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Management Support as a Catalyst for Affective Commitment



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Management Support as a Catalyst for Affective Commitment

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines management support as a catalyst for affective commitment among frontline employees in 4 and 5-star hotels. Drawing on social exchange theory, the article argues that employees who perceive their managers as supportive, responsive and enabling are more likely to develop emotional attachment to their organisation.

Methodology: Data were collected from 314 frontline employees in 4 and 5-star hotels and analysed using reliability assessment, correlation analysis and regression analysis.

Findings: The findings indicate that management support has a positive and statistically significant relationship with affective commitment (Standardised β .127 and p-value .001).

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The findings suggests that supportive managerial behaviour can strengthen employees' sense of belonging, identification and willingness to remain with the organisation. The article contributes to the literature by positioning management support not simply as a managerial practice, but as a catalyst that activates employees' affective bonds with the organisation. In practice, the findings highlight the importance of visible support, constructive feedback, communication, recognition, and employee well-being in developing a committed service workforce.

Keywords: *Management Support; Affective Commitment; Social Exchange Theory; Frontline Employees; 4 and 5-star Hotels.*

Introduction

Employee commitment remains a central concern for service organisations because service delivery depends substantially on the attitudes, effort and discretionary behaviour of employees who interact with customers. In high-contact service settings, the employee is not only a producer of service but also a visible representative of the organisation during the service encounter (Schneider and Bowen, 1985; Heskett et al., 1994). This makes the development of affective commitment especially important, because employees who identify with and feel emotionally attached to their organisation are more likely to remain, exert effort and support organisational goals (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 2002).

Affective commitment refers to the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organisation (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1991). It differs from continuance commitment, which concerns the perceived costs of leaving, and normative commitment, which concerns obligation to remain (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 1993). Affective commitment is particularly valuable because it captures a "want to stay" orientation rather than a "need to stay" or "ought to stay" orientation. Meta-analytic evidence indicates that affective commitment is generally the most favourable component of commitment in relation to desirable work outcomes, including lower turnover intention, stronger attendance and improved performance-related behaviours (Meyer et al., 2002).

This article focuses on management support as a catalyst for affective commitment. Management support is understood here as employees' perception that managers are concerned about their welfare, willing to listen to work-related problems and reliable when work becomes difficult. This conceptualisation aligns with the wider organisational support literature, in which employee attitudes are shaped by the extent to which organisational agents are perceived to value employee contributions and care about employee well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). In service contexts, support from managers can be especially influential because frontline employees face customer pressure, emotional labour, service failures and unpredictable work demands (Schneider and Bowen, 1985; Babakus et al., 2003).

The article makes a focused contribution by examining management support, rather than treating it merely as one element within a wider bundle of organisational practices. The term catalyst is used deliberately. A catalyst does not replace employee motivation or organisational commitment; rather, it accelerates and enables the conditions under which affective commitment can form. Management support can therefore be seen as a catalytic managerial practice because it helps convert organisational concern into employee attachment through reciprocity, trust and feeling of obligation (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Settoon et al., 1996).

Management support

Management support has long been recognised as an important feature of the service work environment. Schneider and Bowen (1985) associated supportive managerial practices with

employees' service perceptions and customer-related outcomes, highlighting the role of managerial feedback, information-sharing and human resource practices in shaping service climates. In a similar vein, service-management research suggests that employees are better able to perform customer-facing roles when managers provide resources, guidance, encouragement and problem-solving support (Heskett et al., 1994; Babakus et al., 2003; Karatepe, 2014).

From an employee perspective, management support is not limited to formal policies. It is experienced through day-to-day managerial behaviours, including whether managers listen, show concern, provide help and remain dependable when difficulties arise. These behaviours matter because employees often interpret the actions of managers as evidence of the organisation's broader intentions (Levinson, 1965; Eisenberger et al., 1986). When managers show concern for employee welfare, employees are more likely to view the organisation as supportive. Conversely, when managers are inaccessible or indifferent, formal organisational rhetoric about valuing employees may lose credibility.

Management support is also central in hospitality and other high-contact service contexts because frontline employees frequently need to handle customer demands, service failures and work pressure in real time. In such contexts, support can reduce uncertainty and increase employees' confidence that the organisation will stand behind them (Babakus et al., 2003; Karatepe, 2014). Consequently, management support is not merely a welfare issue; it is a strategic service-management practice that helps create the psychological conditions for commitment, stability and sustained service quality.

