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Ethnic Employees' Behaviour Vis-a-Vis Customers in the Service Sector

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ETHNIC EMPLOYEES' BEHAVIOUR VIS-A-VIS CUSTOMERS IN THE SERVICE SECTOR

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Abstract

Modern societies in the western world are increasingly faced with cultural diversity as a result of international migration. The socio-economic position of ethnic groups in a globally mobile society has extensively been studied in recent years, from the perspective of their skills, language abilities, adjustment behaviour, and so forth. This study investigates the social and economic performance of ethnic workers in cities by addressing the question whether these groups have a higher or lower reputation or esteem on the labour market than their indigenous equals, seen from the perspective of the customer's perception and satisfaction. There is a popular feeling that ethnic employees in the service sector are less client-centered than indigenous employees. Sometimes, stigmatization is mentioned as a factor that acts as a negative predictor for someone's position on the job market. This phenomenon calls for a careful and critical assessment, as it may also rest on an unjustified stigma. Therefore, it is an interesting research question whether workers of ethnic origin, e.g., in the service sector, are more or less client-friendly than others. How do others judge their social or economic performance? After an extensive literature review, we formulate relevant hypotheses on the actual behaviour of ethnic employees and test these on the basis of empirical fieldwork in the service sector – notably in the retail sector – in the city of Amsterdam. Our conclusion is that, in general, there is no ethnic bias in the behaviour of these employees, although our findings suggest that gender bias does occur.

KEY WORDS: Client-friendliness, Culture, Ethnic groups, Migration, OCB (Organizational Citizenship Behaviour), Performance

1. Migration in Modern Society

Our era is characterized by a significant increase in migration flows to Western European countries. International migration – either voluntary or forced – has changed the demographic face of cities in many countries, and has transformed them into multicultural agglomerations. The economic explanation for this massive phenomenon is not conclusive, as different analytical frameworks - sometimes complementary, sometimes contrasting – have been developed to shed light on the above phenomenon, ranging from standard neoclassical theory to dual labour market theory or the new economics of migration theory (cf. Demeny 2002, Gorter et al., 1998).

Migrants have often different skills than the indigenous population and hence, there are differences in economic performance as well. Also in this context, various explanatory frameworks have been designed by economists, such as the human capital theory, the skills theory, the regional wage theory or the self-selection theory (see also Heikkilä et al., 2006). It is widely accepted that migration flows are determined by push and pull factors of various kind (economic, social, cultural, or political).

In an open economy migrants may show up as a source of supply of labour on the labour market. They may act as substitutes for current workers or they may fill vacancies which were difficult to meet, depending on their skills and on the functioning of their local labour market. In an age of mass migration, migrant workers will be found in many different segments of the labour market, depending on their wage level and professional qualifications. In economic terms, their individual marginal productivity will determine which position they assume on the labour market.

Migrants are by no means a uniform category of people. They comprise a varied mix of guest workers, refugees or migrants from former colonies. They may have totally different ethnic, cultural or socio-economic backgrounds, reasons why some people speak of a modern economy as a melting pot of cultures (Jacobs, 1961).

All these elements can currently be found in the Netherlands. In the 1960s, this country recruited low-skilled workers mainly from Spain, Italy and Greece, while later on guest workers were acquired from Turkey and Morocco. At the same time, The Netherlands experienced an influence of people from Surinam, a colony which had become independent, while also large inflows of people from the Dutch Antilles could be observed. And finally, after the war conditions in the past decade in various parts of the world – both inside and outside Europe – asylum seekers and refugees entered the Dutch society, e.g. from Yugoslavia, Somalia, Afghanistan or Iran.

Such inflows did not only create problems on the tight Dutch housing market, but they also led to tensions on the labour market. And last but not least, the often almost uncontrolled immigration flows caused a variety of socio-cultural tensions in the Dutch open society, especially in the larger cities. Ethnic frictions have in the meantime become a source of great concern in the traditionally flexible and tolerant societal system in Dutch cities.

Ethnic groups¹ are generally considered to be those people who have socio-cultural or physiological features that are different from most other people, for instance, because they were born abroad or whose parents (or one of them) were born abroad. If their skill levels are below average Dutch standards, they may most likely be found in lower segments of the labour market (see Borjas, 1995). In general, then their wages turn out to be lower than the Dutch average (see de Graaff, 2002), but there is also a great variation in wage levels among different ethnic groups. Most migrants show up as ethnically recognizable groups with the following distinct features:

- they show a high degree of geographic clustering
- they operate on dual or segmented labour markets
- their wages show much variation, but usually below the average
- there is much variation in repatriation rates of migrants from different national origins.

