The effect of some organizational culture components on frontliner's commitment and customer-oriented behavior - a study of airport services in Vietnam

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Abstract–**This research empirically investigates the impacts of three components of organizational culture (Decisiveness, Team orientation, Attention to detail) on service frontliners' behaviors, represented by organizational commitment and customer-oriented behavior (COB) in the airport services in Vietnam. It also estimates the effect of organizational commitment on COB of frontliners. Based on the data collected from 310 frontliners working in several airports, the analyses reveal that two dimensions of organizational culture, "Attention on details" and "Team orientation", have direct positive influence on COB while all three components have positive influence on the employee'sorganizational commitment which then leads to COB. Theoretical and managerial implications have been discussed accordingly.**

Keywords–**organizational culture, customer-oriented behavior, organizational commitment, airport services***.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In service sector, frontline employees (frontliners) play a very important role in the success of a firm because they are the ones who directly deliver the service to customers [1]. It is not at all exaggerating to say that they are the face of the company. It is their job to satisfy the firm's customers. Therefore, issues relating to the attitudes and behaviors of frontline employees have received a lot of attention from researchers and practitioners [2]. A key problem for managers is to ensure that their frontliners display appropriate behaviors when they serve the customers. Generally speaking, service, which has been characterized as more personalized, flexible and receptive to individual customer demands [3], requires employee's commitment to customers. It is therefore very important that frontliners have customer-oriented behavior which has been advocated to be a driver ofcustomer satisfaction [4]. As such, customer-oriented behavior (COB) is of great interest to researchers and practitioners.

The question is how to facilitate the frontliners' customer orientation behavior or what are the determinants of COB. It is indicated in the literature that there are generally two categories of factors affecting employees' behavior – organizational and dispositional [5]. Organizational factors may include organizational culture, climate, rewards or incentives, policies, leadership and trust, job design, management support and commitment, while dispositional factors refer to innate characteristics of an employee [6]. An increasing numbers of organizations response to the mentioned question by executing programs such as "culture change" or "customer care" targeting the attitude, orientation and behavior of frontliners [3]. These programs share the assumptions that employees have a "natural" desire to do quality work and this can be promoted by organizations through job design, culture and leadership, supportive supervision, trust and training [3]. As such, organizations can encourage COB by using organizational measures or recruiting right staff who possess appropriate characteristics to serve customers.

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This research focuses on exploring organizational measures to promote COB among its existing frontliners. While there are several factors beingmentioned in the literature, organizational culture is interested in this study because it is "a sense-making and control mechanism that guides and shapes employees' attitudes and behaviors" [7]. Moreover, while other measures focusing on external motivators can only trigger short-term effect, organizational culture which is characterized as a set of shared valueswill naturally guide its employees to behave in customer-centric manner. The impact caused by organizational culture is therefore more long-lasting and sustainable.

There are studies attempting to investigate the general relationship between the organizational culture and COB [3], but little is known about the different roles of cultural components in frontliners' COB in the context of airport services. In this service, customers (i.e., passengers) have to perform many tasks at the airports before boarding such as parking, baggage check-in, ticketing, security screening, immigration procedures… which are very irritating and time pressuring. As such, airport frontliners need to be customer-oriented to fully support so-called demanding passengers. Therefore, given the diversity of service characteristics, findings from studies on COB conducted in other service contexts may not be applicable or valid. Thus, this research is formed to investigate the impact of various components of organizational culture on frontliners in Vietnam airport service in two aspects. The first aspect is on their relationship with customers, i.e COB. The second is on their relationship with the firm itself, i.e., employee commitment.

2. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS

2.1 Conceptual background

2.1.1 Employee's customer-oriented behavior (COB)

Customer orientation from employee's perspective is defined as the willingness to adjust the service delivery according to a customer's situation such as needs, problems, special circumstances [8]. Accordingly, the term COB indicates specific behaviors displayed by frontliners toward customers. Among several operationalizations of the construct, the commonly used one is by Winsted [4] who suggests three dimensions of COB [9], which are common in both western and eastern culture, including (1) *Concern* refers to specific behaviors showing concern or caring for the customers such as helpful, understanding, attentive… It combines elements of empathy, assurance, and responsiveness dimensions of servqual [10], the concept of authenticity as well as perceived competence, listening and dedication. (2) *Civility* focuses on "not negative" behaviors. The dimensions includes a variety of behaviors a service personnel should avoid, otherwise service may fell below the customer's zone of tolerance. These behaviors basically relate the employees' attitude, courtesy and attention. Examples of such behaviors are acting arrogantly, being indifferent, rude or annoyed with customers. (3) *Congeniality* relates to the frontline staff's positive attitudes, sunny temperament and warm personality. Such behaviors include smiling, being happy, cheerful and enthusiastic.

Because the behaviors of frontliners are critical in customers' evaluation of service quality and customer satisfaction [6], this research focuses on the factors affecting COB. However, in the context of airport service, behaviors such as being rude, arrogant or annoyed with customers are strictly banned in employees' code of conduct [11]; thus, this research will not consider the civility dimension to avoid bias of data due to asking sensitive information in the survey of frontliners. Moreover, this usage of two dimensions (instead of the original three dimensions) would not significantly affect the results because in this research we specify COB as a reflective second-order construct.

2.1.2 Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment refers to the emotional attachment which employees form with the organization, based on shared values and interests [12]. Meyerand Allen [13] conceptualize a three-component model of organizational commitment. (1) *Affective commitment* represents the affective attachment to the organization. The employees remain with the organization because they affectively *want to*. (2) *Continuance commitment* is considered as a perceived cost associated with leaving the organization. The employees remain with the organization because they economically *need to*. (3) *Normative commitment* relates to the obligation to remain

with the organization.The employees remain with the organization because they feel they socially *ought to do so*. This is the most commonly used operationalization among researches on this construct [14].

Meyer and Allen [13] suggested that each component may have different implications for on-the-job behaviors and performance. Accordingly, affective commitment and somehow normative commitment have positive relationship with job performance and organizational behavior citizenship while continuance commitment might be unrelated or negatively related to those consequences [16]. In other words, employees who are *affectively* committed to the organizations are more likely to exert more effort for better job performance than those who demonstrate *continuance and normative* commitment. Therefore, the current study focuses on investigating the role of affective commitment in explaining frontliner's performance towards COB.

2.1.3 Organizational culture

Organizational culture is "a system of shared meaning held by members that distinguishes the organization from other organizations" [7]. It is a set of basic assumptions learned by the group through solving problems of external adaptation and internal integration and then be taught to new entrants as correct ways to feel, think and act [17]. Because organizational culture can "shape" employees' behaviors [7], it is a powerful tool for a company to improve its employee performance.

Several studies have conceptualized the concept of organizational culture. Deshpande and Webster [18] have classified culture into four types based on competing values; namely: clan, adhocracy, hierarchy, and market. Wallach [19] identified three separate organizational cultures described as bureaucratic, innovative and supportive. However, it is difficult to measure the concept practically because one organization can have characteristics of one or more types.

O'Reilly et al [20] proposed Organizational Culture Profile (OCP) containing 8 characteristics which capture the nature of organizational culture, namely: (1) *Innovation and risk-taking*; (2) *Attention to details*; (3) *Outcome orientation*; (4) *Aggressiveness*; (5) *Emphasis on growth*; (6) *Team orientation;* (7) *Supportiveness*; (8) *Decisiveness*. These characteristics, which represents on a continuum from low to high, give a comprehensive picture about how the employees perceive the

organization, how things are done in it and the way employees are supposed to behave [7]. Therefore, the OCP is adopted in this study.

In airport service, passengers have to go through several check-in counters before boarding. On arriving the airport, passengers have to check-in at the airline desks where they are asked to present photo identification and weigh their luggage. Next, they have to go to the security checkpoint where they are asked to show identification and boarding pass and then take off outerwear, take out electronic devices and remove liquids or gels at the screening machines. Then, the passengers have to find their gate where they have to stand in line to be called for boarding by an agent. It can be seen that the process including many stages requires a lot of time and effort from passengers, which can cause irritation. Therefore, to achieve overall customer satisfaction, it is essential that frontline staff at all the stages have to collaborate with one another to best serve the passenger. Moreover, passengers need a lot of support from airport staff to complete all the compulsory procedures within a limited period of time. They will highly appreciate if airport staff can provide them with immediate help. As a result, people working at the airports need to pay attention to details to predict where passengers need help and be very decisive in adopting the best possible ways to help them or to resolve problems.