Affective commitment

Organisational commitment has been widely conceptualised as a psychological bond between the employee and the organisation (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1991). Within the three-component model, affective commitment is the emotional and identification-based component of commitment. Employees with high affective commitment remain with the organisation because they want to do so, identify with organisational goals and experience membership as personally meaningful (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 1993).

Affective commitment is highly relevant to service organisations because the quality of the service encounter often depends on employees' willingness to go beyond minimal role compliance. Employees who are emotionally attached to the organisation are more likely to invest effort, protect the organisation's reputation and engage constructively with customers and colleagues (Meyer et al., 2002; Paulin et al., 2006). In this respect, affective commitment provides a psychological basis for consistent service delivery and employee retention.

Prior research has connected supportive work environments with affective commitment. Perceived organisational support is a particularly important antecedent because employees tend to develop stronger attachment when they believe that the organisation values their contribution and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). This logic is

directly relevant to management support, because managers are the most visible organisational representatives in employees' everyday work experience (Levinson, 1965; Settoon et al., 1996).

Social exchange theory as the explanatory framework

Social exchange theory provides the main theoretical foundation for this article. Blau (1964) argued that social exchange relationships are built through reciprocal interactions in which one party provides benefits, and the other develops an obligation to respond. Unlike purely economic exchange, social exchange is not based only on immediate and precisely specified repayment. It involves trust, gratitude and longer-term reciprocity (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005).

In organisational settings, social exchange theory has been widely used to explain why supportive treatment by the organisation or its representatives leads to favourable employee attitudes and behaviours (Settoon et al., 1996; Wayne et al., 1997; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). When employees perceive that managers are concerned, available and dependable, they are likely to interpret this as a beneficial action from the organisation. This can create a felt obligation to reciprocate through positive attitudes, including stronger affective commitment (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

This theoretical logic explains why management support can be described as a catalyst. Supportive managers initiate or strengthen the exchange relationship by signalling care, respect and reliability. Employees may then reciprocate not through a direct contractual repayment but through stronger emotional attachment and willingness to remain part of the organisation. Thus, management support can activate the reciprocity process through which affective commitment develops (Blau, 1964; Settoon et al., 1996; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005).

Hypothesis development

Supportive managerial behaviour is expected to enhance affective commitment for three reasons. First, management support communicates that the employee is valued. Perceived organisational support theory suggests that employees develop attachment partly because they personify the organisation and read managerial actions as indicators of organisational concern (Levinson, 1965; Eisenberger et al., 1986). Second, management support reduces the psychological distance between the employee and the organisation by making the organisation appear responsive and dependable (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Third, in service roles, managers who provide help and listen to work-related problems can reduce the strain associated with customer contact and role pressure, making continued membership more emotionally attractive (Babakus et al., 2003; Karatepe, 2014).

Based on this reasoning, the article proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Management support has a positive effect on employees' affective commitment.

Methodology

Research design and sample

The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. The empirical setting was 4 and 5-star hotels, a context in which frontline employees play a central role in delivering service quality and maintaining customer relationships. Usable responses were obtained from 314 frontline employees. This sample size is appropriate for multiple regression analysis and provides a sufficient basis for examining the relationship between management support and affective commitment in a service setting.

Measures

Management support was measured using items adapted from established service-management support research, particularly the work of Babakus et al. (2003) and related job-resource/service-support studies. The measure captured employees' perceptions of managerial concern for employees' welfare, willingness to listen to work-related problems and dependability when work becomes difficult. This wording reflects management support as an experienced supervisory resource rather than an abstract organisational claim.

Affective commitment was measured using items adapted from Paulin et al. (2006), consistent with the broader affective commitment tradition developed by Allen and Meyer (1990), Meyer and Allen (1991) and Meyer et al. (1993). The measure captured employees' pride, willingness to exert effort for the organisation and desire to remain connected with the organisation. Responses were collected using a Likert-type agreement scale.

Reliability evidence supported the use of both measures. The management support measure produced acceptable internal consistency, and the affective commitment measure also demonstrated acceptable reliability. These results indicate that the items used for each construct were sufficiently coherent for hypothesis testing.

Data analysis

Multiple regression analysis was used to test the proposed relationship. Age and tenure were entered as control variables because demographic and employment characteristics may influence employee attitudes. Management support was then examined as a predictor of affective commitment. The regression approach is suitable because the hypothesis concerns the direction and strength of association between a focal predictor and an employee attitude outcome.

