EMPLOYEE BEHAVIORS CREATING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION:
A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY ON SERVICE ENCOUNTERS AT A HOTEL

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ABSTRACT: Because creating a successful customer–employee encounter is significant for the enhancement of customer satisfaction, it is critical to determine which employee behaviors primarily influence customers' perceptions. In this study, semi–structured interviews and focus group interviews were conducted with employees at a five–star hotel establishment who were continuously in contact with customers, and the findings were compared with the results of questionnaires completed by employees and customers. The three most significant positive employee behaviors were "being polite and cheerful", "making the customer feel special" and "being knowledgeable enough to respond to questions", whereas the two most significant negative employee behaviors were "giving negative answers and strong reactions to questions" and "being sulky". It was observed that customers and employees shared similar opinions on the positive and negative impacts of these behaviors. **Keywords:** Customer–employee encounter, behaviors, attitudes, reasons, customer satisfaction, case study, Sakarya, Turkey.

RESUMEN: Crear un encuentro exitoso entre cliente y funcionario es importante para mejorar la satisfacción del cliente, por lo que es crítico determinar cuáles las conductas de los funcionarios que más influyen las percepciones de los clientes. En este estudio, fueron realizadas entrevistas semiestructuradas y grupos especializados con funcionarios de una unidad hostelera de 5 estrellas, en que os funcionarios estaban en constante contacto con los clientes. Los resultados fueron comparados con los resultados de los cuestionarios aplicados a los funcionarios y a los clientes. Los tres más significativos comportamientos positivos de los clientes fueron "ser bien educados y alegres", "hacer con que el cliente se sienta especial" y "tener conocimiento suficiente para responder a preguntas", mientras que los dos más significativos comportamientos negativos de los funcionarios fueron "dar respuestas negativas y fuertes reacciones a las preguntas" y "que sean malhumorados". Se observó que los clientes y los funcionarios tenían opiniones iguales en lo que respecta a los impactos positivos y negativos de esos comportamientos. Palabras clave: Encuentro cliente-funcionario, comportamientos, actitudes, razones, satisfacción del cliente, estudio de caso, Sakarya, Turquía.

RESUMO: Criar um encontro bem sucedido entre cliente e funcionário é importante para melhorar a satisfação do cliente, pelo que é crítico determinar quais os comportamentos dos funcionários que mais influenciam as perceções dos clientes. Neste estudo, foram efetuadas entrevistas semi-estruturadas e focus groups com funcionários de uma unidade hoteleira de

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5 estrelas, em que os funcionários estavam em constante contacto com os clientes. Os resultados foram comparados com os resultados dos questionários aplicados aos funcionários e aos clientes. Os três mais significativos comportamentos positivos dos clients foram "serem bem-educados e alegres", "fazer o cliente sentir-se especial" e "ter conhecimento suficiente para responder a questões", enquanto os dois mais significativos comportamentos negativos dos funcionários foram "dar respostas negativas e fortes reações às questões" e "serem mal--humorados". Observou-se que os clientes e os funcionários tinham opiniões semelhantes quanto aos impactos positivos e negativos desses comportamentos. **Palavras-chave:** Encontro cliente-funcionário, comportamentos, atitudes, razões, satisfação do cliente, estudo de caso, Sakarya, Turquia.

INTRODUCTION

Service quality and customer satisfaction in the tourism sector depend considerably on employees. The behaviors displayed by employees towards customers in the process of service production determine the customers' perception of service quality as well as their satisfaction. For instance, Juwaheer (2004:350) regards employees as having a greater impact than other factors on customer satisfaction. In this sense, it is of great significance that employees display appropriate behaviors for a service experience that customers perceive as pleasing and high quality. Face–to–face encounters between customers and service employees are of critical importance to customers' satisfaction and loyalty. Successful customer–employee encounters can help establishments to ensure their continuation and increase their profitability.

At hotel establishments, there is a high interaction between employees and customers. Because hotels establishments must spend a great deal of time and money on marketing and promotional activities in order to attract new customers, it is important for them to maintain loyalty among their existing customers. Because successful customer–employee encounter is very important in creating such loyalty, it is important to examine the elements that determine the success of such an encounter, particularly in terms of the employee behaviors that have positive and negative effects on customer perceptions.

