

Theme park employee satisfaction and customer orientation

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The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between front-line employee job satisfaction and customer orientation. Data for this study were collected through the use of a survey instrument completed by 146 front-line employees of a regional theme park in the southeast United States. Simple Linear Regression analysis was used to test the relationships under review. Results of this study showed that employees who are more satisfied with the relationship they enjoy with co-workers have a higher customer orientation. Significant relationships were not found between any other dimension of job satisfaction (including overall job satisfaction) and employee customer orientation. In addition, no significant relationship was found between any demographic characteristics reviewed and customer orientation. Results found in this study run contrary to previous results of studies conducted in non-recreation-related work environments. The results of this study suggest that employees of recreation-related organizations respond differently to job satisfactions as they relate to customer orientation rather than employees of other business types. Results of this study may help theme park managers better facilitate customer orientation through improved relationships between front-line employees.

INTRODUCTION

Theme parks are a popular leisure-time activity and tourist destination in the United States and worldwide. There are more than 450 theme parks in North America alone ('Wild Adventures buck industry attendance trends', 2003), with the top 50 parks attracting 168 million visitors in 2004 ('Theme parks attendance increases in 2004', 2004). There was a time when theme parks represented a unique recreational offering. Organizations were able to operate with limited competition and could automatically count on a share of increasing tourism revenues. In the last 30 years, however, the number of operating theme parks has increased, driving competition. An increased number of parks, coupled

with lower travel costs (e.g., airline deregulation, more accessibility by car), have given the traveler a greater choice. In addition to direct competition, theme parks are competing for visitors with a variety of other attractions, including museums and galleries, state and county parks, as well as natural areas (Lewis and Clacher, 2001).

Increased access to a similar product has resulted in greater consumer leverage and demand for quality service. Consumers today expect quality products and services delivered in a way that satisfies their unique expectations. Organizations can no longer afford to compete with price or product attributes alone. For organizations (both service organizations and traditional manufacturers of goods), the product itself

is less a point of competitive advantage. Even continuous product development typically will not lead to a sustainable competitive advantage, only the associated service remains for differentiation (Gronroos, 2004).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

For decades the American business model focused on increasing market share as the key to maximizing profits. To this end, organizations concentrated on attracting new customers instead of retaining existing ones (Griffin, 2002). The business environment changed drastically throughout the 1990s and has continued to change in the new century. Organizations have faced a variety of challenges, like increased competition, recession, downsizing, a more demanding consumer, and increased government regulation and intervention (Burke, 1999). The notion of a close relationship with customers, although not a new one, has become a necessary component of a successful business strategy (Gronroos, 2004). A variety of research within services has suggested that long-term relationships with customers are necessary in order to gain a competitive advantage (Berry, 1983; Gronroos, 1981). Burke (1999) stated, 'In an increasing competitive environment, maintaining current clients and attracting new ones has become critical to survival, let alone growth' (p. 53). At the same time, researchers have argued that organizations are not doing enough to stem customer defection (Reicheld, 1996). The traditional marketing approach (addressing the product, price, place of distribution, and promotion dimensions) was inadequate in addressing the unique challenges that arose within the relationship context. An increased emphasis on employee satisfaction and customer orientation grew out of this need to service customers on a more intimate level.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The dependent variable used in this study was a composite measure of customer orientation. Independent variables included measures of job satisfaction (individual dimensions and a composite measure) and various demographic and work variables (age, gender, length of employment, full- or part-time employment, and percentage of time spent in direct customer contact). The first objective of this study was to determine the relationship between job satisfaction and customer orientation among front-line employees in a theme park setting. The second objective of this study was to determine the relationship between various demographic (age, gender) and work (overall length of employment, overall length of employment within the current job category, full-time vs. part-time employment, percentage of time spent in direct customer contact) characteristics and customer orientation among front-line employees in a theme park setting.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction encompasses all aspects of employment that have an influence on the employee including whether the employee is happy to go to work, perceives the job as meaningful, what perceptions the employee holds of the organization, and any other impact either physical or psychological (Eskildsen and Nussler, 2000). Job satisfaction has been studied in a variety of relationships, including organizational climate (Payne *et al.*, 1976), job roles (Schuler, 1979), supervision (Downey *et al.*, 1975), and communication satisfaction (Pincus, 1986). Although studies vary methodologically, findings generally show that the more trust, participation, and openness subordinates feel between themselves and a superior, the more satisfied the subordinate