These observations are rather general and have to be adjusted for individual motives and behaviours at the micro level. The position of people with ethnic origin on the labour market depends normally on motivations and human capital factors, assets which may be analyzed by using e.g. the life-cycle model, the stress-threshold model or the expected utility model (see Fokkema, 1996). The socio-economic position of ethnic groups has extensively been studied in recent years, from the perspective of their skills, language abilities, flexible behaviour, and so forth. Sometimes, stigmatization is mentioned as a factor that acts as a negative predictor for someone's position on the job market. Stigma's however can be true or false. But it would be an interesting question whether ethnic groups have a higher or lower reputation or esteem

¹ There is a difference between migrant workers (or migrants) and members of ethnic minorities (ILO, 2000). Migrant workers are those people who have a job in a country that is different from their nationality, while ethnic minorities refer to a group of people who are different from the majority of the population in terms of physiological, cultural or other characteristics, even though they may have citizenship of the country in which they reside. In the Dutch context, the concept of 'allochtonous' has become en vogue; this refers to a person who lives in The Netherlands and of whom at least one parent is born in a foreign country. The distinction between migrants, ethnic people and allochtonous people is not always very transparent. It is less relevant for our study, as the persons under consideration in our fieldwork were not always distinguishable on the three above mentioned categories. So we will not offer here a conclusive demarcation criterion.

on the labour market than their indigenous equals. How do others judge their social or economic performance?

In the light of the previous observations, the present paper aims to investigate the social and economic performance of ethnic groups by addressing the question whether workers of ethnic origin in the service sector are more or less client-friendly than others. The paper will start with a literature review (Section 2) and then offer in Section 3 an empirical framework for studying the degree of customer-friendliness of ethnic workers in the service sector, in particular in the retail sector in Amsterdam. Several numerical results will be presented, followed by an interpretation of empirical findings on the basis of various literature sources (Section 4). The paper will be concluded with some prospective remarks.

2. Cultural Diversity

Migrants are usually a source of cultural diversity in a nation or city. The phenomenon of cultural diversity has been extensively investigated by Hofstede (1991, 2001). He interprets culture as a collective and interactive set of common identity values that are decisive for a group response (or behaviour) vis-à-vis its external environment. Culture manifests itself in different appearances in relation to geographic location, physical environment, nation, history, socio-economic traditions and conditions, political systems, religious circumstances, common language or dialect, technologies and work modes, or education and deeds. Clearly, culture is not always an unambiguous concept and may often be fuzzy in nature. Consequently, cross-cultural research is often based on qualitative characteristics of the target group and not so easy to quantify. The great merit of the work of Hofstede is that he has managed to design quantifiable indicators for cross-cultural comparison.

His research has prompted an avalanche of interesting research on cultural diversity, with a particular view to the development of cross-cultural comparative studies in industrial organizations and management practices. Interesting follow-up of his work can be found *inter alia* in Trompenaars (1994), Milberg et al. (1995), Verbeke (2000), Ardichvili et al. (2002), Christie et al. (2003), Shulruf et al. (2003), McSweeney (2002), Min et al. (2004), Ronald et al. (2004), Stephen et al. (2004) and Bergeron et al. (2005).

With the advent of the era of mass migration in Europe, the issue of cultural diversity has gained increasingly societal and political interest, unfortunately often from a negative perspective. It has even become a source of big concern in European societies. Modern cities mirror the openness of an industrialized global society, as they have become a meeting place of people from different national, cultural and ethnic origin. For example, an open city like Amsterdam will soon have a majority of people from a different ethnic origin than the indigenous Dutch population. Modern cities in the western world tend to become multi-cultural agglomerations.

The economic benefit of cultural diversity in the city may be manifold, as they may enrich the socio-economic opportunity base, create a varied supply of talents on the labour market, or enhance the creativity possibilities in the city (see Jacobs, 1961; Florida, 2002). The rich history of the city of Amsterdam has clearly demonstrated that a large influx of dedicated and professional migrants from several countries has generated new production modes and innovations which have contributed significantly to the wealth and international position of the city.