This study aims to reveal the employee behaviors that cause the success or failure of customer–employee encounters at hotel establishments, as well as the attitudes and reasons underlying these behaviors, and to compare the comments of employees and customers regarding how customers evaluate these behaviors.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Employees are service providers who make a connection between the customer and the establishment (Bitner, 1995:247) and are the

most important elements that represent the establishment in the eye of customers (Paulin et al., 2000:461). Customers encounter employees whenever they enter a hotel, go to a restaurant, or board a plane. Even a single employee can easily determine a customer's impression of the service establishment, because customers tend to associate the service provider with the service itself (Rafaeli, 1989:245). According to Paulin et al. (2000:462), the employees in direct contact with the customer directly influence the way in which the customer perceives the establishment. Therefore, the behaviors of those employees and customers' perceptions regarding those employees affect the quality of relationship formed between the customer and the establishment. The customer's satisfaction with the establishment is determined by his or her satisfaction with the employees with whom he or she is in contact (Crosby & Stephens, 1987:407; Singh, 1991). Customers' satisfaction with employees will affect their satisfaction with the establishment, which in turn may cause them to display positive behaviors towards the establishment (Singh, 1991:227). Therefore, employee behaviors appear to be the key element of customer satisfaction.

Employees at different service establishments are likely to display different behaviors and emotional orientations towards the customer; for instance, a nurse is expected to display the behaviors of care, attention and listening towards a patient, who might be regarded as a customer (Steinberg & Figart, 1999:178), while other behaviors might be expected from a hotel employee. Therefore, it is crucial to first determine what behaviors are perceived as significant in creating a strong positive or negative effect on hotel customers.

On the other hand, some factors may be defined which direct employees to specific behaviors in service encounters. Some significant pressures relate to the nature of the job and the structure of the demand. When customers visit a hotel establishment for a vacation or holiday, those employees who work face to face with them should allow them to relax by avoiding any discussion of work–related issues. Furthermore, employees must maintain the hotel's image through their emotional and aesthetic attitudes, clothing, and behaviors (Guerrier & Adib, 2003:1400). Unless employees treat customers frankly and sincerely, customers may perceive the hotel climate as controlled, sterile and inauthentic.

Customers are also likely to welcome natural interactions with employees who respond and relate to them as individuals, despite the expectations of the establishment, job, or social environment. Conversely, in large enterprises, behavior patterns towards the customer are more certain, the customer–employee relationship is determined in a more bureaucratic style, and specific standards are expected from the employee (Guerrier & Adib, 2003:1401).

DEFINITION OF CUSTOMER–EMPLOYEE ENCOUNTER IN THE CAUSE–EFFECT RELATIONS

The fact that an employee is an integral part of the service makes the successful employee–customer encounter more significant for customer satisfaction. The customer–employee encounter refers to the mutual interaction resulting from the encounter between a customer and a service employee, as well as the inputs and outputs it creates (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996). As a moment of interpersonal relationship, such an encounter encompasses some mutual behaviors displayed at the time of contact. Customer satisfaction, which might be defined as the full and complete fulfillment of customer needs (Kotler et al., 1996:3–5) or as the agreement of a customer's emotions before and after consuming a product or service (Westbrook, 1987:258–270), should occur as a result of this interaction. High employee performance is required to generate customer satisfaction by meeting or exceeding the customer's expectations (Emery & Fredendall, 2002:217–229).

In current literature, service encounter is taken in hand mostly as a part of activities identified in 'relationship marketing' (Gremler & Bitner, 1994). Success of service encounter has been evaluated by inferring some critical personal skills and focusing on management of these skills (Nickson et al., 2005). Many researchers have examined service encounters (and their success) by considering premises such as communication (Mattsson & den Haring, 1998), customer orientation (Donavan & Hocutt, 2001), customization of service experience (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996), expectations (Coye, 2004), management commitment to service quality, behavior–based evaluation, empowerment, role conflict and role ambiguity, self–efficacy, job satisfaction and employee adaptability (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996), trust (Halliday, 2004), customer's displayed emotions (Mattila & Enz, 2002), gender (Mattila et al., 2003), positive and negative emotions, mutual understanding, extras (to pay special attention, give something extra, etc.), authenticity, competence, and minimum failing (Price, Arnould, & Deibler, 1995), as well as consequences such as encounter satisfaction (Danaher & Mattsson, 1994), confirmation of truth (whether the firm's promises are kept; Bitner, 1995), customers' perception of service quality (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996), switching behavior of customers (Keaveney, 1995), affective response and service satisfaction (Price, Arnould, & Tierney, 1995).

Hansen and Danaher (1999) focus on inconsistent performance within the encounter, emphasizing that both the initial and final service should be performed equally well. Researchers have found that better performance during the service encounter produces more positive judgments than bad or average performance. According to Akhtar

et al. (2009), basic premises of customer dissatisfaction within the service encounter are existence of problematic customers, employee response to service delivery system failures, employee response to customer needs, and requests and unprompted and unsolicited employee actions. Allen and Grisaffe (2001) argue that the different employee attitudes (e.g., organizational commitment) will influence employee behavior and have different effects on customer reactions (e.g., customer satisfaction, repeat purchase behavior). Arnould and Price (1993) focus on provider–customer relationship in delivering an extraordinary experience. Customers are active participants in service outcomes and provider–customer interdependence is relatively high. According to Arnould and Price (1993:28),

"Research on service encounters has concentrated on comparatively brief transactions. Virtually no literature examines temporally extended service provider roles. One distinguishing feature of extended encounters is long transactions that provide more time for the customer to react to the emotional behavior of an employee."