is likely to be with his or her job (and organization). Researchers have identified four key factors that impact job satisfaction. First, rewards and recognition have been shown to contribute to job satisfaction. Some researchers have identified extrinsic rewards, including salary and benefits as the most important factors for retaining employees, while others contend that intrinsic rewards such as working conditions, status, and security drive employee satisfaction (Leavitt, 1996; Savery, 1996). Personal choice and development have been identified as the second factor that impacts employee satisfaction. Employees are not driven by pay and benefits alone; some value career development is important to satisfaction (Leavitt, 1996). The third dimension shown to impact employee satisfaction is a work and life balance. Some researchers have argued that the interaction between employee satisfaction and life satisfaction is directional (i.e., either employee satisfaction impacting life satisfaction or life satisfaction impacting employee satisfaction; Bauer, 2000), while other researchers argue that it is reciprocal (Hagedorn and Sax, 1999). A final dimension shown to impact employee satisfaction is training and development. Howard and Frink (1996) showed that employees who perceive growth opportunities are more satisfied.

Service behaviors are those that occur during interactions with customers (Farrell *et al.*, 2001) and are the primary influence on customers' perceptions of service quality (Bitner *et al.*, 1990; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). Employees' service behaviors are influenced by their level of job satisfaction (Bettencourt, 1997; Bettencourt and Brown, 1997). What exactly defines employee service behavior, however, is still debated (Bitner *et al.*, 1994; Farrell *et al.*, 2001). Employee performance improves with experience and has been shown to moderate the effect of satisfaction on organizational commitment (Russ and McNeilly,

1995). Some researchers have challenged the link between the emotional state driving job satisfaction and performance (Organ, 1977), while others have shown productivity and job satisfaction to be correlated (Petty *et al.*, 1984). Petty *et al.* (1984) found that individual job satisfaction and job performance are positively correlated. Research has also shown a link between job satisfaction and specific performance outcomes, including organizational citizenship behaviors (Smith *et al.*, 1983) and employee turnover (Price and Mueller, 1986; Rusbult and Farrell, 1983).

Employee satisfaction is impacted by employees' perceptions of their job and the organization for which they work (Eskildsen and Nussler, 2000). Agho *et al.* (1993) found that employees show less job satisfaction when alternative jobs (for which they are qualified) are available, when they do not receive adequate information to perform their job, and when superiors make incompatible requests. In a study set in the real estate industry, Harris *et al.* (2005) found that employees holding a customer orientation (vs. a performance orientation) have higher levels of job satisfaction and that a selling orientation does not directly impact job satisfaction. Agho *et al.* (1993) found that the ability to make job-related decisions, working with friendly people, fair reward, and opportunity for mobility within the organization were related to job satisfaction. Personality dimensions brought to the organization by the employee (as opposed to created by the characteristics of the organization) impact job satisfaction (Agho *et al.*, 1993). Employee outlook (either negative or positive) impacts job satisfaction appraisals.

Customer Orientation

A customer-oriented organizational culture is critical for a service firm's success (Parasuraman, 1987). Customer-oriented service providers behave in ways designed

to foster long-term customer satisfaction (Howe *et al.*, 1994). Because organizational culture cannot be easily copied by the competition, it represents a sustainable competitive advantage (Parasuraman, 1987). Deshpande *et al.* (1993) view customer orientation as a part of an overall corporate culture and argue that simply focusing on the needs of customers is inadequate without 'consideration of the more deeply rooted set of values and beliefs that are likely to consistently reinforce such a customer focus' (p. 27). Customer-oriented employee behavior leads to long-term satisfaction with an emphasis on long-term rather than short-term results (Dunlap *et al.*, 1988; Saxe and Weitz, 1982).

