

An Examination of the Role of Perceived Support and Employee Commitment in Employee–Customer Encounters

Christian Vandenberghe
École des Hautes Études Commerciales

Kathleen Bentein
Université du Québec à Montréal

Richard Michon
Ryerson University

Jean-Charles Chebat
École des Hautes Études Commerciales and Reims Management School

Michel Tremblay
École des Hautes Études Commerciales

Jean-François Fils
Université Catholique de Louvain

The authors examined the relationships between perceived organizational support, organizational commitment, commitment to customers, and service quality in a fast-food firm. The research design matched customer responses with individual employees' attitudes, making this study a true test of the service provider–customer encounter. On the basis of a sample of matched employee–customer data ($N = 133$), hierarchical linear modeling analyses revealed that perceived organizational support had both a unit-level and an employee-level effect on 1 dimension of service quality: helping behavior. Contrary to affective organizational commitment, affective commitment to customers enhanced service quality. The 2 subdimensions of continuance commitment to the organization—perceived high sacrifice and perceived lack of alternatives—exerted effects opposite in sign: The former fostered service quality, whereas the latter reduced it. The implications of these findings are discussed within the context of research on employee–customer encounters.

Keywords: perceived organizational support, organizational commitment, commitment to customers, service quality

Western economies are increasingly dominated by services, which has stimulated employee–customer linkage research during the past decade (Pugh, Dietz, Wiley, & Brooks, 2002) and has encouraged researchers to identify the driving forces that lead to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty (Snipes, Oswald, LaTour, & Armenakis, 2005). Service firms are increasingly using *encounters* as the vehicle to deliver services. Encounters refer to situations in which the service is designed to be quick, reliable, and of a standard quality; is purported to address customers' instrumental needs; and occurs when the service provider and customer do not expect to interact again in the future (Guterk, Groth, & Cherry, 2002). Examples of service encounters include buying a ham-

burger in a fast-food restaurant or purchasing a ticket from an airline company (Guterk, Bhappu, Liao-Troth, & Cherry, 1999).

The challenge of organizations providing services through encounters is to keep customer-contact employees motivated to maintain a reliable and constant quality of service. In pursuing this objective, organizations typically use display rules that prescribe the emotions to be expressed during encounters (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988; Wilk & Moynihan, 2005). These emotions are thought to lead, through contagion processes, to positive evaluations of services by customers (Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, & Sideman, 2005; Pugh, 2001; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990; Tan, Foo, & Kwek, 2004; Tsai & Huang, 2002). However, because employees in firms providing services through encounters are not empowered to provide reliable and high-quality services (Guterk et al., 2002), the extent to which they comply with emotional display rules is uncertain. An indicator of such a disposition might be found in employees' attitudes in the workplace, particularly commitment. In support of this view, Gosserand and Diefendorff (2005) found that emotional display rules were related to high affective delivery of services only if employees were committed to these rules. Similarly, when employees feel supported by their organization, they are also more inclined to perform better during encounters (Susskind, Kacmar, & Borchgrevink, 2003).

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of customer-contact employees' attitudes toward the organization and its customers in the achievement of service quality within the fast-food industry, a context in which services are typically provided through encounters.

Christian Vandenberghe, Department of Management, École des Hautes Études Commerciales, Montréal, Québec, Canada; Kathleen Bentein, Department of Organization and Human Resources, Université du Québec à Montréal, Montréal, Québec, Canada; Richard Michon, School of Retail Management, Ryerson University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; Jean-Charles Chebat, Department of Marketing, École des Hautes Études Commerciales, and Reims Management School, Reims, France; Michel Tremblay, Department of Human Resource Management, École des Hautes Études Commerciales; Jean-François Fils, Department of Psychology, Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Christian Vandenberghe, École des Hautes Études Commerciales, 3000, Chemin de la Côte Sainte-Catherine, Montréal, Québec, Canada, H3T 2A7. E-mail: christian.vandenberghe@hec.ca

We postulated that perceived organizational support (POS), organizational commitment, and commitment to customers will influence the effective delivery of services as perceived by customers.

