

An Examination
of the Influence of Organisational Culture
on the Service Predispositions of Hospitality Workers
in Tropical North Queensland

Thesis submitted by

Josephine PRYCE

DipHospMgt, BBus, BAdmin(Tourism)(Hons)

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James Cook University

CAIRNS QLD 4870

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my husband, Ron, who set me free.

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PREFACE

I have worked in service industries for as long as I can remember. When I was seven my father leased a poultry farm and we serviced a large community on the outskirts of Melbourne. From the beginning I was always at the frontline assisting my Dad with sales and customer service. Eventually, I got my first paying job as a shop assistant in the local corner store. Here I was able to continue the personalized style of customer service I had grown accustomed to and took great pride in. It was not until I began working for the supermarket chains that I noticed differences in employees' attitudes to their work and how this impacted on customer satisfaction. I marveled at how organizations sought to make profits while employing individuals who were not service-oriented. Years later while working for Australia Post, I realized that there were organizations who tried to address these issues. Customer-service training programs were made available to those individuals who struggled with work at the frontline. Yet despite such initiatives some individuals did not improve. Further, I noticed a unique camaraderie between individuals from different offices. Individuals moved from one office to another and settled in easily. It was like there was a common work culture that united employees.

Over the past ten years, I have worked in a number of hotels and found similar issues. Hotel workers' behaviour can be inappropriate and unpredictable. Some employees' may have personalities suitable to working in hospitality but lack the attitude to overcome the difficulties and pressures of the job. They fail to deliver quality service in an industry that demands working long, irregular hours in emotionally and labour intensive environments. I have often questioned whether it is an organizational 'thing'. Much is written and said about organizational culture. I have thought perhaps there is some association. On the other hand, like Australia Post, I noticed a certain camaraderie that transcends organization boundaries and connects the workers within the same occupation.

These observations and thoughts have perplexed me for some time and were the impetus for this study into the influence of organizational culture on the service predispositions of hotel workers.

ABSTRACT

The past decade has witnessed a continued emphasis on services and the delivery of quality service. More recently, increasing attention has been focused on the hospitality industry as it has become more widely recognized as an important sector of the service economy. The hospitality industry, like other service industries, is a people-oriented industry. The importance of satisfying customers and its association with quality is well established. Customers' perceptions of the level of quality within the service transaction are dependent on the attitudes and behaviours of service providers. Traditionally hospitality workers are expected to exhibit positive attitudes toward the customer. In the author's experience this is not always the case. It seems that attitudes alone are not responsible for delivery of quality service. Hospitality workers are seemingly influenced by an overarching industry culture. This study sets out to explore the service predispositions of hospitality workers and examines the relationship between the attitudes of hospitality workers and organizational culture.

In an attempt to examine the influence of the organizational culture on the service predispositions of hospitality workers, data was gathered from six four-star hotels in Tropical North Queensland, Australia. Research into the key components of service predispositions is emergent and while there is a plethora of research into organizational culture, there are no studies that have investigated the relationship between organizational culture and employees' service predispositions. First, profiles of service predispositions were developed. Second, the nature and characteristics of organizational culture were examined. Third, the relationship between service predispositions and organizational culture was investigated.

The Service Predispositions Instrument (SPI) was used amongst a sample of 254 hotel employees to assess their attitudes toward providing quality service. Initially, the data was analysed and used to validate the dimensionality of the questionnaire. Thereafter, the 'service attitudes' of hospitality workers were collated to develop hospitality SPI norms. The results showed that some dimensions were considered to be more important by hotel employees for delivering quality service. The greatest value was given to the dimensions of *communication*, *competence* and *individual consideration*. This suggests that

hospitality workers recognize the importance of communicating clearly, openly and with enthusiasm with customers, of being confident in the command of skills and knowledge necessary to perform the job and of accepting that all customers are different and so, have a willingness to consider that their needs on an exclusive basis are necessary. These three dimensions could then be considered as 'industry norms' for the delivery of exceptional service.

Organisational culture was measured using an instrument that consisted of 96 seven-point Likert-type statements. This instrument represented a set of questions that were developed from issues important to hotel workers and the literature. Once the reliability and validity of the instrument were tested, the data was analysed using a range of analytical procedures, including correlations, ANOVAs and multiple regressions, to develop a profile of the organisational culture in hotels and to establish the relationship between organisational culture and employees' service predispositions. Principal components analysis (PCA) produced 28 underlying dimensions of organisational culture. The findings showed that *importance of job, customer orientation, rituals, training and role ambiguity* were seen as the most important components of hotel culture. More importantly, the relationship between organizational culture and service predispositions was confirmed and the notion of the existence of an overarching occupational hospitality culture emerged. It is proposed that employees of the hotel industry, as an occupational identity, generate an occupational hospitality culture where hospitality workers share some commonalities about the nature of being hospitable and service delivery, regardless of the hotel or firm they work for. This culture is a powerful, ubiquitous influence, which may override organisational hospitality culture and drive the behaviour and performance of hospitality workers.

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