Brown *et al.* (2002) define customer orientation as 'an employee's tendency or predisposition to meet customer needs in an on-the-job context' (p. 111). This definition is composed of a 'needs' dimension (an employee's belief in the ability to satisfy customer needs) and an 'enjoyment' dimension (degree to which serving customers is enjoyable). Brown *et al.* (2002) state that 'both components are necessary to fully understand a service worker's ability and motivation to serve customers by meeting their needs' (p. 111).

In this study, we focused on the customer orientation of front-line personnel, who are not salespersons in the typical sense. This research broadened the applicability of the Selling Orientation – Customer Orientation (SOCO) scale developed by Saxe and Weitz (1982). This is critically important to managers within service industries, where front-line employees have direct customer contact, but are paid by the hour and are not dependent upon what they sell (e.g., retail outlets, restaurants, or, in this study, a theme park). The interaction between employee job satisfaction and their customer orientation was explored in this study. To date, little research has explored the impact job satisfaction has on customer

orientation. As far as can be discerned, no research has studied this relationship within a theme park setting.

METHODS

Dependent Variable

The scale used to measure customer orientation was a shortened version of the 24-item SOCO instrument proposed by Thomas *et al.* (2001). The SOCO instrument is a self-assessment scale designed to evaluate a salesperson's desire to: help customers, assess customer needs, offer satisfactory products or services, adequately describe products or services, and the use of deception or manipulation in selling (Thomas *et al.*, 2001). The SOCO instrument has been used in a variety of settings (real estate, advertising, industrial salespeople, insurance) and from multiple viewpoints (buyers, consumers of retail products). It has been determined to be a generally reliable and valid measure of the customer orientation of salespeople (either from the salesperson perspective or from the customer perspective) (Dunlap *et al.*, 1988; Michaels and Day, 1985; O'Hara *et al.*, 1991).

In a study of 354 industrial buyers, Tadepalli (1995) found the original 24-item SOCO instrument and the modified version put forth by Michaels and Day (1985), even with slight modifications, including a purchaser point of view toward a single salesperson, to be a reliable and valid measure of a salesperson's customer orientation. In a study involving salespeople, sales managers, and customers, Thomas *et al.* (2001) investigated the reliability and validity of a shortened (10 item) version of the SOCO instrument. Thomas *et al.* did find that customer orientation of salespeople could be measured 'with little information loss' by using the shortened scale (p. 69). The original SOCO scale was investigated and the two-factor model results reported by Saxe

and Weitz (1982) was replicated. In a study of 354 marketing professionals, Periatt *et al.* (2004) found the shortened version of the SOCO scale proposed by Thomas *et al.* (2001) to be a reliable and valid measure of salespersons' customer orientation.

Independent Variables

Job satisfaction was assessed using the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) scale developed by Smith *et al.* (1969). The JDI identifies six dimensions of employee job satisfaction: satisfaction with work, supervision, possibility for promotion, co-workers, pay, and satisfaction with the job in general. The JDI presents a series of short phrases to which respondents are asked to respond either in agreement, disagreement, or not sure. The scoring system for the items within each scale is as follows: agreement responses (yes) to positive items, and disagreement responses (no) to negative items = 3 points; disagreement responses (no) to positive items, and agreement responses (yes) to negative items = 0 points, a response of 'don't know' (represented by a question mark) given to either type of question = 1 point. Hanisch (1992) studied the appropriateness of the JDI scoring system. Specifically, the researcher was interested in determining if the use of a question mark (representing more of a negative response, 1.0 vs. 1.5 on a scale from 0 to 3 with 0 being a negative response) was still a valid approach. Her findings supported the use of a question mark representing a more negative response, first introduced in the original JDI.