For above-mentioned reasons, three dimensions of organizational culture – *attention to details* (requiring employees to be analytical, precise and detail-oriented), *team orientation* (requiring employees to be team-oriented, people-oriented and collaborative) *and decisiveness* (requiring employees to be decisive, predictable and low conflict) are thought to be representative and important in airport service context and will be investigated. Other five components of organizational culture are beyond the interest of this research, irrespective of whether they have influences on COB or not.

2.2 Proposed hypotheses

2.2.1 Organizational culture and COB

In general, employees adjust their behaviors by observing and learning which behaviors are promoted and which ones are not allowed [21]. This is the way how employees learn and adapt to organizational culture. Schein [17] also proposed that organizational culture is taught to members as

a correct way to feel, think and act. It is, therefore, expected that an organizational culture which focuses on customer orientation can encourage frontliners to display customer orientation behaviors.

Airline passengers have to complete a lot of procedures at different counters within a limited amount of time before boarding and most of the time many of them are in a rush. Thus, frontliners need to be able to handle unexpected situations precisely in a timing manner. For example, when a customer is about to be late, the frontliner should process the check-in as quickly as possible or ask other staff for a hand to help customers. In a decisive culture, employees are instilled with the values of being decisive, tolerate and predictable and they are also empowered to make decisions. As such, this will lead to the frontliner's responsive, understanding and happy behaviors in dealing with customers. Thus, it is hypothesized:

H1: Decisiveness culture has a positive relationship with frontliner's COB

As mentioned before, passenger's satisfaction is the sum of all encounters with different frontliners. It is important that all the frontliners collaborate with one another to best serve passengers. Airport frontliners also need to collaborate with customers in order to help them complete the check-in and check-out process. Thus, it is hypothesized:

H2: Team orientation culture has a positive relationship with frontliner's COB

The culture which values highly on "attention to details" requires its frontliners to be precise, analytical and pay attention to details. In airport service, paying attention to details is very important. Airport frontliners should help passengers to fulfill all the compulsory steps without mistakes; otherwise customers can miss their flight. To do so, they need to be detail-oriented, thorough and careful. Thus, it is hypothesized:

H3: Attention-to-detail culture has a positive relationship with frontliner's COB

2.2.2 Organizational culture and organizational commitment

Person-organization fit theory argues that people are attracted to and selected by organizations that match their values and they leave organizations that are not compatible with their personalities [7]. The match between a person's values and the organization's culture can predict job satisfaction and employees'

commitment to the organization [22]. In other words, a person whose values match the organizational values would be more committed to the organization. Since organizational culture is a set of shared values, it is considered as "social glue" to attach the members to the organization.

It is proposed that a team-oriented, decisive and detail-oriented culture of an airport company will select and retain the people who share the same values. This, in turn, will increase the level of employee's commitment to the organization. Thus, it is hypothesized:

H4: Decisiveness culture has a positive relationship with organizational commitment

H5: Team orientation culture has a positive relationship with organizational commitment

H6: Attention-to-details culture has a positive relationship with organizational commitment

2.2.3 Organizational commitment and frontliner's COB

Organizational commitment has been studied by several researchers as a variable having impacts on employees' behaviors and performance [15]. A committed employee is willing to exert "considerable and sustained personal effort on behalf of the organization" [23]. Many researchers also found out that affectively committed employees exhibit greater customer orientation, dedicating more of their time, effort to meet the organizational goals and satisfy customers [6]. Hence, we hypothesize:

H7: Organizational commitment has a positive relationship with frontliner's COB

3 METHOD

The proposed model and hypotheses were tested using survey data obtained from respondents who directly interact with passengers such as customer help/information staff, security-check staff, shop and food store assistant, check-in staff… at different airports in Vietnam namely, Lien Khuong (Lam Dong); Phu Bai (Hue); Cam Ranh (Khanh Hoa); Vinh (Nghe An); Buon Me Thuot (Daklak). These airports were selected (excluding Tan Son Nhat and Noi Bai airports) because in these airports, airports staff directly and inclusively provide ground services to passengers, while in big airports like Tan Son Nhat or Noi Bai these services are carried out by staff from airlines operators (Vietnam Airlines, VietJet Air, etc.) which are different organizations. The sample

comprised 310 cases. Data were obtained by means of a structured questionnaire directly delivered and collected at these airports by one of the authors who are working in airport service. Convenience sampling technique was employed. Respondents were approached during their off-peak or free time between two flights.

In terms of measurement scale, organizational culture components such as Decisiveness (4 items), Team Orientation (4 items), Attention to detail (4 items) were measured by total 12 reflective items adopted from O'Reilly et al. [20]. Employee Commitment was measured by 5 reflective items adopted from Meyer & Allen [13]. Customer-Oriented Behavior including Concern and Congeniality were measured by 8 items borrowing from Winsted [4].

4 RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive statistics

The sample characteristics are summarized in Table 1 which indicates that the sample was reasonably controlled in terms of gender, age, experience, and education level.

4.2 Validity and reliability of measures

Firstly, a joint exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was applied to all scales together for a preliminarily assessment of dimensionality, convergent, and discriminant validity. The results indicated that the factor structure fully matched the design and each item loaded mainly on its designated factor.

Next, the 25 items measuring six first-order constructs were submitted to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS software program [24] to assess the measurement model representing relations among all constructs and their associated items. The kurtosis values of all variables were within -0.25 to +1.49 and their skewness values ranged from -1.16 to -0.62. Although the data

exhibited slight deviations from normal distribution, it was appropriate for maximum likelihood (ML) estimation to be applied [25].

Refinement was made by eliminating 6 items due to low loading or high covariance of error terms. Finally, CFA of the measurement model which included the remaining 19 items yielded the following measures: Chi-square $\chi2(df = 137) = 165.32$; $p < 0.05$; Normed chi-square $\chi2/df = 1.20$; Goodness-of-fit index GFI = 0.95; Tucker-Lewis index TLI = 0.98; Comparative fit index CFI = 0.99; Root mean square error of approximation RMSEA = 0.03. It was also noted that no offending estimates were found (i.e., no negative error variances or Heywood cases) [26]. All these statistics showed that the measurement model fits the data set in this empirical study.

In addition, all item loadings on their designate constructs range from 0.60 to 0.87 and AVE of scales ranged from 0.51 to 0.65, which were all above 0.5, indicating satisfactory convergent validity. Correlation coefficients between pairs of constructs ranged from 0.48 to 0.77. The squares of which were from 0.22 to 0.59, indicating discriminant validity of scales. Composite reliabilities were from 0.76 to 0.88. Thus, convergent validity, discriminant validity and reliability of scales are satisfactory.

4.3 SEM estimation and hypothesis testing

Given the satisfactory fit of the measurement model, the proposed hypotheses were then tested using structural equation modeling (Figure 1). In this model, Customer-oriented behavior was specified as multidimensional reflective constructs, while Decisiveness, Team-Orientation, Attention to detail, Employee commitment were unidimensional constructs. The estimation of the proposed structural model using ML method resulted in a good fit: Chi-square = 279.307; dF = 143; CFI = 0.949; GFI = 0.906; TLI = 0.938; RMSEA = 0.059.

TABLE 1. SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Variable	Freq.	%	Variable	Freq.	%
Age group:			Education:		
- 29 or under	79	25.5	- Intermediate (or lower)	91	29.4
- 30 - 40	154	49.7	- College	117	37.7
- 41 or more	77	24.8	- University (or higher)	102	32.9
Experience:			Gender:		
- Under 4 years	55	17.7	- Male	142	45.8
- 4 – under 8 years	84	27.1	- Female	168	54.2
- 8 – 15 years	116	37.4			
- 15 or more	55	17.7			

Based on the standardized path coefficients and p value, six hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H5, H6 and H7 were supported (at p = <0.05), but H4 was not. In other words, 3 components of organizational culture, namely, Decisiveness, Team orientation, Attention to detail have significantly positive effects on Employee commitment and Customer-oriented Behavior, Employee commitment then has a positive effect on Customer-oriented behavior. However, hypothesis H4 about the positive effect of Decisiveness on Customer-oriented behavior was not supported as $\beta = 0.08$ (p = 0.187 > 0.05). The results also showed that the proportion of the variance in Employee commitment explained by the three components of organizational culture was at 29%; and 69% of the variation in Customer-oriented behavior could be explained by three components of organizational culture and Employee commitment.