Employee Attitudes and Service Quality

Most research on the service provider–customer linkage has adopted a unit-level framework. This research has shown that employee satisfaction or commitment was significantly related to such outcomes as customer satisfaction (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Koys, 2001; Ryan, Schmit, & Johnson, 1996), discretionary service behavior (Simons & Roberson, 2003), and service quality (Schmit & Allscheid, 1995). Related findings within this line of research include the positive associations reported between climate for service and customer perceptions of service quality (Johnson, 1996; Rogg, Schmidt, Shull, & Schmitt, 2001; Schneider & Bowen, 1985; Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998), and between team maturity and effectiveness and customer satisfaction (Subramony, Beehr, & Johnson, 2004). There is thus compelling evidence suggesting that aggregate employee attitudes influence service quality in a variety of contexts.

Although interesting, these studies did not address the individual service provider–customer encounter, which is a key aspect of services because contact employees are boundary spanners who interact with customers on an individual basis (Chung & Schneider, 2002; Payne & Webber, 2006). To address this question, one needs to go beyond shared perceptions to examine the service provider–customer encounter at the employee level, which only a few studies have done. For example, Masterson (2001) found students' perceptions of their instructors' efforts and prosocial behaviors to be related to the instructors' reports of organizational commitment. Homburg and Stock (2004) showed that salespeople's job satisfaction affected customer satisfaction in dyadic relationships within a business-to-business environment. Other studies reported customer-oriented attitudes and behaviors and job satisfaction to be related to service quality (Snipes et al., 2005; Stock & Hoyer, 2005), service-oriented organizational citizenship behaviors, and customer satisfaction and loyalty (Payne & Webber, 2006). However, these studies were conducted within "service relationships" environments in which providers and customers have repeated interactions over time, not within service encounters contexts. The objective of the present study was to extend this research by building on well-known frameworks of individual attitudes to predict service quality in fast-food restaurants.

Perceived Organizational Support

Researchers conceive the employment relationship as an exchange of effort and loyalty against the receipt of material and psychological benefits (Blau, 1964; Etzioni, 1961; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). According to the norm of reciprocity that underlies social exchange processes in organizations (Gouldner, 1960), employees are expected to reciprocate the favorable treatment received from their employer by producing higher performance (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997). Accordingly, research has shown that (a) employees form global perceptions of the extent to which they are valued and cared about by the organization (POS; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986) and (b) use such perceptions as a basis for determining the strength of their obligations to reciprocate (Eisenberger et

al., 1997). In their review, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) found POS to be positively related to in-role and extrarole performance and negatively associated with intended and actual turnover.

Aside from its function as a catalyst of social exchange processes, POS may also "serve as a socio-emotional resource for employees" (Armeli, Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Lynch, 1998, p. 289). Armeli et al. (1998) found that POS was more strongly associated with work performance among police patrol officers when their need for socio-emotional support was stronger. The need for support might also be salient for contact employees providing services through encounters because they have to expend efforts at constantly displaying prescribed emotions (Grandey, 2003) and have little freedom in how to deliver services (Gutek et al., 2002). According to the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1998; Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993), the interpersonal job demands typically experienced by service employees constrain them to tap into their resources. To the extent that the efforts produced result in the depletion of one's energy, emotional exhaustion and reduced performance will ensue (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003; Schaufeli & Buunk, 1996). POS thus "provides resources that enable workers to accomplish work objectives" (Hochwarter, Witt, Treadway, & Ferris, 2006, p. 483), thereby helping contact employees maintain service quality. On the other hand, perceptions of support tend to be collectively shared by employees within the same unit. These perceptions are often included as an element of a climate for service contributing to customer satisfaction (Johnson, 1996; Schmit & Allscheid, 1995; Schneider et al., 1998; Susskind et al., 2003). We thus expect POS to affect customer perceptions of service quality at both the employee- and the unit- (i.e., restaurant) level.

Hypothesis 1a: Employee-level POS will be positively related to service quality.

