

Perceptions of Tourist Guides on Employee Empowerment: Behavioral Approach

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Extensive Summary

Introduction

Empowerment can be used to describe both the psychological perspective as well as the organizational (structural-behavioral) one (Appelbaum, Hebert and Leroux, 1999, p. 233). The psychological empowerment is viewed as the perception or attitudes of individuals towards their work and their roles in an organization (Chang and Liu, 2008, p. 1444). The organizational perspective which was analyzed in this study includes having access to information and job-essential resources, receiving support, and having the opportunity to learn and grow (Chang and Liu, 2008, p. 1444). It is theoretically defined as an organization's ability to offer access to information, resources, support and opportunity in the work environment (O'Brien, 2010, p. 6; Pelit, 2011, p. 211; Tolay, Sürgevil and Topoyan, 2012, p. 450). Information is defined as knowledge of the organization on policies, decisions, goals and data and offers a sense of meaning and purpose, increasing the ability of the worker to make decisions and judgments that contribute to the mission of the organization. Resources are defined as the necessary money, equipment and time do the work. Support is defined as feedback and guidance from peers, supervisors and others. Opportunity is defined as access to education and growth in the workplace (O'Brien, 2010, p. 6).

According to Bowen and Lawler (1992, p. 33) empowerment has four organizational ingredients: (1) information about the organization's performance, (2) rewards based on the organization's performance, (3) knowledge that enables employees to understand and contribute to organizational performance and (4) power to make decisions that influence organizational direction and performance.

Empowerment has contributions to employees, managers and organizations and also customers as well. It leads to important behavioral outcomes. For instance, empowerment enhances the self-efficacy of employees as discretion allows them to decide the best way to serve customers. Empowerment also leads to employees

becoming more adaptive (Chow, et.al., 2006, p. 483). It makes them feel better about their inputs to the company, it promotes a greater productivity, and provides them with a sense of personal and professional balance. It exercises employees' minds to find alternatives and better ways to execute their jobs, and it increases their potential for promotions and job satisfaction (Fragoso, 2000, p. 31). It will enable employees to do good work and to take responsibility for their own performance, so as to produce more satisfied customers, a more competitive organization, and greater profits (Lashley, 1996, p. 334).

Empowerment processes may allow leaders to lessen the emotional impact of demoralizing organizational changes or to mobilize organizational members in the face of difficult competitive challenges. Empowerment practices also may be useful in motivating subordinates to persist despite difficult organizational/ environmental obstacles (Conger and Kanungo, 1988, p. 476). It increases productivity and reduces overhead. It gives managers the freedom to dedicate their time to more important matters. The leader and organization take advantage of the shared knowledge of workers (Fragoso, 2000, p. 31).

The practice of empowerment is particularly appropriate in the environment of tourism. Because tourism's setting is one in which service occasionally unavailable or delayed, customers have special needs or requests, and other customers' behavior can disrupt enjoyment of the service in some way. On these occasions, employees are positioned to decisively remedy the problem and to restore enjoyment of the tourism experience, if they have been sufficiently empowered to act (Timmerman and Lytle, 2007, p. 274).

In the process of interaction of service delivery, employees who are empowered have the motivation to improve customer service and productivity, and sell products and provide services effectively. They have a stronger sense of self-efficacy and they could understand customer demand actively, solve problems in the service timely and effectively and show more outstanding performance in the service (Khan, et.al., 2011, p. 558).

The studies (Ayupp and Chong, 2010; Brymer, 1991; Chiang and Hsieh, 2012; Chow, et.al., 2006; Fock, et.al., 2011; Güzel, Aydın Tükeltürk and Özkul, 2008; Hales and Klidas, 1998; Hocutt and Stone, 1998; Humborstad and Perry, 2011; Karatepe, 2013; Klidas, 2002; Lashley, 1995; Lashley, 1996; Melhem, 2004; Pelit and Öztürk, 2011; Pelit, 2011; Ro and Chen, 2011; Timmerman and Lytle, 2007; Tsaur, Chang and Wu, 2004; Zencir, 2004) on employee empowerment in the tourism sector generally concentrated on the hotel establishments. The fact that the studies on employee empowerment at travel agencies and empowerment of tourist guides are poor, encourage to do this study.

Method

The aim of this study is to determine the perceptions of tourist guides on employee empowerment in the context of behavioral approach. In order to reach the aim, a questionnaire was developed and applied between 2014 and 2015 to tourist guides who worked as a guide actively in the English language. Questionnaires were sent by email and social media to 750 guides. Finally 378 accurately filled questionnaires were considered for statistical analysis.