The JDI has been shown to be reliable and valid (Capella and Andrew, 2004; Parsons, 1998) and applicable in a wide range of settings (Roznowski, 1989). Roznowski (1989) stated, 'In terms of both predictive power and construct validity, the scales of the JDI have impressive relations with measures of organizationally and theoretically relevant criteria' (p. 805). Kinicki *et al.* (2002)

assessed the construct validity of the JDI and found internal consistency, and test-retest reliability to be 'moderately high' and recommended its use (p. 26). Roznowski (1989) stated that the JDI was useful for comparisons across studies, organizational contexts, and longitudinally. Roznowski (1989) used factor and correlation analysis to test the original dimensions of the JDI, along with additional updated questions designed to replace original items outdated by a modern business environment. Within each of the original dimensions identified by Smith *et al.* (1969), one to five items were replaced. Reliability for each of the newly defined dimensions increased.

RELIABILITY OF THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

To examine the reliability of the scales used in this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated. Cronbach's alpha indicates how well a set of variables measures a single latent construct. Cronbach's alpha coefficients range from 0.0 to 1.0 and indicate the strength of relationship between items within a scale. Alpha coefficients near 1.0 means that items are measuring similar dimensions of the construct. Scales used in this study were deemed reliable with an alpha coefficient ≥ 0.70 (Jeffreys *et al.*, 1997). Reliability coefficients for the scales used in this study are reported in Table 1.

Job satisfaction was measured using the JDI developed by Smith *et al.* (1969). Satisfaction with work on present job contains five items with a reliability coefficient equal to 0.80. Satisfaction with present pay contains five items with a reliability coefficient equal to 0.71. Satisfaction with opportunities for promotion has five items with a reliability coefficient equal to 0.83. Satisfaction with supervision contains five items with a reliability coefficient equal to 0.79. Satisfaction with people at work contains five items with a reliability coefficient equal to 0.78. Satisfaction with

Table 1 Reliability coefficients for job satisfaction and customer orientation scales used in the study

Variable	Number of items	Reliability coefficient
Work on present job	5	0.80
Present pay	5	0.71
Opportunities for promotion	5	0.83
Supervision	5	0.79
People at work	5	0.78
Job in general	8	0.83
Customer orientation	5	0.85

the job in general contains eight items with a reliability coefficient equal to 0.83.

Customer orientation was measured using a shortened version of the SOCO scale developed by Saxe and Weitz (1982). Customer orientation has five items with a reliability coefficient equal to 0.85.

COLLECTION OF DATA

The population for this study was front-line employees of a medium-sized theme park in the southeast United States. 'Front-line employee' was defined, in this study, as hourly paid employees, who spend some percentage of their work time in direct customer contact and are in non-management positions. In order to increase the reliability of the survey instrument, a pilot study consisting of 10 members of the population of interest was conducted. Following the pilot study, all front-line employees of the park under study ($n = 301$) were asked to complete the survey questionnaire. Respondents were contacted up to five times including a total of three survey distributions. This procedure (including a variety of mailing methods) was shown by Dillman (2000) to improve overall response rate. Sampling error, confidence level in the results, and non-response bias were considered. To this end, a formula recommended by Dillman

(2000) was used to determine an appropriate sample size based on the population size, proposed confidence level, and desired sampling error. A total of 146 usable responses were collected equaling a 48.5% response rate.

ANALYSIS

Simple linear regression is a general linear model designed to explain the relationship between a single continuous independent variable and a single continuous dependent variable. In this study, the method of least squares was used to fit the regression line (the simple linear regression equation is also known as the least squares regression equation) (Dallal, 2000). The method of least squares minimizes the sum of the squares of the residuals of the points of the data (difference between the observed values and fitted values in the equation). The regression equation is: $Y = a + bX + e$. Y is the dependent variable, a is a constant value (the value of Y when $X = 0$), b is the slope of the regression line (Beta), that is, how much Y changes for each one unit change in X . X represents the independent variable (customer orientation), and e represents an error term (Abrams, 2005).

Because the data for customer orientation was kurtotic, an inverse transformation was performed prior to analysis. The variable was then checked again for normality. Skewness and kurtosis values within $+/-2.0$ are considered within the normal range (Baumgartner and Jackson, 1999; George and Mallery, 2001). After transformation, customer orientation (skewness = 1.30, kurtosis = 0.33) approximated a normal distribution. If data are non-normal, it is appropriate to transform them prior to analysis. Particularly if the data are arbitrary values (including Likert responses), transformation does not increase the difficulty of interpreting the results (Abrams, 2005).