Hypothesis 1b: Unit-level POS will be positively related to service quality after controlling for employee-level POS.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment has been shown to be a strong predictor of a variety of work outcomes, including intended and actual turnover and in-role and extrarole performance (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnysky, 2002). We contend that it should also be predictive of customer reactions, particularly at the employee level. The dominant framework in the literature, Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component model, provides a strong basis for delineating the proposed effects of commitment on service quality. Affective commitment (AC) indicates an emotional bond between the employee and the organization that is based on identification with the organization's goals and values. Research has shown that such commitment is facilitated by the positive work experiences provided by the organization (Meyer et al., 2002). In a service context, affectively committed individuals will tend to help the organization provide quality services (Allen & Grisaffe, 2001).

Hypothesis 2: Organizational AC will be positively related to service quality.

Continuance commitment (CC) reflects commitment based on the perceived costs of leaving the organization. Since the original proposition, research has shown that two subdimensions better characterize CC: (a) the perceived sacrifice associated with leaving

(HiSac) and (b) the costs resulting from a lack of employment alternatives (LoAlt; Bentein, Vandenberg, Vandenberghe, & Stinglhamber, 2005; Jaros, 1997; McGee & Ford, 1987; Meyer, Allen, & Gellatly, 1990; Powell & Meyer, 2004). HiSac and LoAlt consistently have been found to be related to one another but differentially related to other constructs. Although they have never been studied in relation with service quality, it is likely that they will relate to it differentially. First, the notion of sacrifice underlying HiSac refers to a variety of ties with the organization, with one set being instrumental but others being motivational. In the latter case, the ties reflect the fact that the individual has invested a lot of him- or herself in the job or the organization. This is in line with work by Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, and Erez (2001) on job embeddedness, according to which the organization-related sacrifice factor includes such motives as having freedom in doing one's job, being respected by and enjoying positive relations with one's coworkers, or having good promotional opportunities. All these aspects should be associated with a strong motivation to complete one's tasks effectively and thus characterize a positive inclination toward satisfying customers in the context of this study. The reverse might be true for LoAlt, which reveals negative perceptions regarding opportunities in the external environment. Those staying with their organization because of a lack of alternatives may feel trapped, which makes them more anxious and less willing to invest themselves in providing quality services to customers. The preceding discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a: HiSac will be positively related to service quality.

Hypothesis 3b: LoAlt will be negatively related to service quality.

Normative commitment (NC) is the last commitment form. NC refers to a loyalty driven by a sense of moral obligation toward the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Research has shown that it is positively associated with in-role and extrarole performance (Meyer et al., 2002). Accordingly, we expected NC to be positively related to service performance in the present study. As highlighted by Meyer, Becker, and Vandenberghe (2004), employees with a strong NC tend to introject the organization's goals and work toward their accomplishment through a sense of obligation. In so doing, they experience a "motivational mindset" that is somewhat externally controlled. However, their motivated behavior is sustained by the sense of self-worth they derive from gaining the organization's respect. Although the motivational basis underlying NC is less strong than the identification motive underlying AC, its effect on behavior should nonetheless be positive. We thus made the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Organizational NC will be positively related to service quality.

Commitment to Customers

As boundary spanners, service employees are likely to experience a dual commitment, that is, to both the organization and customers (Chung & Schneider, 2002). Because customers are external to the organization, the nature and strength of employees' commitment to them should be particularly relevant for predicting the extent to which they will try to meet the goals and expectations of customers (Siders, George, & Dharwadkar, 2001). One of these

expectations might be relationship-oriented (Bansal, Irving, & Taylor, 2004; Dube & Shoemaker, 2000; Mohr & Bitner, 1995), as illustrated by research on employees' customer orientation (Peccei & Rosenthal, 1997; Stock & Hoyer, 2005). However, no study has addressed the possibility that employee attitudes toward customers can take different forms. On the basis of the generalized model of employee commitment (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001), we argue that the three-component model provides a useful basis for depicting employees' attitudes toward customers.

