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Frontline Employee's Intercultural Competence: Does it impact Customer Evaluations of an Intercultural Service Encounter?

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Abstract

Globalization has led to an exponential growth of intercultural service encounters. In view of the importance of customer-orientation in services, we investigate the effect of the frontline employee's intercultural competence on customer's affective and cognitive evaluations of intercultural service encounters. The focus of this study is on the effect of employee cultural competence, relative to employee technical competence and cultural distance. A 2x2x2 full-factorial design (N= 322) with video vignettes was used. MANOVA results show significant main effects of employee intercultural competence and employee technical competence on both types of customer evaluations. Moreover, employee intercultural competence positively moderates the effects of employee technical competence, and eliminates a negative effect of cultural distance. We conclude that employee intercultural competence is a powerful extra-role behavior with an additive effect on both the affective and cognitive evaluation of intercultural service encounters, even when ETC is at a low level.

Key words: Intercultural Service Encounters, Intercultural Competence, Cultural Distance, Hospitality, Relationship quality

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