FINDINGS

The average age of respondents was 36.36 years, with 45.10% between the ages of 16 and 24, 25.00% between 25 and 49, and 29.90% 50 or older. Respondents were 39.70% male and 60.30% female. They were evenly split between full-time employment (49.30%) and part-time employment (50.70%). On average, respondents had worked at the park under study for 18.90 months overall with an average of 16.95 months in their current department. Respondents spent on average 76.15% of their work time in direct customer contact (See Table 2 for complete results).

Table 3 displays the means and standard deviations, and the skewness and kurtosis results for the six dimensions of job satisfaction, including satisfaction with the job in general. The statistical procedures used in this study assume a normal distribution of the variables for an accurate interpretation of the results. Visual examination for normality was made using histograms. A statistical check for normality was also made by analyzing the skewness and kurtosis statistics. Results within ± 2.0 indicate that the data are not significantly shifted toward one tail or another (skewness) nor are they too peaked or too flat (kurtosis) (Baumgartner

Table 2 Demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristic	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Number	(%)
Age (Years)	36.36	18.13	144	
16–24			65	45.10
25–49			36	25.00
50 +			43	29.90
Gender			146	
Male			58	39.70
Female			88	60.30
Job category			146	
Full time			72	49.30
Part time			74	50.70
Length of employment	18.90	18.48	144	
0–6 Months			52	36.10
7–12 Months			22	15.30
13–24 Months			29	20.10
>24 Months			43	28.50
Length of employment in current department	16.95	17.40	144	
0–6 Months			58	40.30
7–12 Months			22	15.30
13–24 Months			31	21.50
>24 Months			33	22.90
Work time in direct customer contact	76.15	33.15	144	
0–25%			24	16.70
26–50%			9	6.20
51–75%			14	9.70
>75%			97	63.40

Table 3 Means and standard deviations for job satisfaction dimensions

Dimension	Number	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis
Work on present job*	146	9.27	4.96	-0.41	-1.02
Present pay*	146	4.80	4.09	0.93	0.27
Opportunities for promotion*	146	6.00	4.91	0.55	-0.88
Supervision*	146	10.02	4.77	-0.49	-0.94
People at work*	146	9.57	4.54	-0.32	-1.03
Job in general**	146	14.47	7.00	-0.24	-0.96

*A score equal to 15 indicates complete satisfaction.

**A score equal to 24 indicates complete satisfaction.

and Jackson, 1999; George and Mallery, 2001). For satisfaction with the job in general, a score equal to 24 indicates complete satisfaction. For all other dimensions, a score equal to 15 indicates complete satisfaction. Respondents were most satisfied with supervision ($M = 10.02$, $SD = 4.77$). Respondents were least satisfied with present pay ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 4.09$). Overall, respondents were moderately satisfied with their job in general ($M = 14.47$, $SD = 7.00$).

Table 4 displays the means and standard deviations for the five items measuring customer orientation, the means and standard deviations, and the skewness and kurtosis of overall customer orientation. Because the data were kurtotic (skewness = -1.67, kurtosis = -3.58), we did an inverse transformation of the data prior to analysis. The

data were subtracted from a constant equal to the highest response, plus one (46) and then divided into one (source on desk comp at home). Respondents indicate the proportion of customers with whom they act as described, from *Never* to *Always*. The average customer orientation score was high ($M = 38.50$, $SD = 6.76$). The majority of respondents (68.22%) 'always' or 'almost always' acted with the best interest of the customer in mind.

The following relationships were tested in this study using simple linear regression analysis (See Table 5 for complete results).

- Overall job satisfaction ($B < 0.01$, $p = 0.49$) did not result in higher customer orientation [$F(1,144) = 0.48$, $p = 0.49$].

