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Engaging Hotel Managers Through Managerial Support

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Engaging Hotel Managers Through Managerial Support

Abstract

The influence of varying levels of organizational support and managerial support on hotel managers' psychological contract and work engagement was examined through a scenario-based experiment. Findings showed that lower managerial support is more detrimental and thus, recommendations are presented to help organizations foster managerial support of managers.

Background

Actions such as caring about employees' well-being, valuing opinions, rewarding contributions, etc. indicate support of employees. These can be organizational like career development, wellness programs, or recognition programs or managers' behaviors and actions such as helping employees, valuing employee's work-life balance, addressing employee complaints, etc. These supportive actions by managers can also be seen as an indication of organizational support as the manager is viewed as the organization's representative (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986).

A psychological contract is an employee's belief that an organization will fulfill perceived promises, such as pay increases, career progression, etc., when he/she has met his/her obligations to the organization. Managers, acting for the organization, signal to the employees these perceived promises through words and actions (Rousseau, 1995). This psychological contract can either be fulfilled or breached depending whether or not the employee believes the organization has met its obligations to him/her. Supportive actions by the organization and managers can help meet perceived promises while unsupportive actions can break them.

When employees feel supported and believe promises have been met, they will be more engaged. Improving engagement has many benefits, including increased company financial performance, higher employee and guest satisfaction, and lower employee absenteeism and turnover (Maertz, Griffeth, Campbell, & Allen, 2007; Richman, 2006; Saks, 2006). Ideally, support from the organization and manager should both be high, but what happens when one is high and one is low, especially for managers who are often understudied? Understanding how opposite levels of support affect managers' psychological

contract and work engagement was the purpose of this study.

Scenarios were created under which 256 participants were managers for a fictitious hotel company and received one of four support situations: high organizational and managerial support, low levels of both, or high of one and low of the other.

Supporting managers to engage them

Results indicated those under the imperfect scenarios where organizational support and managerial support were not equal, believed their psychological contracts with the company were breached and thus, had lower engagement. Those who had low managerial support, but high organizational support perceived an even bigger breach and were less engaged than those under the high managerial support and low organizational support scenario.

Managerial support may be much more important than organizational support when it comes to managers believing that promises have been met and to keeping managers engaged. Leaders, such as general managers (GM) and department directors, should pay particular attention to the managers who report directly to them and consider managers' perceived contracts and engagement. For example, by being honest about career growth opportunities and not making unrealistic promises without considering consequences. Human resources (HR) must ensure leaders do not make the assumption that because their subordinates are managers, they are not in need of support in the same way hourly employees are, or that organizational programs alone are sufficient. GMs and HR managers should develop hotel-level support programs. For example, using an app to conduct short, daily check-ins measuring managers' engagement levels allowing a GM or director to address declines, or publicly tracking managers' weekly accomplishments for rewards. Hotel-level programs are especially important if the parent company does not have organization-wide programs because managers' perceptions of promises being met or broken are more heavily impacted by actions of managerial support. In turn, managers' engagement is impacted where they either commit to their work or disassociate from it. These management support programs may be key in times of change such as when a hotel converts to a new franchise or management company and managers are retained, or for hotels from smaller management companies that may not have robust organizational support systems like those of larger management companies or companies that both

franchise brands and manage hotels.

Because a psychological contract is subjective to each employee and thus difficult to manage, but impacts engagement, leaders must provide consistent levels of support on a regular basis. Hotels should create a culture of open communication especially among managers and their leaders. This communication should be in addition to regular departmental meetings and annual performance reviews, and should consist of asking managers about their personal needs in order to manage expectations and meet perceived promises. General managers and directors should be held accountable through performance plans for conducting conversations with managers about their well-being, work-life balance, and other needs. Meeting managers' needs is one way that leaders can show support in order to fulfill promises and increase engagement. This in turn will trickle down to hourly employees as managers exemplify the support they themselves receive.

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