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Comparing Generation Y Hotel Employees in the United States and China

They are known by many names, but most commonly called Millennials. Most demographers put the dates somewhere in the mid-1980s and mid-2000s. This cohort was born and raised in an era of rapid technological development, better access to education, and growing globalization. They are often characterized as protected by Baby Boomer parents and society. They are technologically-savvy, achievement-oriented, team-oriented, job-hoppers, and focused on life-balance. The Pew Research Center² estimates these Millennials will represent 75% of the global workforce by 2025. Gen Yers look beyond salaries. They want to use their skills for innovative, meaningful work that contributes to society.³ This generation does not favor hierarchical management. Instead, they want inclusivity and view organizational leaders more like partners than bosses.⁴ Thus, it is essential to understand their values in term of work attitudes and behaviors.⁵ In particular, employees' commitment to customer service is particularly important in the hotel sector as it results in greater customer satisfaction and loyalty as well as better service quality.⁶ We surveyed hotel employees in the United States and China to see if they might differ in terms of their work attitude and behaviors. We focused on what effect [1] Employee Voice, [2]Team Member Exchange, [3] Power Distance, and [4] Empowerment may have on the employees' commitment to their hotel's customer service.

A Multi-Nation Inquiry

The United States and China were selected as our test sites because of their cultural differences. The U.S. society is characterized as individualistic and low power distance. Balanced rights, democratic power, and minimal hierarchical structure are idealized. American employees often prize individual achievement, self-worth, and personal freedom.⁷ China is characterized as collectivistic and high-power distance. Respect for and obedience to authority figures and avoidance of upward face-to-face contact are idealized.⁸ Confucianism emphasizes harmony within the hierarchy and values hard work by stressing interdependence, in-group obligations, and adherence to societal norms.⁹ For this study, we employed a self-administered online survey using a Qualtrics panel of full-time hotel Generation Y employees in the United

States and China with the comparable sample size (China: n=299; United States: n=157). Three key findings for emerged from this study.

Converging Values?

First, the overarching implication of our study is that millennial employees in both cultures expressed a solid Commitment to Customer Service (United States=4.2; China=4.1).ⁱ This bodes well for the hotel industry and implies that management is committing to having well-structured recruitment and training programs in place.

Second, their attitudes towards Power Distance, Empowerment, Employee Voice, and Team Member Exchange were similar, ranging from moderate to moderately high.ⁱⁱ However, when we looked at how these factors might *predict* employees' Commitment to Customer Service, a distinct difference emerged. In the United States, Team Member Exchange was the most significant predictor. For the Chinese hotel employees, the most significant predictor was Employee Voice. In this regard, our findings suggest that Chinese Generation Yers are becoming more open to expressing their opinions.

Finally, the millennial hotel employees in the United States and China are becoming more similar in their values in term of work attitudes and behaviors, and they are more likely to be aware of global business environments as well.

The findings of this study will help hotel managers understand Generation Y's values in term of work attitudes and behaviors in a cross-cultural workplace. Research supports the development of management strategies; this would allow for transportability of organizational behavior models from one country to another. This new development is particularly important for customizing training and career development programs, thus increasing Generation Y employees' productivity and retention rates.

For example, hotel managers in China need to encourage their employees to use his or her voice to speak their opinions in order to retain qualified Generation Y employees. One way for employers to allow their employees to do that is by supporting their voice through public recognition and instant tangible rewards. Generation Y in the U.S. who experience high-quality employee exchange are more likely to have greater commitment to customer service than those would in China. Through supporting team ideas and suggestions, firms can set up workplaces where team members can work together, share tasks, and earn team rewards.

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- ii On a scale of 1=low and 5=high.
- ii United States: 3.0, 3.9, 3.9, 3.9; China: 3.0, 3.8, 3.9, 3.9.