Bitner (1990) discusses extended service encounters. As a service encounter refers to 'a period of time during which a consumer directly interacts with a service' (Bitner, 1990:70), the success of a service encounter depends on the basic principles of customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction after the service encounter is closely dependent on customers' attributions, which may be evaluated in the context of three dimensions: locus (Who is responsible?), control (Did the responsible party have control over the cause?), and stability (Is the cause likely to recur?). Bitners' (1990) research has been designed to focus on physical surroundings and employee responses as a critical process which creates customer attribution.

Bitner et al. (1990) evaluate the success of service encounters by analyzing critical incidents gathered from hotels, restaurants, and airline industries. Their findings reflect that the factors for satisfaction or dissatisfaction may be separated into three groups: employee response to service delivery system failures, employee response to customer needs and requests, and unprompted and unsolicited employee actions. They found that customers were primarily satisfied by behaviors from the third group, followed by the second group, while dissatisfaction behaviors were found to be primarily in the first group, followed by the third and second. Bitner et al. (1994) studied the service encounter from the perspective of service employees working in hotels, restaurants, and airline industries. Their analytical study sought to understand the roots of customer satisfaction by evaluating the success of service encounters from the employee perspective. They found four categories of employee behaviors responsible for the success of service encounters: Responses to requests, responses to failures, unprompted actions, and reactions to problematic cus-

tomers. The first three of these are fixed dimensions from the findings of research conducted on customers.

On the other hand, Bitner et al. (2000) analyze service encounters within the new influences of technology. Technology has some special impacts on service encounters as it allows for possibilities to (1) customize service offerings, (2) recover from service failure, and (3) spontaneously delight customers and increase the efficiency of these processes. Mattsson and den Haring (1998) have focused on the dynamics of communication between service providers and their clients in a hotel. According to them, communication is influenced by the activities that clients and service providers jointly pursue and, consequently, these activities give rise to communicative roles that are "acted" out repeatedly. Danaher and Mattsson (1994) focused on the aims of encounters at various times; for example, they argued that there are different satisfactory factors/behaviors and satisfaction levels for encounters on customers' arrival, on coffee breaks, at lunch, in a conference room, and so forth. Donavan and Hocutt (2001) define employee behaviors and attitudes that create customer satisfaction in the service encounter as customer orientation. Customer perceptions of the contact employee's customer–oriented behaviors were found to be positively related to customer satisfaction with the service encounter as well as customer commitment to the firm.

Gremler and Bitner (1994) evaluate the service encounter as a phenomenon that encompasses more exchange points than the employee and customer may realize. They consider the employee–employee service encounter, focusing on the concept of the internal customer and viewing employees as internal customers. Nickson et al. (2005), focusing on the personal image and appearance of employees in service encounters, confirmed that appearance is the second most important factor after personality in the eyes of service employers.

Much of the research in this area has associated the success of service encounters with customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction. The research unit of such studies is most often customers, sometimes employees, and occasionally both of these. The service encounter has been studied as a structure with premises and consequences and operationalized by developing items related to different variables. A few studies have dealt directly with the behaviors (mostly employee behaviors) displayed in service encounters by examining them in specific items.

In this study, behaviors that affect the success of service encounters were gathered using a field study, and the effects of these behaviors were determined comparatively from the perspectives of both the customer and the employee. Although a few studies have examined the process of service encounters by considering the views of both employees and customers, we aimed to focus specifically on service

encounters in a case hotel and to detect different dimensions in the service process. This research is original in its use of a case study approach to create an opportunity to determine effective behaviors by considering the views of employees as well as of their real customers. Thus, this research has examined actual service encounters occurring in a hotel. Previous studies that have focused on behaviors have measured and developed such behaviors in groups; that is, they take consideration "groups of behaviors" instead of individual behaviors. In our study, we aimed to determine most important individual behaviors and rank each behavior's power to determine customer satisfaction in service encounter.

Differences in the attitudes and behaviors of the employee in the customer–employee encounter cause reactions and decisions by customers, resulting in a change in customer satisfaction. The impact of different attitudes and behaviors of different employees on customer satisfaction constitutes the main issue addressed in this research. In this study, which was conducted to determine factors affecting the success of the customer–employee encounter, we sought answers to the following two interlinked questions.