AC to customers should reflect a mindset of desire to pursue a course of action of relevance to customers, such as exerting extra effort to satisfy their expectations. In line with research on emotions in service encounters (Homburg & Stock, 2004; Pugh, 2001; Tsai & Huang, 2002), we expect employees with a strong AC to customers to experience positive emotions that will be transmitted to customers through a process of emotional contagion. AC to customers, thus, should be positively related to customer perceptions of service quality, which is consistent with the finding that AC to customers among sales executives is related to customer-relevant objective performance (Siders et al., 2001). NC to customers implies a perceived obligation to meet the customers' expectations. In line with the arguments of Meyer et al. (2004), the somewhat externally controlled form of motivation accompanying NC to customers should increase service performance because it helps employees gain respect from customers and, hence, promotes their sense of self-worth. Finally, CC to customers can be viewed as being based on the perceived cost of failing to pursue a course of action of relevance to customers, such as meeting their expectations.¹ The motivational mindset accompanying CC to customers would thus be one of providing services of minimal quality to prevent customers from becoming dissatisfied. Together, these arguments led to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 5a: AC to customers will be positively related to service quality.

Hypothesis 5b: NC to customers will be positively related to service quality.

Hypothesis 5c: CC to customers will be unrelated to service quality.

¹ Note that our measure of CC to customers does not include a distinction between sacrifices and alternatives, as is the case for CC to the organization. Conceptually, we view CC to customers as the perceived cost of failing to meet customers' expectations. This is reflected in the content of the items of this scale as reported in the Appendix. Future research should determine whether a distinction between sacrifices and alternatives should be made within the construct domain of CC to customers. As noted by an anonymous reviewer of this article—whom we thank for the suggestion—the alternatives component of CC to customers may derive from employees perceiving few alternatives within the restaurant to serving customers (e.g., working at the grill, stocking materials, etc.). On the other hand, HiSac to customers could be conceptualized as the extent to which employees perceive that there are sacrifices associated with failing to meet customers' expectations. Clearly, our conceptualization of CC to customers departed from the content domain of these potential subcomponents of the construct.

Method

Sample and Procedure

The study was conducted in 12 restaurants of a fast-food firm located in Belgium. We met with the human resources department staff to plan the survey and build the measure of service quality. The study was conducted between January and April 2001. A student met restaurant managers and left them a specified number of envelopes including questionnaires to be distributed to employees. A cover letter explained that the study was about employee attitudes and invited employees to fill out the questionnaire and then to return it to the researchers' office using a prepaid envelope. Employees were informed that customers would be surveyed later about their satisfaction with the restaurant and food in general. After 2 weeks, the student asked managers to verbally remind employees to respond. A few days after the employee surveys were completed, the student spent 3 consecutive days (Friday–Sunday) at each restaurant to deliver customer surveys. He stayed behind the queues that faced the cash desks and distributed the survey to customers personally after they were served. Customers were informed that the survey asked about their perception of the service provided by the employee who served them. Customers seated themselves somewhere in the restaurant to eat, then filled out the questionnaire and left it in a sealed box at the exit door. Cashier and customer questionnaires were coded to allow their pairing. For each cashier, 10 randomly selected customers received the service quality questionnaire.

In total, 420 employee questionnaires were distributed. Among them, 266 were sent back (63.34%). Among respondents, 133 were cashiers (contact employees). The customer surveys were distributed to 1,976 customers. Of those, 1,774 participated (89.78%). Overall, 1,116 customer surveys could be matched to the 133 cashiers, for an average 8.39 customers per employee. The average number of employee responses per restaurant was 11.09 (range = 7–19), whereas the average size of restaurants in terms of staff employed was 35 (range = 28–39).

Although we were not able to collect information regarding employee age in the employee survey, information received from the human resources department revealed that the overall population working in the restaurants was young, with 24.70% younger than 20 years of age, 29.80% aged 20–21, 27.70% aged 22–24, and 17.80% aged 25 or older. Within the sample of 133 cashiers retained for substantive analyses, 53% were female, average organizational tenure was 1.01 years ($SD = 1.42$), 63.4% worked fewer than 20 hours per week, and the remaining 34.6% worked more than 20 hours per week; 66.2% had school demands in addition to their work.²

Measures

Service quality. We used the SERVPERF scale of the SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988) as the starting point for developing scale items. The SERVPERF measures the extent to which customers perceive employees as performing a series of service behaviors (Brady, Cronin, & Brand, 2001; Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Two criteria guided our work in adapting the scale to the purpose of this study. First, the items had to fit the fast-food industry, which is characterized by brief but numerous contacts between service employees and customers. Second, the items had to describe the behavior of individual employees. Among the 22 SERVPERF items, 12 were judged as relevant to the industry context. They were slightly adapted and then translated into French by a first translator and independently

back-translated by a second translator (Brislin, 1980). The human resources department staff added a 13th item: "This employee was considerate toward me."