At the same time, it ought to be recognized that a large influx of people from different socio-cultural and ethnic origin may become problematic, if these do not share the same value system. The social tension in many cities becomes problematic, if a large migrant influx is accompanied by an above average unemployment, crime rate or unadjusted behaviour. The current frictions in many European cities demonstrate convincingly that mass migration and cultural diversity are not by definition socio-economic blessings. On the other hand, a period of economic recession (or retarded growth) may prompt the need to look for causes of the evil, and then often ethnic minorities may be subjected to unjustified accusations or stigma's regarding their integration behaviour. This may lead to a negative socio-cultural stigmatization of certain population groups and even aggravate their socio-economic position due to exclusion behaviour by the indigenous population.

Against the above sketched background of cultural diversity and socio-cultural stigmatization of ethnic groups, it is an interesting question to investigate whether employees having a different ethnic origin and working in the service sector have a higher or lower work performance than their indigenous colleagues, seen from the perspective of the customer's perception and satisfaction. On ethical grounds it is often argued that all employees in an organization should have equal opportunities (see e.g. Cox, 1993), but the question is of course whether all employees have the same work ethics and dedicated effort. This ethical stance is supported by socio-economic arguments that diversity creates innovative work conditions and learning mechanisms, favors flexibility and social resilience, and enhances the abilities to better understand the varied needs and wishes of a diversified group of clients.

An interest meeting place between ethnic employees and customers is the retail sector, and in particular a supermarket, where both employees and customers exhibit a high degree of diversity in terms of gender and ethnicity. There is a popular feeling that ethnic employees in a supermarket are less client-centered than indigenous employees. But this feeling may rest on an unjustified stigma, and hence the present paper sets out to critically examine the hypothesis that ethnic people are less client-friendly in the service sector (in particular, in a supermarket). We will offer first a very concise overview of relevant findings from the literature.

Our analysis will largely center around the concept of organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) and, therefore, we will start with a brief description of this notion. OCB is a term proposed by Bateman and Organ (1983) to refer to behaviour that is beneficial to the organization but which is neither prescribed nor enforced by the organization. OCB is not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system. Because these behaviours are not enforced, they are by definition optional and employees may withhold them without concern for possible sanctions by the organization. OCB theory actually originates from the fundamental work by Robbins (1979). Finally, it is important to know that OCBs have an important impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of work teams therefore contributing to the overall productivity of the organization.

OCB is often seen as an X-efficiency factor that may lead to a rise in the performance of productivity of a firm. In this context it is important to raise the question whether there may be an ethnicity or gender bias in OCB in relation to work habits or client-orientation.

The literature on customer-friendliness of employees offers sometimes interesting empirical results. For example, Bridges (1989) has investigated the client-orientation of male and female workers; the author finds that in general women are more client-friendly and supportive than their male counterparts. This finding is also supported by a study of Diefendorff et al. (2002).

There is also quite some empirical literature on the relationship between OCB and gender. Morrison (1994), for instance, comes to the interesting conclusion that women tend to see OCB as an intrinsic part of their work. In particular female workers tend to be more committed to providing support and assistance to others. In a related study, Ang et al. (2003) also include foreign workers and conclude that these have a lower work performance and a lower OCB. According to these authors, foreign workers contribute less to an organization than local workers. They are less committed to perform well and have generally a lower OCB, since their financial remuneration, career prospects and secondary labour conditions are less favourable. The differences between foreign and local workers is explained here as the basis of social exchange theory.

In our study we will in particular address the impact of ethnicity – next to the gender impact – on the customer-friendliness of employees in the service sector (more specifically supermarkets). The present research is largely exploratory in nature and aims to uncover empirical evidence in a field where facts – rather than stigma's – are rare. After the presentation of empirical findings we will interpret our results in the light of various prevailing theoretical frameworks, with a view to the formulation of lessons and recommendations for enhancement of motivation, for labour force management and for performance improvement (see e.g. Motowidlo et al.,1997; Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996; Van Dyne et al., 1995).

Work habits and behaviours may relate to competences specified in a job description on; labour contract or to complementary features of a social nature in a normal working environment. In the framework of our paper it is, therefore, important to make a distinction between the core task and the contextual performance of an employee. A contextual performance may originate from work ethics, personal dedication or group ambition of a worker; it is often called OCB or sometimes pro-social behaviour, as such a form of positive behaviour cannot be enforced in a labour contract, even though it favours a higher achievement level of an organization. Examples of an OCB are: voluntary or spontaneous actions to improve the work atmosphere, willingness to assist colleagues or to perform additional tasks, altruistic behaviour in case of work difficulties, politeness, open attitude and sportsmanship, etc.