The results show further that Customer-oriented behavior (second-order construct) is reflected substantially and balancedly by its two components (first-order constructs), namely concern ($\beta = 0.84$; $p = 0.000$) and congeniality ($\beta = 0.85$; $p = 0.000$).
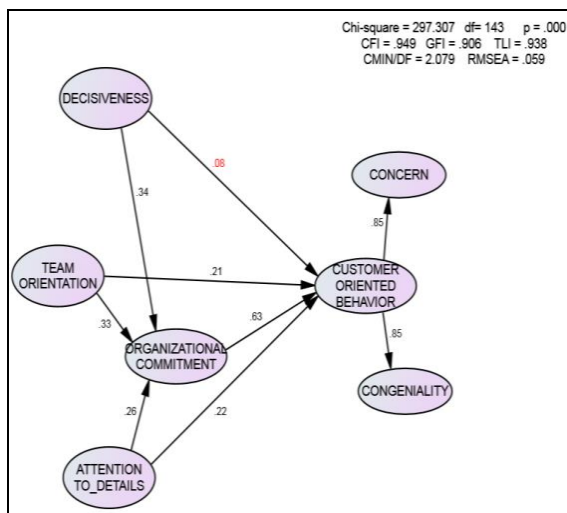

Figure 1. Amos estimation results

The indirect effect of Decisiveness on customer-oriented behavior via employee commitment was significant ($\beta = 0.215$; $p = 0.004 < 0.05$) but the direct effect was not ($\beta = 0.083$; $p = 0.267 > 0.05$). In contrast, both Team orientation and Attention to detail have direct and indirect effect on customer-oriented behavior. Team orientation was found to have significant direct effect ($\beta = 0.205$; $p = 0.006$

< 0.05) and indirect effect ($\beta = 0.210$; $p = 0.004 < 0.05$). Similar results were found for Attention to detail (significant direct effect at $\beta = 0.224$; $p = 0.006 < 0.05$ and indirect effect $\beta = 0.161$; $p = 0.004 < 0.05$).

5 DISCUSSION

In service sector, frontliners play a very important role in satisfying customers. They directly deliver the service to customers on behalf of the company. For customers, they are the one who create values by displaying COB. For the company, they are a precious asset whose commitment should be enhanced. As such, this research finds out the effects of the components of organizational culture in promoting frontline employees' commitment and COB. Specifically, Team orientation and Attention to detail dimensions have moderate positive relationships. In addition, Team orientation, Attention to detail and Decisiveness positively affect employee commitment.

The findings being found in this special context of airport service in an emerging country bring about two implications. First, it identifies the relatively important role of each component of organizational culture in a specific context. It should be noted that almost all organizations have their own culture with specific characteristics, which lead to different set of organizational behaviors. In this setting, Decisiveness, Team orientation and Attention to detail are important features if organizations want to build a firm basis for employee commitment and COB, creating long lasting and sustainable effects beside short-term incentives such as rewards. The results also reveal that employees' COB is ensured if it is displayed by employees with high level of commitment. In other words, an organizational culture which is described as being decisive, team-oriented and detail-oriented (not to mention other components) is beneficial for the organization both internally (in terms of employee commitment) and externally (in terms of COB).