Table 4 Means and standard deviations for customer orientation

Item	Number	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I try to figure out what the customer needs are	146	6.91	2.04
A good employee has to have the customer's best interest in mind	146	8.21	1.32
I try to bring the customer with a problem together with a product/service that helps to solve that problem	146	7.88	1.78
I offer the product/service that is best suited to the customer's problem	146	7.81	1.63
I try to find out what kind of product/services will be most helpful to a customer	146	7.71	1.68
Overall Customer Orientation*,**	146	38.50	6.76

*A score equal to 45 indicates a complete customer orientation.

**Skewness = 1.30, Kurtosis = 0.31.

Table 5 Regression analysis summary predicting customer orientation

Variable	B	SEB	β
Job in general	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01
Work on present job	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01
Supervision	<0.01	<0.01	-0.04
Opportunities for promotion	<0.01	<0.01	0.09
People at work	0.01	0.01	0.19*
Present pay	<0.01	<0.01	-0.05
Age	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01
Length of employment	<0.01	<0.01	0.02
Length of employment in current department	<0.01	<0.01	0.03
Percentage of time spent in direct customer contact	<0.01	<0.01	0.15

* $p < 0.05$.

- Satisfaction with supervision ($B < -0.01$, $p = 0.67$) did not result in a higher customer orientation [$F(1,144) = 0.18$, $p = 0.67$].
- No significant relationship was found between any demographic factor and employee customer orientation.
- A significant linear relationship was found between satisfaction with people at work (IV) and customer orientation (DV). Results indicated that higher satisfaction with people at work ($B = 0.01$, $p = 0.02$) resulted in higher customer orientation [$F(1,144) = 5.22$, $p = 0.02$]; with 3.5% of the variance in customer orientation explained by satisfaction with people at work.

DISCUSSION

The first objective of this study was to determine the relationship between job satisfaction and customer orientation among front-line employees in a theme park setting. This study showed that the customer orientation of front-line employees is

impacted by the satisfaction felt between front-line employees and their co-workers.

No relationship was found between overall job satisfaction and customer orientation, or between satisfaction with supervisors and customer orientation. The literature is inconsistent with regard to the nature of these relationships. Jones *et al.* (2003) found front-line employee's perceptions of the organization's market orientation positively impacts job satisfaction and organizational commitment. However, they also showed that employee customer orientation is not impacted by their immediate supervisor market orientation. Jones *et al.* (2003) suggested that a perception of the organization's market orientation represented support for employee efforts to meet customer needs, but immediate supervisor orientation did not infer the same support.

Results of this study were consistent with what Jones *et al.* (2003) found. Although satisfied with immediate supervisor actions, employees in this study were very dissatisfied with organizational dimensions (including pay and opportunities for promotion). These dimensions may be perceived by employees in this study to be out of the control of their immediate supervisors. The results found in this study may be reflecting this inconsistent relationship felt by employees. In this study, front-line employees reported low levels of overall job satisfaction. At the same time, they reported high levels of customer orientation. This finding implies that front-line employees are getting their satisfaction from their relationship with the customer and not from the relationship they have with the organization.

No relationship was found between employee satisfaction with their immediate supervisors and customer orientation. Respondents in this study did report a general satisfaction with supervision, but level of satisfaction with supervision did not impact front-line employee customer orientation. This finding implies that the

immediate supervisor/front-line employee relationship is not nearly as important as the relationship between front-line employees and their customers. This finding extends the finding that overall job satisfaction (including satisfaction with the organization in general) is not related to customer orientation. Satisfaction with immediate supervision represents a much closer relationship than the more abstract relationship between the organization and the front-line employee.

A significant relationship was found in this study between employee satisfaction with his or her co-workers and customer orientation. Leavitt (1996) and Savery (1996) showed that some employees are motivated as much by intrinsic rewards (including working conditions) as extrinsic rewards (pay and benefits). Co-workers contribute greatly to working conditions. The results of this study suggest that employees who enjoy the company of their co-workers are in a better position to concentrate their efforts on external customers (increased customer orientation). This is consistent with Agho *et al.* (1993) who found working with friendly people increased job satisfaction. On the one hand, employees are satisfied by supervisor actions but not satisfied with the organization in general. This may partially explain why the one dimension of job satisfaction that was found to be associated with customer orientation (satisfaction with co-workers) is outside the control of both immediate supervisors and the organization. Bettencourt (1997) found that when the effects of fairness perceptions are controlled for, there is no relationship between job satisfaction and prosocial employee behavior.