RQ1. *What employee behaviors do employees think positively and negatively affect the success of customer–employee encounters? What are their attitudes and perceptions underlying these behaviors, and what are the reasons for these behaviors?*

RQ2. *What employee behaviors that impact the success of customer–employee encounters have the greatest effect on customer satisfaction (from the perspective of customers and employees comparatively)?*

METHODOLOGY

Both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used in this study to investigate what behaviors result in successful customer–employee encounters, what attitudes/motivation and sources influenced these behaviors, and how these behaviors affected customer satisfaction. A sample establishment was selected, and data were obtained from its customers and from the employees of this establishment that worked in contact with customers in the process of service production. The sample establishment is a five–star hotel operating in Sapanca, Sakarya, and the sample of the study consists of the employees and customers of this hotel. We chose to analyze the service processes of a sample establishment in order to obtain details of customer–employee encounters as well as the opinions of both employees and customers. In addition, the selection of a large hotel establishment was particularly preferred by the researchers, who believed that the institutionalized nature and more balanced distribution of jobs, responsibilities,

and authority associated with large establishments (as compared to small establishments) would make it possible to obtain clearer results with respect to the phenomenon to be observed. Accordingly, the hotel with the highest capacity and physical equipment in the province of Sakarya was chosen as the sample establishment.

Data were obtained and analyzed in a four–stage process: (1), a semi–structured interview was conducted with employees who were in contact with the customers, (2) a focus group interview was conducted with other employees, (3) a questionnaire was completed by employees in contact with the customers (different employees from those in the first two stages), and (4) a questionnaire was completed by the hotel customers.

The semi–structured interview was intended to obtain the opinions of those employees who worked in contact with the customers about the success of the encounter. The questions asked were intended to ascertain employees' opinions regarding the influential behaviors in such encounters, the employee attitudes/perceptions causing these behaviors, and the reasons for these behaviors. In the semi–structured interview, 10 different employees from different departments working in contact with customers were individually interviewed. The interviews ranged from 15 to 35 minutes in length.

The focus group interview was intended to rank the behaviors identified in the first stage by order of significance. A focus group interview, one of the most commonly used data collection techniques, provides an opportunity to discuss a given topic with a specific number of participants in the same medium. Eight employees attended the focus group interview, which lasted 80 minutes.

A total of 39 contact employees completed the questionnaire in the next stage; at this point, nearly all the contact employees working for the case hotel had participated in some aspect of the study. After conducting the questionnaire on the sample of employees, permission was obtained from the hotel managers to distribute the questionnaire to customers staying at the hotel. As many customers as could be reached were targeted using the convenience sampling method. Responses were obtained from 240 customers; after removing responses that were unusable due to missing data, 207 questionnaires were considered valid.

To prepare questions for the questionnaire, a scale based on the qualitative findings was used. In the first section of the questionnaire form, respondents' demographic characteristics (gender, age, education level, and marital status) were used to define sample parameters, along with the number of stays at the hotel and reasons for traveling (for customers) or the number of years working in the hotel industry and in their current department (for employees). The second section included the questions that had been created to quantify the factors

creating satisfaction in the customer–employee encounter. For instance, in the first question, the impact of an employee's attitude of politeness and cheerfulness on customer satisfaction was assessed. The impact of various factors on satisfaction was measured using a five–point scale consisting of the degrees "ineffective", "slightly effective", "effective", "highly effective" and "extremely effective".

Studies focusing individually on either customers or employees are quite common in the literature. However, studies that consider both groups together and focus on the customer–employee encounter are less numerous. Also, in many related studies, quantification has been performed using the questionnaire technique, but factors such as employees' social desirability or fear of the top management/employer have not been addressed in the reliability analyses. Moreover, the application of the same questions to employees in different occupations and to each organization in almost all sectors might negatively affect the reliability of the study. To address these issues, a semi–structured interview and a focus group interview were conducted in this study in order to obtain more reliable results regarding the employee's evaluation of the customer–employee encounter. Also, in their discussion of research limitations, many previous qualitative surveys have recommended a quantitative examination of employee responses. These recommendations were taken into consideration in our study; in order to ensure the validity of the responses, a questionnaire was given to both the employees and customers.

FINDINGS

Findings of the Semi–Structured Interview

Of the ten employees who participated in the semi–structured interview, three worked in the Department of Sales & Marketing, three in the Front Office Department, two in the Department of Catering Services, one in the Department of Guest Relations and one in the Department of Activities. Six participants were 25–30 years of age, three were 31–35, and one was over 36.

Interview participants indicated that in customer–employee encounters, employees focused first and foremost on offering the customer the product that he/she had purchased and therefore was entitled to receive. This approach might be called product–oriented, as the expectation of customer satisfaction is based primarily on the qualities of the product. The fulfillment of what had been promised to the customer, the offering of services with a better product, or the provision

of more than the product the customer had paid for was considered by the employees to be sufficient to make the customer happy. Some participants noted the significance of making the customer feel that he/she was special, even if this was not their job.

