citizenship behavior.* OCB was measured using the scale proposed by Bettencourt *et al.* (2001), of 15 items, which incorporates the contributions of Van Dyne *et al.* (1994). To value OCB, most studies relied on evaluations made by managers (Mackenzie *et al.* 1993). *Perceived service quality.* PSQ

was measured using a 7-items scale adapted from Bitner and Hubert (1994). *Chain affiliation*. This construct was measured through a dichotomous variable: independent hotels versus chain-affiliated hotels.

### **Data analysis**

In order to ensure correct usage of the scales, we carried out a two-stage process: first, an individual analysis of the constructs was carried out; and second, a joint analysis was carried out to verify their reliability and validity.

In the first stage, in order to refine the scales, the Cronbach  $\alpha$  value of all constructs is calculated using SPSS 15.0. The Cronbach alpha values obtained are the following: service failure prevention and recovery (.758); service standards communication (.775); service technology (.882); perceived service quality (.758); participation (.834); service delivery (.779); and loyalty (.838). All scales exceed the traditional criteria for the Cronbach  $\alpha$  value, so we are confident of the reliability of our measures.

In the second stage, a joint analysis of all the constructs is carried out. In order to do so, a measurement model of all the constructs is subjected to confirmatory factor analysis, by the method of robust maximum likelihood estimation, using EQS. As service failure prevention and recovery, service standards communication, and service technology are different dimensions of OSS, these dimensions are first combined in a second-order factor. After removing some items, the goodness of fit is acceptable with a Satorra-Bentler chi-square of 33.638 with 55 degrees of freedom. The other overall fit indices are also indicative of a good fit of the model to the data (CFI=1.000; IFI =1.010; RMSEA=.000). A measurement model that includes the second-order factor and OCB and PSQ is then estimated (see Table I). The goodness of fit of this model is also acceptable with a Satorra-Bentler chi-square of 228.365 with 196 degrees of freedom. The other overall fit indices are also indicative of a good fit of the model to the data (CFI=.967; IFI =.968; RMSEA=.036). Table I shows that the model is valid and reliable.

## **Results**

### **Main effects and mediating effect**

Structural equation modeling (using EQS) was employed to test the hypothesized relationships. Table II displays the causal parameters and fit indices of general model. The analyses largely provide support for the hypotheses. OSS dimensions are significantly and positively related to customer-contact employee OCB and PSQ. Further, OCB emerges as a significant predictor of PSQ. The results provide support for hypotheses 1, 2 and 3. Approximately 49% of the variance in PSQ is explained by these OSS dimensions.

To examine the mediating effect of OCB posited in hypothesis 4, an adapted version of Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure for mediation testing was used. All conditions for mediation were fulfilled. Subsequently, both a  $\chi^2$  difference test of the fully mediated model and the partially mediated model and a  $\chi^2$  difference test of the non-mediated model and the partially mediated model were carried out to examine whether the partially mediated model was significantly better. Results show that the partially mediated model is significantly superior to the other models ( $\chi^2$  difference tests  $p < .001$ ). Thus, support for hypothesis 4 is found, i.e. service-oriented OCB partially mediates the OSS dimensions-PSQ relationship. Consequently, the effect of OSS dimensions on PSQ is direct and indirect through service-oriented OCB.

Table I: Final measurement items

Constructs/items*	Average variance extracted	Composite reliability
Service failure prevention and recovery	0.54	0.77
Service standards communication	0.54	0.78
Service technology	0.79	0.88
Perceived service quality	0.54	0.78
Service delivery	0.54	0.78
Loyalty	0.57	0.92
Participation	0.57	0.92
Employee Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)	0.78	0.91

NOTE: Goodness-of-fit statistics: Satorra-Bentler Chi-squared 228.365 (196 d.f.)  $p < 0.001$ ; CFI=.967; IFI =.968; RMSEA=.036

(\*) All standardised loadings are significant ( $p < .01$ )

Table II. Parameter estimates

	Non-mediated model	Mediated model
Recovery → OCB		-.295 (-2.328)**
Standards → OCB		.499 (3.947)**
Technology → OCB		.277 (2.397)**
Recovery → PSQ	.254 (2.119)**	.450 (2.000)**
Standards → PSQ	.387 (3.039)**	.058 (0.440)**
Technology → PSQ	.251 (2.408)**	.113 (0.980)**
OCB → PSQ		.461 (1.983)**
	S-B $\chi^2$ (195) = 237.7313 $p < 0.001$ ; CFI = 0.957; IFI = 0.958; RMSEA = 0.041	S-B $\chi^2$ (194) = 213.7015 $p < 0.001$ ; CFI = 0.980; IFI = 0.981; RMSEA = 0.028

NOTE: Standardized parameters and robust t-values are shown (\*\*  $p < .01$ ).

### Moderating effect

To study the moderating effect of chain affiliation, two multisample models were estimated (using EQS), as suggested by Byrne (1994). Following the pattern of previous studies (Hibbard *et al.*, 2001) we decided to simplify the model using single indicators. Thus, we replaced the constructs by the average score of the indicators, grouping them in a single measure.

Table III shows the results of the multisample models with respect to chain affiliation. As it can be seen, the significant relationships are quite different between chain affiliated hotels and independent hotels. However, in both groups, two relationships coincide: (a) between service failure recovery and prevention and perceived service quality, and (b) between OCB and perceived service quality. However, there are significant differences in the coefficients only between the service failure recovery-PSQ and communication service standards-PSQ relationships. The intensity of the relationship is, in both cases, stronger in chain-affiliated hotels than in independent hotels. These results partially support hypothesis 5(a), but they do not give support to hypotheses 5(b) y 5(c).

Table III. Parameter estimates

Hypothesized paths	Moderated model		
	Independent	Chain Affiliated	Lmtest Dif $\chi^2$
<i>Fit Statistics</i>			
Recovery → OCB	-.098	.138	.098
Technology → OCB	.171*	-.094	2.519
Standards → OCB	.327*	.052	2.217
OCB → Quality	.246*	.475*	2.587
Recovery → Quality	.119*	.296*	6.107*
Technology → Quality	.086	.023	.208
Standards → Quality	.087	.171*	3.610*
$\chi^2$ (df)	17.365 (20)		
CFI	1.000		

NOTE: Non-standardized parameters are shown (\* p < .10)

### Discussion and managerial implications

The results indicate that the direct influence of service failure recovery, communication of service standards, and service technology on PSQ is positive and significant. They also show that service-oriented OCB mediates the OSS dimensions-PSQ relationships. The results indicate that the hotel managers who want their contact personnel to deliver an excellent service should clarify the hotel's mission, its quality standards and the role of the contact personnel, through open and effective communication. Hotel managers should also make an effort to incorporate the new technologies, and to stimulate and train employees to provide an appropriate recovery for service failures.

The results regarding the moderating variable indicate that relationships differ between chain-affiliated hotels and independent hotels; although in both subsamples two relationships coincide: (a) between service failure recovery and prevention and PSQ, and (b) between OCB and PSQ. Therefore, regardless of the hotel's affiliation, hotels that wish to improve their service quality must design service recovery programs, so that employees are appropriately trained on how to give customers a satisfactory response after a service failure; moreover, they must stimulate the customer-contact employees' OCB, as these behaviors have a positive influence on service quality.

As the relationship between service failure recovery and PSQ is significant for both types of hotels, the stronger intensity of the relationship indicates that an improvement in the hotels' response to service failures will have a greater effect on service quality in chain-affiliated hotels; thus, the management of this type of hotel should make an additional effort in this dimension of the organizational service system.

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