The Effects of Employees' Demographic Characteristics on the Perception of Organizational Culture: A Study in Service Enterprise

Halil SAYLI
Afyon Kocatepe University
Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences
Afyonkarahisar, Turkey
sayli@aku.edu.tr

Ahmet BAYTOK
Afyon Kocatepe University
School of Tourism and Hotel Management
Afyonkarahisar, Turkey
ahmetbaytok@aku.edu.tr

Hasan Hüseyin SOYBALI
Afyon Kocatepe University
School of Tourism and Hotel Management
Afyonkarahisar, Turkey
hsoybali@aku.edu.tr

Abstract: This study aims to evaluate the service sector employees' perception of organizational culture from the demographic characteristics perspective. The research was conducted in a Ministry of Culture and Tourism Licensed five-star thermal hotel in Afyonkarahisar, Turkey. In scope of this study, a questionnaire was developed and applied to thermal hotel employees. The data collected through the questionnaire survey was analysed by using SPSS 18.0 statistics package software and the relationship between factors which creates the organizational culture and demographic characteristics of employees such as age, gender, education level and duration of experience both in the sector and in the hotel was examined. From the hypothesis developed it was observed that while differences exist between organizational culture perception and gender, age and education level, there are no differences between organizational culture perception and duration of experience both in the sector and in the hotel.

Introduction

Culture, as a fact related to human societies gathered according to certain principles, is used to express the interaction between human beings and it's consequences (Hodgetts & Luthans, 2000: 108). Being an important concept related to human and human beings makes the culture important for enterprises whose one of the most important competitive tools is human. The power, which forms common language, expressions and concepts to create an internal commitment between the members of an organization, arranges the power of members, their status, promotions and relationships between each other and makes them to be able to give meanings to all organizational events is culture (Özkara, 1999: 84). One of the factors that play a key role in creation of a strong culture which will contribute to achieve the objectives of a business is its employees. Because employees are the people who keep the culture alive in organizations. Therefore, it is essential to know how employees perceive organizational culture in an organization. Demographic characteristics of employees are one of the factors which play an important role in employees' organizational culture perception (Hofstede et al.1990; Helms & Stern, 2001). Being aware of the effects of demographic characteristics on the perception of organizational culture will guide primarily management in areas of policy formation, determination of competencies, manpower planning, socialization process planning, keeping the culture alive and changing the culture.

Organizational Culture

Over the last 30 years, organizational culture has been a topic of significant interest in the organizational studies literature. In short, the culture expressed with a " the way things are done around here" phrase, can be defined as "shared and the agreed set of values and beliefs by the members of organization" (Recardo & Jolly, 1997: 5), "the shared philosophies, ideologies, values, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, attitudes, and norms that knit a community together (Kilmann et al. 1986: 89), "collective thinking program which makes different the members of an organizations from others" (Hofstede 1991: 182–183), " a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein, 1992:12). When the above organizational culture definitions are examined, a group of people, behavioural characteristics which distinguish this group from others and the resources of these are indicated as determinant factors.

The culture of organizations bears the characteristics of the community culture. However, each organization brings about its own culture to ensure organizational cohesion among its members. As each organization is formed by people with different characteristics, as fingerprints organizational culture is also different from others and unique. Different behavioral norms, expectations, practices and organizational values are the main reason for formation of differences (Vanderberghe, 1999: 175).

Everybody who works in an organization accepts the culture which symbolizes unwritten behavioural aspects of the organization. But, the culture controls the organizational life without getting noticed Daft, 2000: 314). In the world of modern management, the culture which has become a main area of interest at the same level with strategy, structure and control is the characteristics of organizations, not individuals'. But, it is measured by individuals' actual and intellectual behaviour (Hofstede, 1998: 479).

Understanding the organizational culture and its dynamics, it makes meaningless and unusual human behaviour faced in the organization meaningful (Schein, 1992: 4) and allow us to understand how the organization works in reality (Wilkins, 1983: 25).

Demographics Characteristics, Organization Culture And Their Relationship

Culture of an organization is formed by artifacts, espoused values and basic assumptions and is unique (Schein, 1992). This is because each organization is formed by different people. In addition, in an organization, perceptions of the enacted organizational culture are not uniform among employees, as every individual has a unique understanding and explanation of his/her working conditions, based on his/her own characteristics, preferences and personality" (Bellou,2010: 5).

Demographic characteristics of employees are one of the factors which play an important role in employees' organizational culture perception. In the literature, there has been studies indicating that employees' perception of organizational culture differs according to their demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education level, work experience (Hofstede et al.1990; Helms ve Stern, 2001; Bellou, 2010). For example, Hofstede et.al. (1990), who claim that the shared perceptions of daily practices are the core of organizational culture, declare that the values of employees change depending on the nationality, age and education level. Helms ve Stern (2001), on the other hand, state in a study conducted in different branches of a hospital group as a service enterprise that the background of employees and sectoral work experience affect the organizational culture more than the experience acquired in work place. The same study also indicates that there are significant differences between the cultural perception and age groups in particular, gender and ethnic background, there is not much difference between the duration of work experience in the organization and organizational culture perception and there is no relationship between the department of employees and organizational culture perception. Bellou (2010) who conducted a research on organizational culture as a determinant of job satisfaction emphasizes that age and gender are determining factor in perception of organizational culture values.