3. The Customer-Friendliness of Ethnic Workers

In analyzing the hypothesis that employees with an ethnic origin have a lower work performance – in terms of customer-friendliness – than autochthonous workers, we have to make a distinction between the observer and the subject. As mentioned in Section 2, there are generally two main discriminating factors for differences in customer-friendliness in the services sector, viz. gender and ethnicity on the side of the worker and/or of the client. The same differences might apply to the observer, but since in our case the interest is in the performance difference (i.e., a higher or lower degree of work dedication of the employee), we use as observers neutral standard clients (so-called mystery-guests) who observe the behaviour and attitude of both ethnic and non-ethnic workers in the service sector (i.e., supermarkets in the retail sector), on the basis of a standard set of questions for testing their politeness, willingness to help or effort to satisfy the client. The only distinction made on the side of the mystery guests is gender, viz. whether the fictitious client is male or female. This is done, because findings from the literature suggest that the behaviour of personnel vis-à-vis women or men may be significantly different. On the side of the personnel, the only difference made here is between ethnic ('allochthonous') and indigenous ('autochthonous') employees. Clearly, there might be other discriminating features, such as age, appeal, dress and the like, but for reasons of practicality we have limited ourselves to a dichotomic classification on the side of both the observer-client (the mystery guest) and the employee (see Table 1). This table makes up our empirical test framework.

	Mystery Guest	
Employee	Male	Female
Ethnic ('Allochtonous')		
Non-Ethnic ('Autochtonous')		

Table 1. A dichotomic classification of observers and subjects according to degree of customer-friendliness

Our empirical field work was undertaken in the supermarket sector, where many young people are employed to fill the shelves, to assist clients, to carry commodities etc. The supermarket is a frequent meeting place between personnel and customers. In general, the skill requirements for a job in this sector are low, reason why also many young people of ethnic origin are employed there. So this is a proper place for undertaking research on our hypothesis regarding the assumed low customer-friendliness of ethnic employees.

The conceptual model used in our research can easily be mapped out as a linear causality model (see Figure 1), which follows previous ideas of Borman & Motowidlo (1997).

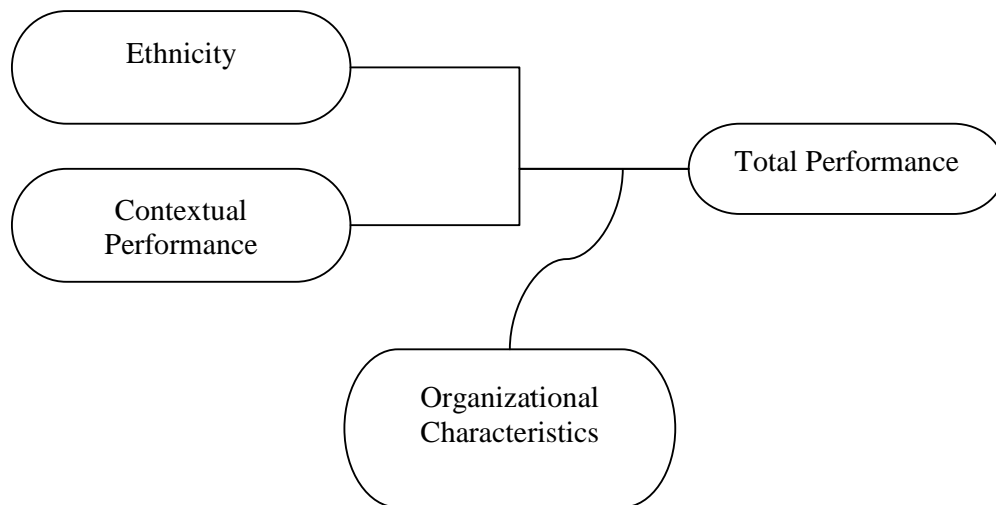


Figure 1. Conceptual model for the performance of ethnic employees

In empirical terms, customer-friendliness comprises feelings of hospitality, of welcome, of freedom of choice, of being properly served, of needs satisfaction and of respect and politeness. The degree of customer-friendliness may be measured by means of the following trichotomic class of performance criteria:

A: complete and optimal service delivery

B: intermediate service delivery

C: inferior service delivery.