Regarding employee behaviors that affect the customers' happiness, the participants clearly expressed some behavior patterns. For instance, participants frequently expressed the importance of behaving cheerfully and smiling. Other behaviors mentioned included using polite expressions and gestures, making eye contact, treating the customer as a member of the family, using an appropriate tone of voice, and making substantial efforts to solve problems.

When identifying the elements underlying their performance in encounters with customers, the participants also highlighted some factors. The rewarding and wage policies of the establishment were naturally considered important factors. Other factors the interviewees felt impacted their performance in encounters with customers were: the quality of the management and the hotel system, the importance attached to in–service training, the regard employees hold for their jobs and the importance they associate with their jobs, the authority employees are given to make decisions about their jobs, the quality of employees' relations with colleagues, how well–organized working hours are, whether overtime is left to the initiative of the employee, and the quality of tools and materials provided by management for the job.

Regarding incentives provided by the establishment, participants indicated that it is quite important to provide employees with the wages they deserve, as well as to offer bonus opportunities. Determination of authority and roles and provision of welfare within the establishment were expressed as another factor. In addition, it was believed that the establishment should trust its staff and that some opportunities should be provided to serve something extra (e.g., food or beverage) to customers.

Participants also discussed customer characteristics that might influence the encounter. Although the overwhelming majority of the participants stated that they performed a standard presentation regardless of customer characteristics, they agreed that it was necessary to talk differently to some groups due to age or profession, and that doing so might be more effective in ensuring customer satisfaction. Even though a significant portion of the participants stated that they were unaffected by the attitudes and behaviors displayed by the customer in the encounter, some participants stated that they had difficulty keeping their temper under control due to the negative acts of certain guests and that this might be reflected in their behaviors toward those guests.

The participants were also found to be highly sensitive to positive reactions by the customer in the encounter. Participants identified a

display of gratitude in the form of a smile in return for the service a customer received as a very pleasing behavior that took away all their fatigue and job stress.

Finally, the participants were asked why they thought customers reacted differently to the behaviors of different employees. Opinions on this matter related to differences in the amount of sincerity, cheerfulness and cogency displayed by employees towards the customer in the encounter as well as the customer's desire to talk to a person with more authority and to hear the same answer from an authorized person.

As a result of the semi–structured interview in the first stage of the research, efficient behaviors in encounters with customers, the attitudes and perceptions underlying those behaviors, and the reasons for those behaviors were identified to some extent (Table 1). Next, a focus group interview was conducted in order to make these findings more concise and clear as well as to reinforce reliability.

Findings of the Focus Group Interview

Of the employees who participated in the focus group interview, one was employed in the Department of Sales and Marketing, two in the Front Office Department, three in the Department of Catering, one in the Housekeeping Department, and one in the Department of Spa & Wellness. Six of the participants were 25–30 years of age, while two were 31–35.

In the focus group interview, the information obtained from the semi–structured interview was reevaluated and clarified, and some new factors were added, allowing for a comparison to be made among these factors and for the factors to be put in order according to their significance.

Employee Behaviors Thought to Positively Influence the Customer and the Attitudes and Reasons Underlying the Behaviors

According to the results of the semi–structured interview and the focus group interview, there are many behavior patterns that make the customer happy in the encounter. The behaviors identified were: polite and cheerful, making the guest feel special (e.g., addressing the guest by name and offering individualized service), looking neat, offering the proper service the first time, being knowledgeable enough to respond to questions, being ready and willing, showing initiative by making extra efforts, creating a solution by reaching a compromise, and offering a service above the customer's expectations (See Table 1).

Table 1: Employee Behaviors That Affect the Customer and Attitudes and Perceptions and Causes Underlying These Behaviors (from Most to Least Significant)

	Positively Affect the Customer	Negatively Affect the Customer
BEHAVIORS	1. Being polite and cheerful 2. Making the guest feel special (Addressing the guest by name and offering individualized service) 3. Looking neat 4. Offering the proper service the first time 5. Being knowledgeable enough to respond to questions 6. Being ready and willing 7. Taking initiative by making extra efforts 8. Creating a solution by reaching a compromise 9. Offering a service above expectations	1. Being sulky 2. Being unable to meet demands or respond to questions 3. Giving negative answers with strong reactions 4. Acting without asking the customer 5. Making the customer feel unhappy and not being interested in the customer
	Behind Behaviors Which Positively Affect The Customers	**Behind Behaviors Which Negatively Affect The Customers**
ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS	1. Sincerity 2. Taking a shine to the guest 3. Trying to create high performance in service offering 4. Attitude of the guest 5. Making the guest feel that there will not be any problems 6. Personal characteristics 7. Decency 8. Conscience 9. Empathy	1. Stress 2. Workload 3. Lacking authority to use initiative 4. Fatigue 5. Lack of opportunities 6. Emotional state 7. Feeling uncomfortable with one's position 8. Reflecting reactions to the administration in encounter with guest 9. Thinking that this kind of behavior is what is required
	Behind Behaviors Which Positively Affect The Customers	**Behind Behaviors Which Negatively Affect The Customers**
CAUSES	1. Training 2. Empowerment 3. Provision of customer satisfaction 4. Interests of the workplace 5. Sense of duty 6. Behaving in a professional manner 7. Personal interest 8. Feeling a responsibility 9. Fear of losing the job 10. Desire to avoid having the department experience any problems 11. Word–of–mouth advertising	1. Working conditions and inadequacy of wage 2. Manner of the customer 3. Role ambiguity 4. Disliking the customer 5. Unethical behavior of the customer 6. Feeling deceived 7. Lying on the part of the customer 8. Reflecting the problems in one's private life on the job 9. Workload 10. High working hours 11. Employee's obligation to consider himself/herself 12. Lack of understanding shown by management 13. Training