Results

Table 1: *Descriptive characteristics of respondents (n = 314)*

<i>Respondents' Characteristic</i>	<i>Respondents Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Respondents in each type of hotel</i>		
<i>4 Star Hotel Employees</i>	<i>241</i>	<i>76.8</i>
<i>5 Star Hotel Employees</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>23.2</i>
<i>Age Group</i>		
<i>20 - 30 Years</i>	<i>163</i>	<i>51.9</i>
<i>31 - 40 Years</i>	<i>95</i>	<i>30.3</i>
<i>41 - 50 Years</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>14.0</i>
<i>51 Years and above</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>3.8</i>
<i>Gender</i>		
<i>Male</i>	<i>157</i>	<i>50.0</i>
<i>Female</i>	<i>147</i>	<i>46.8</i>
<i>Other</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>3.2</i>
<i>Education</i>		
<i>Secondary/Diploma</i>	<i>249</i>	<i>79.3</i>
<i>Associate</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>7.6</i>
<i>Bachelor</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>9.9</i>
<i>Master/Doctoral</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>3.2</i>

The regression results support the hypothesis. A simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether management support predicted affective commitment. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 312) = 10.96, p = .001$, indicating that management support significantly predicted affective commitment. The standardised regression coefficient showed a positive and statistically significant relationship between management support and affective commitment, $\beta = .127, t(312) = 3.31, p = .001$. This suggests that employees who perceived stronger management support were more likely to report stronger affective commitment to their organisation.

Table 2: *Regression Results for Management Support as a Predictor of Affective Commitment*

IV	DV	Standardised β	t	F	df	p
Management support	Affective commitment	.127	3.311	10.963	1, 312	.001

Discussion

The findings reinforce the argument that management support is a catalytic mechanism in the formation of affective commitment. In social exchange terms, employees appear to respond to supportive managerial treatment by developing stronger attachment to the organisation (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). This is consistent with perceived organisational support research, which shows that employees' commitment is shaped by beliefs about whether the organisation values them and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

The findings also support the view that managers are central agents in the development of employee commitment. Although commitment is often discussed at organisational level, employees experience the organisation through immediate managerial practices. When managers listen to work-related problems, show concern for employee welfare and provide help when work becomes difficult, they make organisational support tangible. This can strengthen affective commitment because employees perceive the organisation as more humane, reliable and worthy of loyalty (Levinson, 1965; Settoon et al., 1996).

The hospitality setting makes this result particularly important. Frontline hotel employees work in roles where service encounters, emotional labour and customer expectations can create pressure. In such settings, management support may be especially salient because employees need assurance that managers will help them manage difficult service situations (Schneider and Bowen, 1985; Babakus et al., 2003; Karatepe, 2014). The result therefore suggests that management support should be understood as part of the service infrastructure, not merely as an interpersonal courtesy.

The term catalyst is useful because it avoids overstating the finding. Management support is not the only determinant of affective commitment, and it does not automatically produce commitment in isolation. However, it can accelerate and strengthen the social exchange process through which employees become emotionally attached to the organisation. In practice, management support may help transform routine employment into a more relational and psychologically meaningful exchange.

Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

The article contributes to social exchange theory by showing that management support can act as a specific exchange trigger in frontline service contexts, where employees respond to observable supportive behaviours with stronger affective commitment (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell,

2005; Settoon et al., 1996). It also extends affective commitment research by reinforcing the role of managerial support as an antecedent of employees' emotional attachment, sense of belonging and identification with the organisation (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 1993). From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that service organisations should treat management support as a strategic commitment-building practice by training and evaluating managers not only on operational performance but also on their ability to provide consistent and visible support. However, the study is limited by its cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data, which restrict causal inference and may raise common-method concerns. Future research should use longitudinal or multi-source designs and examine whether mechanisms such as perceived organisational support, psychological safety, trust in management or job embeddedness explain how management support translates into affective commitment across other service contexts, including higher education, healthcare, banking and retail (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Karatepe, 2014; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

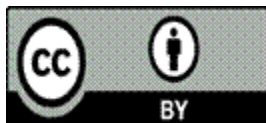
Conclusion

This article examined management support as a catalyst for affective commitment among frontline employees in 4 and 5-star hotels. Drawing on social exchange theory, it argued that management support strengthens affective commitment because employees reciprocate supportive treatment with a stronger emotional attachment to the organisation. The findings support this argument, showing a positive and significant relationship between management support and affective commitment. The central message is that management support should not be treated as a minor interpersonal issue. In service organisations, it is a catalytic managerial practice that can help convert employee perceptions of care, reliability and respect into stronger organisational attachment.

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