



Article Title

Linking authentic leadership to salespeople's service performance: The roles of job crafting and human resource flexibility

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Abstract

To build the sustainable service excellence, organizations should fuel sales employees' drive to serve customers and recover service failures to their utmost satisfaction. The primary aim of our study is to delve into the role of authentic leadership in fostering customer-oriented organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and service recovery performance among sales employees. Respondents for our surveys comprised employees and managers from sales departments of pharmaceutical companies in Vietnam. The data analyses justified the positive relationships between authentic leadership and customer-oriented OCB as well as service recovery performance in a business to business (B2B) context. Job crafting served as a mediator for the links between authentic leadership and customer-oriented OCB as well as service recovery performance. Furthermore, human resource (HR) flexibility was found to play a moderating role for the effect of authentic leadership on job crafting among sales employees.

Conclusion

This study find that sales managers' leadership behavior may shape sales employees' service behaviors including service task crafting, customer-oriented OCB, and service recovery. As sales leaders intend to activate such service behaviors among salespeople, they should adopt and strengthen the values of authentic leadership style. It was found that employees are inclined to rely on their sales leaders' authenticity as a source of resources to develop their service behaviors above and beyond the minimum expectations.

Organizations in a B2B selling context should therefore build high levels of authenticity in sales leaders' behavior through installing effective leadership training programs and incentive systems to convince sales leaders of the magnitude of such a leadership style as well as nurture it. Adopting authentic leadership to influence sales employees to become authentic salespeople help sales managers achieve higher levels of service performance with the added advantage of optimized supervisory resources.

Furthermore, sales leaders should coach and encourage their salespeople to craft their service tasks so that they can accrue further servicerelevant resources (knowledge, skills, and feedback) to engage effectively in customer-oriented OCB and service recovery. Best practice behaviors in service task crafting and service recovery should be encouraged to be shared among salespeople. Sales leaders and their firms within a B2B selling setting should seek to enhance salespeople's perceptions about B2B customers' value co-creation through their feedback and complaints as well as about the impact of

service failures on customers' operations and their own customers' via "domino effects".

Salespeople should be cognizant that, whether intended by their sales leaders or not, their service behaviors are prone to be influenced by their sales leaders. To serve customers beyond their roles or recover service failures more strategically, sales employees should proactively consult with their sales leaders as a source of resources regarding what tactics to serve customers or recuperate failures are required and then accordingly adjust their service behaviors.

Salespeople may display reactance to their sales leaders' role modelling attempts if they do not lead authentically. Firms hence should have another mechanism of control such as a system for HR flexibility as an alternative source of resource for the lack of authentic leadership in sales teams or during the process of authentic sales leadership development. This HR system will equip salespeople with skill and behavioral flexibility as well as adaptive value to develop resource- and challenge-seeking behavior to proactively craft service tasks as well as transcend their roles in serving customers. Nevertheless, firms may not necessarily invest in both authentic sales leadership and HR flexibility.

If authentic sales leaders can ensure sales members' effective engagement in extra-role servicing behaviors, then it may be more economical to select and/or develop authentic sales leaders rather than designing HR flexibility.

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