In this context, the study tries to find an answer to the following question; "does the perception of organizational culture differ according to employees' demographic characteristics in service enterprises? Hypotheses were developed to answer the basic research question and in development of these research hypotheses, Helms & Stern's (2001) study was taken as a reference study.

The ways male and female employees fulfill their work and communicate are different in an organzation. Similarly, decision making and leadership styles indicate differences between male an female employees and managers. Therefore, organizational culture perception difference is expected depending on employees' gender.

H1. Employees' perceptions of organizational culture may vary according to gender.

Age is a determinant in formation of employees' experience. In addition, hayat görüşleri (life views) ans communication and consequently values of employees at the same age group are similar. For this reason, it is expected that employees' perception of organizational culture at different age groups will indicate differences.

H2. Employees' perceptions of organizational culture may vary according to age groups

Organizational culture is a subject which contains different elements and related to values. Therefore, it requires cumulative knowledge and conceptual perspective. Level of education is a important determinant in development of conceptual perspective. Therefore, it is expected that employees' perception of organizational culture will indicate differences according to their education level.

H3. Employees' perceptions of organizational culture may vary according to level of education

The experience acquired in the sector provides information to managers and employees about how the processes of their work and style of conducting the work should be. Consequently, they understand which values should form the values, aware of and understand their importance. From this perspective, it is expected that employees' perception of organizational culture will indicate differences according to their sectoral work experience.

H4. Employees' perceptions of organizational culture may vary according to their duration sectoral work experience.

Learning and adaptation process to the culture requires a certain time. Therefore, existence of organizational culture perception difference between employees who have worked longer in an organization and who have worked shorter is an expected result.

H5. Employees' perceptions of organizational culture may vary according to their duration of work experience in the organization.

The Study

Research was carried out in an accommodation enterprise as part of tourism industry and consequently service sector. The thermal hotel is located in Afyonkarahisar Omer-Gecek Thermal Tourism Region. It is one of the largest hotel in the region and in Turkey and in operation since 2006. The hotel provides services to its customers on half board service base and operates all year round. While the hotel provides services with 250 employees during the high season, only 120 employees are employed in spring season which is accepted as the off-season.

Observation and interviews as qualitative methods (Smircich, 1983) are widely accepted and preferred research tools by researchers in measuring the organizational culture and understanding the artifacts of culture. Nevertheless, it may be possible that employees may behave differently and reply the questions used in these methods in the way that the observer expects or the observer may exhibit biased behaviour in his/her observations. On the other hand, quantitative methods provide instantaneous (cross-sectional), explanatory and descriptive benefits for organizational research and large scale studies. Quantitative methods allow culture researchers to examine culture in different departments and conduct comparative studies (Tepeci, 2001).

In this context, a questionnaire was used as a data collection tool to find out employees organization culture perceptions. In the study, "Organizational Culture Questonnaire" which was developed and its validity and reliability was tested by Hee-Jae Cho's (2010) was used. Questionnaire consists of 60 judgements. Organizational culture in the questionnaire consist of four main factors; involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission. Each main factor that makes up the questionnaire includes three sub-factors which each contain five questions describing themselves. Five-scale Likert type scale was used in the study. Questions include "1 strongly disagree", "2 disagree", "3 Neutral", "4 agree", "5 strongly agree" options. Employees' demographic characteristics consist of gender, age, education level, duration of sectoral experience and duration work experince at the hotel.

Questionnaire was administered at the beginning of May 2010. Because spring season is the off-season fort he hotel, 120 questionnaires were distributed to the employees and 99 questionnaires were returned. The data obtained through the questionnaire was analysed by using SPSS 18.0 statitics package software. In the statistical analysis, T-test and Anova variance analysis were used.

Findings

The demographic data obtained indicate that the hotel has a very young workforce regarding their age groups. 91.8% of the employees who participated in the survey are under the age of 40. It is observed that 56.1% of respondents are male and the remaining 43.9% are female. Almost half of the employees employed by the hotel have high school level of education (46.9). The percentage of employees who received elementary level education is 30.2%. While 60.6% of the employees have more than two years of sectoral experience, 35.5% of whom have worked at this thermal hotel for at least three years. When this data is assessed, it can be said that the hotel has employed young but experienced employees. Besides, because most of the employees are permanent employees and have worked for the organization for at least three years, this contributes to this rearch to obtain reliable data related to the organizational culture values and hypothesis. The research method should comprise the reliability and validity features so that it can produce meaningful and reliable results. The consistency between independent measurements of the same thing, shows the reliability of the research method. Reliability analysis results: The full scale reliabilty coefficient was determined as $\alpha = 0,980$ which is quite high. Sub-factor groups' reliabilty coefficient was found as; **Involvement** $\alpha = 0,942$, **Consistency;** $\alpha = 0,929$, **Adaptability;** $\alpha = 0,920$, **Mission**; $\alpha = 0,953$ which are also at quite high level. Demogrphic variables subject to analysis are ranked a gender, age, duration of work in the sector, and duration of work at the hotel.