Participants' opinions varied regarding the attitudes underlying behaviors they thought made the customer happy. When discussing these attitudes, the employees stated that the moment at which the event took place was very important and that the attitudes underlying their behaviors were formed at that moment. According to the participants, these attitudes included sincerity, taking a shine to the guest, trying to create high performance in service offering, the attitude of the guest, making the guest feel that there would not be any problems, personal characteristics, decency, conscience, and empathy.

When discussing the reasons for the employee behaviors thought to have a positive impact on the customer, the participants noted that these reasons were not necessarily due to the employees alone but might also be due to managerial, environmental and establishment factors. The factors suggested as reasons were training, empowerment, provision of customer satisfaction, interests of the workplace, sense of duty to the hotel, behaving in a professional manner, personal interest, feeling a responsibility, fear of losing the job, desire to avoid having the department experience any problems, and word–of–mouth advertising for the hotel.

Employee Behaviors Thought to Negatively Influence the Customer and the Attitudes and Reasons Underlying These Behaviors

According to the participants, the most frequently encountered behaviors causing unhappiness were not looking cheerful, being unable to meet demands or respond to questions, giving negative answers with strong reactions, acting without asking the customer, and causing the customer to feel unhappy by not showing an interest in him or her (Table 1).

The attitudes causing these behaviors were stated as the work-related factors, while it was also noted that some reasons were likely due to managerial factors and establishment opportunities. These attitudes included stress, workload, lacking authority to take initiative, fatigue, lack of opportunities, emotional state, feeling uncomfortable with one's position, reflecting reactions to the administration in encounters with guests, and thinking that this kind of behavior was what was required in the hotel.

The participants offered several explanations for the behaviors they thought made the customer unhappy. The responses were striking, especially because so many reasons were offered for negative behaviors and because this was the issue most discussed by the employees. The factors mentioned included working conditions and inadequacy of wage, manner of the customer, role ambiguity, disliking the customer, unethical behavior of the customer, feeling deceived, reflecting the

problems in one's private life on the job, working busily, high working hours, employee's obligation to consider himself/herself, lack of understanding shown by management, and lack of training.

After the behaviors, attitudes and reasons were provided by the focus group, a study was conducted to determine the order of significance for these factors. With this purpose, in the last section of the focus group interview, the interviewees were asked to rate the results to obtain their order of significance.

The behaviors obtained from the semi–structured interviews and focus group interviews are consistent with the behaviors discussed in some studies as "scripts in the service encounter" or "service expectations" (Hubbert et al., 1995; Hsu & Chiang, 2011). For example, "say hello / greet customer" and "thank the customer and says good–bye" are some critical stages of the service encounter according to Hsu and Chiang (2011). However, both of these studies focus on the process of service offered in a restaurant rather than the critical behaviors in customer–employee encounters.

The findings of this study show divergent structures in the understanding of customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction. This result parallels those of Bitner et al. (1990) and Bitner et al. (1994). Bittner et al. (1990) determined differences between satisfactory and unsatisfactory factors according to the analyzed customer responses. According to Bitner et al. (1994), some factors gathered from employees' evaluations affect on customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction at different levels. Therefore, it can be said that the factors that create customer satisfaction are not the same as those that create customer dissatisfaction. Similarly, if a factor creates both satisfaction and dissatisfaction, it will not create both in equal measure.

This study's findings on sources of behaviors that create satisfaction are compatible with previous research findings. For example, Hartline and Ferrell (1996) confirmed that managers who are committed to service quality are more likely to empower their employees, and empowerment plays a critical role in sustaining service quality. To increase customers' perceptions of service quality, they suggest increasing employees' self–efficacy and job satisfaction, as well as reducing employees' role conflict and ambiguity. However, although Halliday (2004) emphasizes the role of trust in the service encounter, only one dimension related to trust ("fear of losing the job," ranked ninth in importance) was ascertained in this study. Participants did not express the particular importance of trust.