Following a standard procedure (see Sahin, 2004) mystery guests were used to test the customer-friendliness of employees in a chain of supermarkets in Amsterdam. This was

done by means of a standard type of approach, which could easily be summarized in survey tables. The total sample of subjects was 110. From this total, 59 % was of ethnic origin and 41 % of Dutch origin. The division of observers (mystery guests) and employees in our sample according to the two criteria (gender and ethnicity) is given in Table 2. Most employees in all these supermarket chains were male, so that it was not useful to make a gender distinction among the personnel. The empirical results are given in Tables 3 and 4, for male and female observers, respectively.

Employee	Mystery Guest		
	Male	Female	Total
Ethnic ('Allochtonous')	20 (18 %)	45 (41 %)	65 (59 %)
Non-Ethnic ('Autochtonous')	20 (18 %)	25 (23 %)	45 (41 %)
Total	40 (36 %)	70 (64 %)	110 (100 %)

Table 2. A dichotomic classification of observers and subjects according to degree of customer-friendliness

Performance criteria				
Employee	A	B	C	Total
Ethnic	7 (17.5 %)	10 (25 %)	3 (7.5 %)	20 (50 %)
Non-ethnic	6 (15 %)	12 (30 %)	2 (5 %)	20 (50 %)
Total	13 (32.5 %)	22 (55 %)	5 (12.5 %)	40 (100 %)

Table 3. Classification of customer – friendliness on the basis of male mystery guests

Performance criteria				
Employee	A	B	C	Total
Ethnic	27 (39 %)	13 (19 %)	5 (7 %)	45 (65 %)
Non-ethnic	13 (18 %)	10 (14 %)	2 (3 %)	25 (35 %)
Total	40 (57 %)	23 (33 %)	7 (10 %)	70 (100 %)

Table 4. Classification of customer – friendliness on the basis of female mystery guests

The empirical results are summarized in a pie chart for both male and female mystery guests in Figures 2 and 3, respectively. The male mystery guests appear to have observed an equal number of employees among the two target groups, whereas the female mystery guests have observed more allochtonous than autochtonous employees. It is plausible that there are more allochtonous than autochtonous employees, because the skill requirements for a job in this sector are rather low, reason why many young people of ethnic origin are employed there. Figure 2 shows that for male mystery clients the differences between ethnic and indigenous employees are rather small. Most of the service delivery – and hence performance – is of

intermediate quality, and this holds for both ethnic and non-ethnic employees. It is noteworthy that Figure 3 on female clients offers a different and interesting picture; it turns out that ethnic workers offer a higher level of service than indigenous employees, while in general their service level offered to female clients is higher than offered to males.

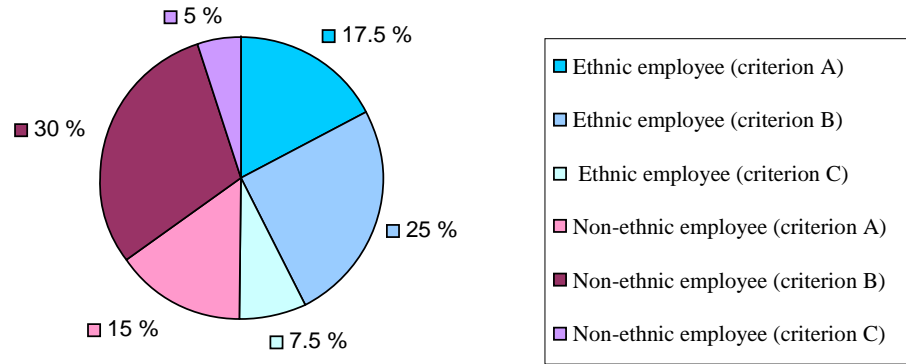


Figure 2. Pie chart for male mystery guests classified according to client-friendliness.