Gender

As shown in Table 1, employees' perceptions of organizational culture indicate significant differences within the confidence intervals (p<0.05) depending on their gender. It is observed that the differences in perceptions of organizational culture stems from the male employees. According to this result, the hypothesis of "employees' perceptions of organizational culture may vary according to gender" is confirmed *H1*.

	Gender					
	Female		Male		t-TEST RESULTS	
VARIABLES	122		280			
	$\overline{X}$	SS	$\overline{X}$	SS	t value	p value
Involvement	3,7767	,75717	4,0933	,60771	-2,297	,024
Consistency	3,7442	,71948	3,9869	,64025	-1,772	0,080
Adabtability	3,6729	,65527	3,9714	,65405	-2,249	0,027
Mission	3,7178	,74831	4,0488	,71515	-2,237	0,028
Culture	3,7279	,67402	4,0136	,62581	-2,168	0,033

Table 1: t-Test findings related to employees' perceptions of organizational culture by gender

Age

When the organizational perceptions of employees are evaluated according to age groups within the confidence interval (p<0.05), significant differences between consistency, adaptability and mission as organizational culture and sub-factors are observed (Table 2). But, as a sub-factor, no significant difference is seen in involvement. Differences in perceptions of organizational culture become prominent in older ages. Although no significant differences are observed in 15-20 age group, 30 and over age groups indicated significant differences. According to this result, the hypothesis of "employees' perceptions of organizational culture may vary according to age groups" is also confirmed *H2*.

Education

As shown in Table 1, employees' perceptions of organizational culture indicate significant differences within the confidence intervals (p<0.05) depending on their level of education. Differences in perceptions of organizational culture become more evident in upper education levels. According to this result, the hypothesis of "employees' perceptions of organizational culture may vary according to level of education" is confirmed *H3*.

VARIABLES	F Value	Significance Level	Source of Difference	Significance Level
Involvement	2,147	0,099	15-20	0,098
			21-29	0,051
			30-39	0,014
			40-49	0,014
Consistency	2,726	0,048	15-20	0,147
			21-29	0,014
			30-39	0,006
			40-49	0,006
Adabtability	3,046	0,032	15-20	0,202
			21-29	0,009
			30-39	0,005
			40-49	0,005
Mission	2,698	0,050	15-20	0,189
			21-29	0,016
			30-39	0,007
			40-49	0,007
Culture	2,865	0,041	15-20	0,080
			21-29	0,013
			30-39	0,005
			40-49	0,005

Table 2: One-Way ANOVA analysis findings related to employees' perceptions of organizational culture by age groups

VARIABLES	F Value	Significance Level	Source of Difference	Significance Level
Involvement	5,768	,004	Primary	,842
			High School	,003
			University	,003
Consistency	**6,173**	**,003**	Primary	,245
			High School	,010
			University	,001
Adaptability	**5,188**	**,007**	Primary	,659
			High School	,006
			University	,006
Mission	**5,277**	**,007**	Primary	,976
			High School	,003
			University	,003
Culture	**6,021**	**,003**	Primary	,567
			High School	,004
			University	,004

Table 3: One-Way ANOVA analysis findings related to employees' perceptions of organizational culture by level of education

Tenure

According to One-Way ANOVA analysis results, which aims to measure the differentiation in organizational culture perceptions depending on the duration of sectoral work experience, no significant difference is found within the confidence interval (p<0.05). Therefore, the hypothesis of "Employees' perceptions of organizational culture may vary according to their duration sectoral work experience" is rejected *H4*.

Tenure in the organization

One-Way ANOVA analysis results based on the duration of work experience in the organization do not indicate significant differences within the confidence interval (p<0.05). Thus, the hypothesis of "Employees' perceptions

of organizational culture may vary according to their duration of work experience in the organization" is rejected *H5*.

Conclusions

The results of the study reveal that demographic characteristis are determinant factors in organizational culture perceptions. Significant differences are observed in particular between the perception of organizational culture and gender, age (except for involvement) and education level. However, no significant differences appear between the perception of organizational culture and the duration of work experience in the secto and in the organization. When the findings of the study are compared to other studies conducted before, despite the existence of some differences, the study reveals similar results with others (Hofstede et al.1990; Helms ve Stern, 2001; Bellou, 2010). For instance, Hofstede *et.al.* (1990) state that the values of employees indicate differences according to their age and level of education. Helms & Stern (2001) and Bellou (2010), on the other hand, emphasise the existence of significant differences between the organizational culture perception and age and gender. Although Helms and Stern determined meaningful differences, even they are small, between duration of work experience in the sector and in the organisation and organizational culture perceptions, no significant differences are observed in this study.

This study has some limitations. The most important of which the research is conducted in only one hotel. This does not allow reserachers to generalize the findings to all thermal hotels. When the overall number of employees is taken into consideration, the inadequate number of respondents is another limitation. Repeating the study in similar thermal hotels working in similar environment and other kind of hotels working in different locations and environments (seaside, mountain resort, city hotels) will make the effects of demographic characteristics on organizational culture perception more prominent.

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