This finding is consistent with the lack of relationship shown between satisfaction with supervision and front-line employee customer orientation. This finding implies an 'us vs. them' mentality among front-line employees in this study. Satisfaction with the overall job and satisfaction with

immediate supervision did not impact front-line employee orientation and represents 'them'. Satisfaction with co-workers and the implication that front-line employees are getting satisfaction from their interaction with customers did impact front-line employee customer orientation and represents 'us'. This further implies that front-line employees who share some (as of yet identified) intangibles (what is termed homogeneity of service providers) will be more satisfied with each other.

Other dimensions of job satisfaction were not shown to be related to customer orientation in this study. This apparent inconsistency (satisfaction with co-workers impacting customer orientation but other dimensions of job satisfaction showing no relationship) can be explained in part by the findings of other job satisfaction research. Koys (2001) showed only a weak association between individual job satisfaction and organizational effectiveness. A much stronger association was found between a unit level measure of employee satisfaction and organizational effectiveness. Ryan *et al.* (1996) explained this in part by making the argument that a unit level performance is not simply a sum of individual employee satisfaction. Other things may impact unit effectiveness, including shared values. The authors suggest that if an environment of cooperation is fostered, unit level productivity may increase. The results of this study suggest that even when other areas of job satisfaction have no impact on customer orientation, satisfaction with co-workers impacting customer orientation may be due to the same operating environment characteristics (shared value, cooperation) that impact unit levels of productivity.

The second objective of this study was to determine the relationship between various demographic (age, gender) and work (overall length of employment, overall length of employment within the current

job category, full-time vs. part-time employment, percentage of time spent in direct customer contact) characteristics and customer orientation among front-line employees in a theme park setting. No relationship was found between demographic characteristics or work characteristics and the customer orientation of front-line employees. This result is consistent with the results found by Howe *et al.* (1994) in a study set in the insurance industry. Length of employment (including overall, or within their current position) was not found to be related to customer orientation in this study. Michaels and Day (1985) found a negative association between length of employment and customer orientation. Those employed longer with the organization may be more resistant to change to a customer orientation. The Michaels and Day (1985) study, however, focused on industrial salespersons, and results may have been impacted by issues occurring within the environment at the time of the study (including industry layoffs).

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Homogeneity of Service Providers

Results in this study showed that satisfaction with co-workers impacted customer orientation. Homogeneity of service workers is not defined by an easily identified characteristic. Management should find some way to determine if new hires (or potential interdepartmental transfers) will interact well with current employees. One recommendation would be to lay out organizational philosophies (including policies and procedures) to potential employees before hire. Disney Corporation uses this method of 'self selection' with great success. Organizations should recruit front-line employees with similar backgrounds.

In this study, employees reported relatively high job satisfaction on the dimension as it relates to direct supervisors. However,

employees were dissatisfied with the job satisfaction dimension relating to the organization as a whole. This relationship between the organization and the front-line employee is critically important. Barnes and Morris (2000) showed that organizations that focus on the needs of front-line employees are in a better position to satisfy the external customer. Organizations can improve the quality of staff performance through employee training. Ballantyne *et al.* (1995) caution that technical skill training is not enough; employees must receive education.

Training and recruitment of front-line employees should be done with the expectation that every employee be considered a part-time marketer for the organization. To this end, Gronroos (1990) recommends organizational strategies for 'attracting, keeping and motivating customer oriented personnel' (p. 162). This sentiment is echoed by Berry and Parasuraman (1992) who include attracting, motivating, and retaining qualified employees in their definition of internal marketing. They argue that organizations should resist the temptation to lower hiring standards in a tight labor market.

Job Satisfaction

In this study, no relationship was found between overall job satisfaction or satisfaction with supervisors and front-line employee customer orientation. However, satisfaction with co-workers was found to impact customer orientation.