After key behaviors creating customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction were determined, the extended group of employees (those who had not participated in prior steps) was asked about the effects of these behaviors. Further, in order to determine whether the employees' re-

sponses to the questionnaire would be confirmed by the customers, a similar questionnaire was given to the customers.

Findings of the Employee and Customer Questionnaires

Data were obtained from 39 employees and 207 customers. Of the employees, 19 (48.7%) were female. Most of them were from the age group of 25–34 (25 employees or 64.1%) and university graduates (23 employees or 59.0%). Of the customers, 102 (49.3%) were female. They were mostly from the age group of 35–44 (69 customers or 33.3%). Regarding their educational status, most of them were university graduates (77 customers or 37.2%). Detailed demographic information is presented in Tables 2a and 2b.

Table 2a: Demographic Characteristics of the Employees

	Number	%
Gender		
Male	20	51.3
Female	19	48.7
Age	10	25.6
18-24	25	64.1
25-34	3	7.7
35-44	1	2.6
45-54	1	2.6
Education Level		
Secondary School	1	2.6
High School	12	30.8
University	23	59.0
Graduate or PhD Degree	3	7.7
Marital Status		
Single	28	71.8
Married	11	28.2
Number of the years worked for this hotel		
1-2	10	25.6
3-4	10	25.6
5-7	10	25.6
8 or more	9	23.1
Department		
Animation	4	10.3
Food and Beverage	10	25.6
GMA	1	2.6
Housekeeping	4	10.3
Customer Relations	1	2.6
Front Office	11	28.2
Marketing	4	10.3
SPA	4	10.3

Table 2b: Demographic Characteristics of the Customers

	Number	%
Gender		
Male	105	50.7
Female	102	49.3
Age		
18-24	19	9.2
25-34	51	24.6
35-44	69	33.3
45-54	59	28.5
55 or older	9	4.3
Education Level		
Primary School	16	7.7
Secondary School	19	9.2
High School	75	36.2
University	77	37.2
Graduate or PhD Degree	20	9.7
Marital Status		
Single	78	37.7
Married	129	62.3
Number of Stays		
1	132	63.8
2	52	25.1
3	14	6.8
4	3	1.4
5 or more	6	2.9
Purpose of Stay		
Business	78	37.7
Health	24	11.6
Entertainment / Relaxation	86	41.5
Cultural Tour	8	3.9
Visiting Relatives or Friends	11	5.3

When the participating customers were asked to quantify the effects of the above–determined behaviors on their level of satisfaction when they received a service from an employee of the hotel, they ranked "always being polite and cheerful" first in importance and "making the customer feel special" second in importance. The remaining employee behaviors were ranked by customers as follows, from most to least influential: "being knowledgeable enough to respond to the customers'

questions", "looking neat", "offering the proper service the first time", "offering a compromise to solve a problem", "always being ready and willing to meet the customers' requests", "showing initiative by making extra efforts", and, finally, "offering a service above the customers' expectations", which was considered least influential by customers. When compared with the opinions obtained from the employees, these findings show that the employees and the customers thought similarly about the first three factors and the eighth factor. Both the employees and the customers considered "always being polite and cheerful" to be the most important factor, "making the customer feel special" to be the second most important factor, and "being knowledgeable enough to respond to customers' questions" to be the third most important factor. Similarly, both employees and customers considered "showing initiative by making extra efforts" to be ranked eighth in importance. The customers and employees differed in their opinions of the levels of significance of the remaining behaviors (Table 3).

Table 3: A Comparison of the Opinions of Customers and Employees About the Positive Impact on Customer Satisfaction of Employee Behaviors in Service Encounters

Employee behaviors	Order of Impact on Customer Satisfaction					
	Employees			Customers		
	Mean (1-5)*	s.d.	Order	Mean (1-5)*	s.d.	Order
Always being polite and cheerful	4.76	0.53	1	4.26	0.75	1
Making customers feel special	4.69	0.65	2	4.17	0.88	2
Being knowledgeable enough to respond to customers' questions	4.58	0.63	3	4.15	0.83	3
Looking neat	4.43	0.64	5	4.09	0.81	4
Offering the proper service the first time	4.56	0.82	4	4.05	0.85	5
Offering a compromise to solve a problem	4.28	0.75	9	4.04	0.88	6
Always being ready and willing to meet customers' requests	4.43	0.78	6	4.00	0.94	7
Showing initiative by making extra efforts to solve problems.	4.35	0.84	8	4.00	0.95	8
Offering a service above customers' expectations	4.41	0.78	7	3.91	0.95	9