TABLE 2. AMOS ESTIMATION RESULTS

Path	Std. Coeff.	p value	Hypothesis test
Decisiveness →Org Commitment	0.34	0.000	Support H1
Team Orientation →Org Commitment	0.33	0.000	Support H2
Attention to detail →Org Commitment	0.26	0.000	Support H3
Decisiveness →COB	0.08	0.178	Not Support H4
Team Orientation →COB	0.21	0.000	Support H5
Attention to detail →COB	0.22	0.000	Support H6
Org Commitment → COB	0.63	0.000	Support H7
COB→ Concern	0.84	0.000	
COB→ Congeniality	0.85	0.000	

The second implication is for management of service at airports. With specific characteristics of this service which requires a lot of efforts from customers, building an organizational culture focusing on three dimensions: attention to detail, decisiveness and team orientation would be a powerful tool for the company to ensure employees' commitment and COB. To do this, airport managers should take necessary measures. For the "attention to detail" component, managers need to promote training which instructs staff to strictly follow the standardized procedures. At the same time, employees should be encouraged to pay attention to every detail of the work, not to ignore even the smallest steps to ensure accuracy. In the aviation industry, any mistake in the service process can lead to insecurity, safety problems, and customer dissatisfaction. For "decisiveness" dimension, it is essential that managers develop clear and specific criteria for the authority and responsibility of each job position and empower staff to make decisions in the scope of their work, minimizing unnecessary management intermediaries and related paperwork. Finally, the "Teamwork orientation" factor should be developed by promoting teamwork activities. This should not be limited to specialized groups but this can be extended to cross-departmental groups. This will make the coordination between individuals and departments more effective in order to solve problems of customers more quickly and accurately.

6 CONLUSIONS

This research has been conducted to investigate the relationship of three components of organizational culture namely Decisiveness, Team orientation, and Attention detail and employees' commitment and COB. The results show that Team orientation and Attention to detail have positive relationship with COB. It is also interesting to note that all the dimensions of organizational culture examined in the study have considerable positive impacts on employee commitment, which in turn significantly influences COB. Moreover, organizational commitment and three components of organizational culture in the research model can explain 69% of the variance of COB.

The findings have made some contributions to the research of COB. As such, organizational culture and employee commitment can be relatively strong determinants of COB. The results also suggest that building organizational culture which is characterized as decisiveness, team orientation, and attention to detail is very important and meaningful for the success of an airport service firm.

Although this study finds out the positive relationship between three components of organizational culture on employees' commitment and COB, the model cannot cover all the factors. It is suggested that other research should attempt to find out stronger determinants of organizational commitment and COB in order to propose comprehensive implications for managers. Clearly, the sample which is drawn from 6 out of 22 airports in Vietnam limits the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future research can expand to other service settings to test the validation of the findings. In additions, the research does not include back-stage employees who silently support frontline staff in satisfying customers. They may play important role in helping frontline staff to display COB, which requires further investigation. Last but not least, although all eight dimensions might have impact on the attitudes and behaviors of employees, including COB, this research explores the effects of only three. Further research may be interested in testing the others.

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Ảnh hưởng của các thành phần văn hóa tổ chức lên sự cam kết và hành vi định hướng khách hàng của nhân viên tuyến đầu: Một nghiên cứu trong dịch vụ hàng không Việt Nam

Tóm tắt – Nghiên cứu này tìm hiểu ảnh hưởng của ba thành phần văn hóa tổ chức (Ra quyết định, Định hướng đội, Chú ý chi tiết) lên hành vi của nhân viên dịch vụ tuyến đầu, thể hiện bởi sự cam kết tổ chức và hành vi định hướng khách hàng (COB) trong ngành dịch vụ hàng không ở Việt Nam. Nghiên cứu còn ước lượng ảnh hưởng của cam kết tổ chức lên COB của nhân viên tuyến đầu. Dựa trên dữ liệu thu thập từ 310 nhân viên tuyến đầu làm việc ở các sân bay, kết quả cho thấy hai thành phần của văn hóa tổ chức, "Chú ý chi tiết" và "Định hướng đội", có ảnh hưởng trực tiếp lên COB, trong khi cả ba thành phần có ảnh hưởng tích cực lên cam kết của nhân viên với tổ chức, qua đó ảnh hưởng lên COB. Các hàm ý về lý thuyết và quản trị cũng được thảo luận dựa trên kết quả này.

Từ khóa – Văn hóa tổ chức, hành vi định hướng khách hàng, cam kết tổ chức, dịch vụ hàng không.