Thakor and Joshi (2005) recommend that managers provide more variety in employee work (including job rotation). If job rotation is not possible (those in positions that require specialized knowledge as an example), Thakor and Joshi (2005) found that increasing organizational identification is also effective. Managers can foster organizational identification among front-line employees through considerate leader

behavior and through regular and constructive feedback. Stock and Hoyer (2005) found that customer-oriented attitudes are distinct from customer-oriented behavior. Even though customer-oriented behavior provides a stronger impact on customer satisfaction, both customer-oriented behavior and customer-oriented attitudes impact customer satisfaction directly. This is important, as it shows customers are attune to employee 'vibes' and they impact satisfaction. Focusing only on actual behaviors is not enough. Management should also be concerned with employee attitudes. Hartline *et al.* (2000) showed that customer-oriented attitudes can be influenced by supervisors' leadership style. The results of this study suggest that even when other areas of job satisfaction have no impact on customer orientation, satisfaction with co-workers impacting customer orientation may be due to the same operating environment characteristics (shared value, cooperation) that impact unit levels of productivity.

LIMITATIONS

This study was confidential but not anonymous. The high levels of customer orientation and relationship marketing orientation identified by respondents may have been artificially high due to this fact. Future research should be conducted using anonymous responses in order to control this potential limitation. Because the focus of this study was the experience of front-line employees, those in supervisory positions were intentionally excluded. Management input would allow future researchers better insight into the responses given by front-line employees (e.g., the association between front-line employees' satisfaction with supervision and what this encompasses).

Although a variety of demographic and work characteristics were considered in this study, the list was not exhaustive. It is recommended that future research increase the number of

demographic and work characteristics considered (including race and socioeconomic status) and their impact on customer orientation. A final limitation of this study was the use of the SOCO scale developed by Saxe and Weitz (1982) to measure the dependent variable in this study. The SOCO scale has been used in previous research predominately with salespersons. The SOCO scale was used in this study with front-line employees who are not salespersons in the traditional sense (they are paid by the hour and sales volume does not impact pay received). Future research using the SOCO scale to measure customer orientation with other non-selling populations is recommended.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Beyond the scope of this study was the impact employee fairness perceptions have on job satisfaction and the delivery of quality service. Bettencourt and Brown (1997) found that employee fairness perceptions were antecedent to the delivery of quality service. They were able to show that perceptions of fairness were related to prosocial employee behaviors. Employee comments, in this study, (although not analyzed qualitatively) indicated that employees in the park under study felt they were treated unfairly on a variety of dimensions (including pay and working conditions). The results found in this study may be impacted by fairness perceptions. Future research should investigate the job satisfaction/fairness perceptions/customer orientation relationship. In addition, because both supervisory and organizational dimensions of satisfaction were measured at the same time and on a single instrument, the validity of the results (showing no relationship between most dimensions of job satisfaction and customer orientation) may have been impacted. Future research should be

conducted measuring each dimension of job satisfaction independently.

Only one dimension of job satisfaction measured in this study (satisfaction with co-workers) was found to be related to customer orientation. The results of this study imply that some other dimension of the co-worker relationship is impacting customer orientation. In addition, no relationship was found between demographic or work characteristics and customer orientation. It is recommended that future research explore the co-worker relationship to determine what specifically is impacting reported levels of satisfaction and in what ways these dimensions impact customer orientation.

The results of this study found no relationship between satisfaction with supervisors and customer orientation. This result may be due in part to employee fairness perceptions. Respondents in this study viewed the promotion practices in the studied organization to be very unfair. Bettencourt and Brown (1997) found that employee fairness perceptions impacted the relationship between job satisfaction and employee's prosocial behaviors. Fairness perceptions were not considered in this study. Future research testing the relationship between job satisfaction and customer orientation (while considering fairness perceptions) is recommended.

In this study, no relationship was found between length of employment (either overall or within the current department) and customer orientation. This result is inconsistent with the findings of Michaels and Day (1985). Although the Michaels and Day (1985) study was hindered due to the setting of the study, future research should further investigate the association between length of employment and customer orientation.

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