

Drivers of Hospitable Behavior: A Plea for Further Examination

Robert J Blomme

Centre for Leadership and Management Development, Nyenrode Business Universiteit, Breukelen, The Netherlands

Abstract:

One of the greatest challenges for management in the hospitality industry is maintaining the quality of hospitable behavior towards guests. The industry is characterized by its division into production operations and service operations. The former concerns activities which may be defined as back-of-house work such as cooking and cleaning, and the latter can be defined as front-of-house work such as serving food and selling rooms. The integration of the two types of operations makes the hospitality sector different from other service industries. Hospitable behavior towards guests is the core activity of our business. It determines guest experience and thus contributes to competitive advantage. Hospitable behavior is characterized by a positive orientation towards guests, enthusiasm, positive energy and the willingness to recognize and meet a guest's implicit needs. Hospitable behavior is often related to the idea that one has to be born with hospitable genes or with a hospitable personality. "You are either born with it or you are not" is a frequently used statement. Other important contributors to perceived hospitable behavior include HRM-issues such as high turnover or high levels of stress. These are often related to the notion that people who leave the sector or who endure stress are not up to work in the hospitality industry. The enormous costs related to the hospitality sector's high turnover rates, low commitment, production losses and sick leave in combination with problems encountered in attracting talent for the industry makes it necessary to acknowledge the importance of "the human factor" as an important condition for running our business.

Moreover, the fact that the hospitality industry is facing growing challenges such as globalization processes, generation differences and the integration of hospitality concepts into other industries (including hospitals, train companies and public services) makes it hard to fully appreciate the concept of hospitality and consequently hospitable behavior. These environmental and HRM challenges force us to think about a renewed definition of hospitable behavior, to examine whether such behavior can be learned or developed, and consequently to investigate what leaders should do to encourage and stimulate hospitable behavior amongst service staff. Although during the last few years a substantial number of research studies have been conducted into HRM-related topics such as employee turnover, stress, work-family conflict and hospitable behavior as such, relatively little research has been carried out into the drivers of hospitable behavior, including personality, engagement, motivation, cognition and emotions. This is remarkable, because hospitable behavior involves the right attitude and demeanor as well as emotionally and esthetically appropriate behavior. As such, the management of people working in the hospitality industry involves the challenge not only of having to manage behavior per se, but more in particular managing the attitudes and emotions of hospitality workers towards guests, especially in front-of-house jobs. Hence, it is necessary to unravel the drivers of hospitable behavior-and consequently the impact of leadership on these drivers-by means of thorough research. This new knowledge will further clarify this topic not only for scholars and researchers but also for hotel managers who are struggling for competitive advantage and continuity. In this respect, I wish to call upon scholars and researchers and invite them to submit conceptual papers as well as research papers in this field, so that we can take this important topic a significant step further. My invitation to initiate thorough scientific research follows a second motivation: it is also important for researchers to bridge the gap with the real world.