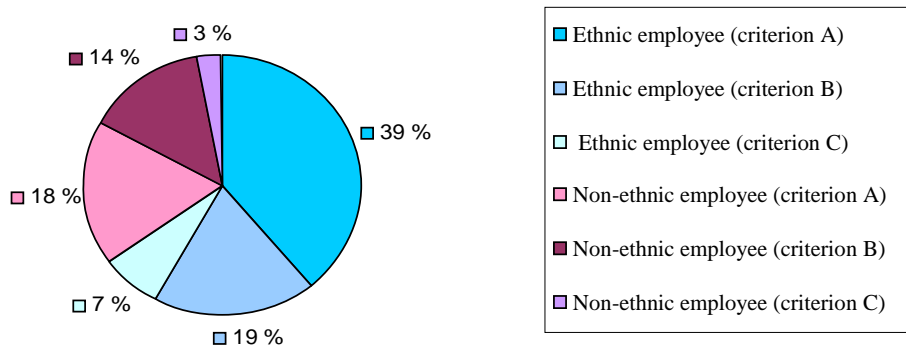


Figure 3. Pie chart for female mystery guests classified according to client-friendliness

We may thus conclude that our hypothesis on a lower customer-orientation of ethnic workers is false. There is not a significant difference between ethnic and non-ethnic employees, regarding their client-attitude and performance in the retail sector under study in Amsterdam.

It is noteworthy, that ethnic employees have a higher service orientation towards female customers, compared to their indigenous colleagues. In summary, our research hypothesis is not confirmed by an empirical research: allochtonous personnel does not have an inferior work attitude and lower performance level than autochtonous employees.

After the presentation of our empirical findings, it may now be interesting to interpret these results from the perspective of existing theories on social behaviour. This will be the subject matter of Section 4.

4. From Fact to Theory

As mentioned before, our fieldwork was exploratory in nature. Having now falsified our research hypothesis, at least for ethnic workers in the retail sector, it is interesting and necessary to interpret our results in the light of prevailing social science theories concerned.

The above results from a small sample of employees prompt intriguing research questions. Why is it reasonable to expect differences in workers' attitude and behaviour as a result of ethnic characteristics? Which factors may be expected to generate differentiating work performance among distinct groups of employees? There is a variety of explanatory models in the social science literature which highlight the relationship between attitude/behaviour and performance of workers in an organization. Drivers in workers' efforts may be: organizational culture, leadership and management style, personality and social identity, communication and socio-cognitive determinants and role models, or trust and social responsibility (e.g. OCB) (see Robbins, 1979). Personality is usually a prominent explanatory variable for OCB and incorporates such explanatory parameters as (see also Tosi et al., 2000): self-esteem (Van Dyke et al., 2000; Tang and Ibrahim, 1998), consciousness, "agreeableness" and "extravert behaviour" (see e.g. Organ & Lingl, 1995; Le Pine & Van Dyne, 2001; Moorman & Blakely, 1995).

It is important to recall that the total work performance in an organization comprises two constituents (see also Allen & Rush, 1998; Murphy, 1989; Rotundo, 2000), namely job performance (as an internal core competence) and contextual performance (as a complementary competence needed to support the social external portfolio of an organization, in particular OCB). As mentioned, OCB impacts on the firm's achievement, efficacy and client satisfaction (see Katz & Kahn, 1978; Borman et al., 1995; Weiner, 1994; Park & Sims, 1989; Podsakoff et al., 1997; Walz & Niehoff, 1996; Organ & Paine, 1999; Koys, 2001). It is essentially a social-supportive behavioural condition that is often not formally regulated in labour contracts but that acts as a moral obligation whose fulfillment may lead to a higher remuneration or recognition of the employee (e.g. Moorman, 1991; Kaufman et al., 2001). How do these observations relate to prevailing social science theories on organizational performance? In the next section we will offer a very concise review of a few prominent social science theories which may be helpful in interpreting empirical results and which will be instrumental in defining a proper research agenda. The theories reviewed here are; the theory of organizational culture, the social exchange theory, the social learning theory and the theory of psychological ownership.

5. Business Performance in the Social Sciences

The motivation for perception of and appreciation for a certain work task or job has been extensively dealt with in the social science literature. We will concisely describe here four classes of theories.

5.1 Theory of organizational culture

The theory of organizational culture regards culture as a collective mental programming mode that distinguishes members of one group or category of people's from others (see Hofstede, 1998). Members of a class share mental programs, i.e., they have a set of common values, attitudes, cognitive competences and behaviours which have been acquired in the course of time through learning mechanisms. Culture – as a collective social phenomenon – is part of the mental program of any individual. The cultural background influences thus the value systems, attitudes and behavioural patterns of workers in an organization (Hofstede, 1980). Culture – as a generic concept – has several dimensions or discriminating features, such as the degree of power (distance) of individualism, masculinity, dominance (or assertiveness dominance), uncertainty avoidance through regulatory or institutional systems, or specific strategic long-term thinking.