*1: Ineffective, 2: Slightly Effective, 3: Effective, 4: Highly Effective, 5: Extremely Effective

The employee behaviors affecting the participating customers' level of dissatisfaction with services received from hotel employees were also ordered ranked in order of importance. "Giving negative answers and strong reactions to customers' questions" was ranked first in importance, while "being sulky" was ranked second in importance. The remaining negative employee behaviors were ranked by customers as follows, from most to least influential: "making the customers feel unhappy by not showing an interest in them", "being unable to meet customers' demands or answer customers' questions", and, finally, "acting without asking the customer", which was considered to be the least influential negative behavior.. When the opinions of the customers and the employees regarding the behaviors with negative impacts on the successful customer–employee encounter are compared, we can see that the customers' and employees opinions are similar (Table 4).

Table 4: A Comparison of the Opinions of Customers and Employees about the Negative Impact on Customer Satisfaction of Employee Behaviors in Service Encounters

| Employee Behaviors | Order of Impact on Customer Satisfaction | | | | | |
| | Employees | | | Customers | | |
	Mean (1-5)*	s.d.	Order	Mean (1-5)*	s.d.	Order
Giving negative answers and strong reactions to customers' questions	4.82	.45	1	4.57	.72	1
Being sulky	4.61	.67	2	4.42	.88	2
Making the customer feel unhappy and not being interested in the customers	4.41	.67	4	4.36	.78	3
Being unable to meet customers' demands or respond to customers' questions	4.46	.71	3	4.29	.84	4
Acting without asking the customer	4.35	.84	5	4.20	1.12	5

1: Ineffective, 2: Slightly Effective, 3: Effective, 4: Highly Effective, 5: Extremely Effective

According to the findings, the behaviors of "giving negative answers and strong reactions to customers' questions", "being sulky", and "acting without asking the customer" were ranked by both employees and customers as first, second, and fifth in importance, respectively. However, employees and customers disagreed on the importance of "being unable to meet customers' demands or respond to customers' questions (ranked third by employees but fourth by customers) and "making customers feel unhappy by not showing an interest in them" (ranked fourth by employees but third by customers).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study resulted in two major findings. First, some critical behaviors that determine customer satisfaction have been found. Second, results show that employees' and customers' perceptions of key behaviors that affect service encounters do not greatly differ. These results reveal how significant the employee behaviors of being cheerful and not being cheerful are in affecting customers' happiness. It is therefore important to consider that in order for the employee to be cheerful and to display the other favorable behavior patterns presented in this study, it is particularly necessary for the employee to be trained and empowered and for the dimensions of the job to be clearly specified. When employees are properly trained concerning the job and empowered, they can display behaviors that make the customer happy, while those employees who do not find their working conditions and wages adequate and who experience role ambiguity are more likely to display behaviors that make the customers unhappy.

Taking into consideration the limited surveys conducted on the customer–employee encounter, the findings obtained in this research will contribute to the literature as a result of the qualitative and quantitative techniques employed as well as the four different applications used to test the theory. Not many studies have been conducted to specify the theoretical scope of the customer–employee encounter, and no known studies have examined the variables formed within the framework of this theoretical scope and the cause–and–effect relationship as a whole.

The first result of the research, which should be beneficial for establishments, is that it proves that the successful customer–employee encounter is significant in order for hotel establishments to generate customer satisfaction. Hotel establishments should know that in order for this encounter to be successful, it is necessary to satisfy the employee, who is part of the product in the service sector. The positive and negative behaviors that affect employee satisfaction were also mentioned among the findings of the research. The fact that these behavior patterns were confirmed by the employees' and customers' responses indicates that hotel establishments should investigate the reasons for these behaviors. Some of these reasons were collected from the qualitative interviews conducted with employees. These reasons can be particularly useful for establishments that want to be successful in the sector. Employees indicate that the two most important reasons for their positive behaviors were training and empowerment, indicating that hotel establishments should particularly focus on these areas. Employees ranked negative working conditions, inadequate wages, and role ambiguity as the three most important reasons for their negative behaviors, indicating that these are the primary factors that should be

prevented in order for hotel establishments to attain success. When these negative factors are eliminated, employees will be enabled to be more successful in the encounter. This will enhance the marketing performance and competitive power of establishments and therefore generate profit, which is their permanent goal.

Due to the limits of the application, this study was made on a single hotel establishment. In order to examine the subject more comprehensively and in order for the findings to be generalizable, the scope of future research can be extended to include several hotel establishments at a specific destination, instead of a single hotel establishment. Furthermore, the subject can be examined with a broad investigation also covering all establishments providing tourism service rather than solely hotel establishments. If different hotel establishments are selected, the factors that influence the customer–employee encounter can be compared between the hotels. This may show that employees and customers under different conditions react differently for different reasons, which will distinctly affect the success of the encounter.

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