Data was analyzed by using the SPSS statistical program. Descriptive statistics including frequencies and distribution percentage were conducted to determine guides' profiles. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to test the reliability of the scale. Mean scores and standard deviations of the 21 items were calculated. Factor analysis was applied. Finally, the "Independent Samples T Test" and "One Way Variance Analysis (ANOVA)" were applied whether perceptions of guides on employee empowerment differ in terms of their profiles.

Findings

Cronbach's Alpha was obtained .94. This result means that the scale was acceptable and reliable.

When analyzing the means of the items it was found that the highest mean scores of the items were "communication (x=4,20)", "giving responsibility (x=4,03)" and "applying personal capabilities to work (x=4,02)" respectively. Lowest ratings on perception of empowerment belong to "congratulating successes (x=3,24)", "giving knowledge and education (x=3,45)" and "encouraging (x=3,47)".

The factor analysis of the scale produced 4 factors: Nine items collected under the first factor and was named "knowledge and reward". The second factor consisted 6 items and was named "motivation". The last factor consisted 6 items and was named "sharing power". When analyzing the mean scores of the factors, "knowledge and reward" gained the least mean scores from the guides. This means that guides felt less empowered about knowledge and reward when comparing with the other two factors.

It was determined in the study that there was a significant difference between genders in terms of employee empowerment. Considering this result the male guides felt more empowered than the female guides. Another significant difference was found between the ages. Older guides stated that they were more empowered than the younger. Finally, it was determined that there was a significant difference between working years in terms of employee empowerment. This means that the more years they work the more they feel empowered.

Discussion

When discussing the results, tourist guides had relative positive perception towards employee empowerment. According to the guides, the highest mean score of the items related to the empowerment was about "communication". This result means that they can communicate with operation managers whenever they want. The best way of sharing knowledge and feedback depends on strong communication. Because communication increases guides' trust and loyalty towards their travel agency they work. Accordingly, it was found in the study that operation managers provide strong communication atmosphere.

The other highest mean scores were about "giving responsibility" and "applying personal capabilities to work". Guides felt that operation managers left all the responsibilities of work and gave opportunity to apply their personal capabilities to work. The guides are the most responsible person who managing and completing the tours successfully. Accordingly, it can be said that tourist guides have enough responsibilities during managing their tours.

On the other hand "congratulating successes", "giving knowledge and education" and "encouraging" got the lowest mean scores. As Bowen and Lawler (1995) stressed true empowerment can only exist when companies implement practices that distribute power, information, knowledge, and rewards throughout the organization. If any of these four elements are absent, then "empowerment will be zero" (Ayupp, 2010, 567).

Moreover, managing tour successfully depends on the guide's performance and satisfying tourists by providing quality services. Also, their performances effect agency's image positively. So operation managers need to give enough knowledge about their work, congratulate them for their success and encourage them for improving themselves. By this way managers can succeed in creating effective triple-dimension field. For agencies, they can create a good organizational reputation and positive image. For tourists, they can provide satisfaction and meet their expectations and needs. For guides, they can increase their job satisfaction and willingness to work. A successful guide has always desired to gain feedback and develops himself/herself constantly.

It was analyzed whether there was a significant difference between socio-demographic profiles of the guides in terms of employee empowerment. According to the results, the male guides felt more empowered than the females. Female guides have multiple roles such as being a wife, mother in their life and each role include the irrevocable responsibilities, requirements and duties. This makes them hard to adapt to working life. Moreover preferring the male guides than the females decrease their motivations and performances. For example, Koroğlu, Şahin and Tetik (2007) conducted a study on the challenges of female tourist guides and determined that travel agencies preferred male guides instead of female guides. For this reason female guides can feel less empowered.

Another result showed that the more years guides work the more they feel empowered. Guides gain the more knowledge of work and experience as long as they work. This makes them to specialize in their field and have the control on their work. Besides, they feel more confident during their tours. These resulted with the empowered guides.

This study was limited with the guides who work in English language. Further studies can be conducted on guides who work in different languages besides English. Another limitation is about empowerment field. Empowerment in terms of behavioral approach was analyzed in this study. Perceptions of guides' on both psychological empowerment and behavioral approach can be analyzed and a comparative study can be done. Also the relationship between empowerment and job satisfaction, organizational commitment can be conducted on tourist guides who work as full-time employee of an agency.