The functioning of people in an organization is in particular determined by individualism and masculinity, while the factor OCB appears to be largely determined by the dimension “individualism – collectivism” (see Van Dyne et al., 2000; Moorman & Blakely, 1995). Individualism leads to the pursuance of self-interest, which creates a business-type of relationship between a worker and the organization. In case of collectivism, the worker is mainly seen as a member – and representation – of a common group with its distinct culture (e.g. Hofstede, 1980). It is clear that this theoretical framework may be helpful in explaining differences in attitude and behaviour in relation to customer-friendliness among culturally different employees, as culture shapes apparently uniformity in behaviours in a group. Ethnic cultural differences may lead to different mental programmes and hence to different response patterns (e.g., vis-à-vis women).

5.2 Social exchange theory

The relationship between OCB and labour satisfaction constitutes a focal point in social exchange theory; there is a stronger correlation between behaviourism and satisfaction than between performance and satisfaction (see Fisher, 2003; Organ, 1997; Barrick & Mount, 1991; Havill et al., 1998). In this theory, actors are assumed to pay something in return to the organization. Clearly, this research has mainly addressed the internal performance of a business organization, and hence incorporates also contextual factors such as OCB (e.g. Borman et al., 1995). The latter factor offers of course a better competitive edge for a high-

quality OCB, as it contributes to the customers' loyalty. In social exchange theory the assumption is made that the contextual performance is a combination of the business context and someone's personality (which is co-determined by a socialization process) (see Tosi et al., 2000).

In the context of our empirical research on customer-friendliness we may thus postulate that the employees' behaviour is partly genetically determined by someone's personality and partly socially by an open attitude vis-à-vis new experiences. Mutual interaction – with positive social externalities – may then be a vehicle to improve business performance. Such behaviour can of course be further stimulated through the provision of good role models and training.

5.3 Social learning theory

Learning means a change in behaviors and attitudes after an experience (Catania, 1997). It may emerge as a result of classical conditioning á la Pavlov, operational conditioning due to a system of carrots and sticks (see Skinner, 1954), or modeling through observations (see Bandura, 1977). The latter learning mechanism is based on social role models and takes for granted that observing the benefits of such models will stimulate good behaviour on the basis of expected future consequences.

For our empirical research, it is noteworthy that customer-friendliness may be learned by means of role model instruments, especially if the management recognizes and rewards good role models, so that others will imitate it (see Pfeffer, 1994). The remuneration for good behaviour may be instrumental (e.g., 'the employee of the week') or financially (see Croonen, 1997; Daniels, 1999).

5.4 The theory of psychological ownership

In this conceptual framework the organization is emotionally seen as a collective ownership (Furby, 1978), through which work commitment, job satisfaction and self-image can be supported, leading to better achievements and a higher OCB (Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004; Wilpert, 1991; Etzioni, 1991; Nuttin, 1987). Mental ownership complies with three basic needs of people, viz. 'home', efficacy and self-identity.

For our empirical research the labour satisfaction of employees is clearly critical, as this creates more commitment to the organization (see Diefendorff et al., 2002; Martin & Hofer, 1995). In this context, it is important to distinguish between full- and part-time workers, as part-time workers have normally also other commitments and hence a lower degree of dedication to the organization. Performance management of part-time workers – a dominant phenomenon in the supermarket sector – is then a first challenge.

6. Conclusions and Lessons

Our research has brought to light three important findings. First, the differences in work performance between foreign and native workers are empirically not evident, although there may be some alternative factors playing a role, such as gender (on the side of the client) or part-time/full-time (on the side of the workers). Second, there is not a single social science theory that offers a comprehensive explanatory framework, but each of the theories reveals certain aspects that are certainly relevant for a better understanding and interpretation of our findings. And finally, contextual performance has proven to be an important factor in performance management and can lead to a step-wise improvement, especially if a higher motivation induces a better performance (see also Ulrich, 1997 and Zairi & Jarrar, 2000).

A model which may be helpful in future operational management tasks for performance policy in the service sector is the so-called ABC (Antecedents-Behavior-Consequences)-model (see for details Croonen, 1997; Nijhof & Rietdijk, 1999; Daniels, 2000). This model would certainly call for further empirical fieldwork. It seems plausible that more focused attention for contextual performance may increase the appeal and the efficiency of supermarkets.

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