Employee attitudes. POS was measured via a French version (Vandenberghe & Peiro, 1999) of the eight-item Survey of POS originally developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986). We used the French version of the organizational commitment scales developed by Bentein et al. (2005) to measure Meyer and Allen's (1991) commitment forms. AC and NC were measured via six items, and HiSac and LoAlt were captured by three items. Note that one item was removed from the HiSac scale because it reduced the scale reliability. To measure commitment to customers, we used a measure of the three-component model of commitment targeted to customers (Stinglhamber, Bentein, & Vandenberghe, 2002): AC and NC were captured by six items, and CC was measured via five items. The full commitment scales are provided in the Appendix.

A 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*) was used for all items.

Control variables. Employee sex, organizational tenure, employment status (<20 hr worked per week vs. ≥20 hr or more), type of labor contract (student contract vs. regular contract), and size of restaurant (number of staff employed) were used as controls.

Analyses

To determine whether customers agreed reasonably well in their evaluations of service interactions with target employees, we used the average mean deviation (AD_M) index of agreement suggested by Burke and colleagues (Burke & Dunlap, 2002; Burke, Finkelstein, & Dusig, 1999; Dunlap, Burke, & Smith-Crowe, 2003). The AD_M index is a measure of average absolute deviation relative to the mean of scores provided by independent raters on a scale or item and was preferred over the r_{wg} index because "it allows for a clear conceptualization of agreement in the metric of the original scale" (Goldberg, Finkelstein, Perry, & Konrad, 2004, p. 814). Smaller AD_M indices indicate stronger agreement among raters. Burke and Dunlap (2002) suggested .83 as a critical value from both a practical and a statistical standpoint for determining the agreement among raters who use a 5-point Likert scale. Ideally, each item should display an AD_M value of .83 or below for every employee being rated by customers. As there might be variation in the level of agreement among raters from one item to another, we used the rule of thumb that the mean AD_M index for each item should be .83 or less. We report the mean AD_M values across items in Table 1. All values are below .83, except for one item that we dropped from the analyses. In addition, we calculated the intraclass correlation (ICC[1]) for the two factors reported in Table 1. In this study, ICC(1) represented an estimate of the proportion of variance in the evaluations of customers that is accounted for by the employee ($N = 133$) to whom they referred. The ICC(1) values (.20 and .18, respectively) compared favorably with those reported in similar studies (cf. Schneider et al., 1998; Susskind et al., 2003).

² Workers who have school demands in addition to their job are employed under a specific labor contract often called a "student contract" in Belgium. These contracts are popular because employers' social security contributions, which, according to Belgian law, are calculated as a percentage of employees' salaries, are lower. Hiring students, therefore, reduces overhead costs.

Table 1
Principal Components Analysis of Service Quality Items

Item	Self-presentation	Helping behavior	Mean AD_M	SD
1. This employee was neat-appearing	<u>.86</u>	.23	.57	.28
2. The appearance of this employee did inspire me with confidence	<u>.80</u>	.08	.82	.26
3. This employee was courteous with me	<u>.72</u>	-.14	.64	.27
4. This employee felt at ease with me	<u>.70</u>	-.12	.73	.28
5. This employee had the knowledge to answer my questions	<u>.59</u>	-.37	.65	.25
6. This employee gave me personal attention	<u>.54</u>	-.20	.75	.30
7. This employee gave me prompt service	.36	-.36	.60	.30
8. This employee was never too busy to answer my requests	-.17	<u>-.90</u>	.79	.29
9. When I had a problem, this employee showed a sincere interest in solving it	.05	<u>-.82</u>	.77	.27
10. This employee was always willing to help me	.12	<u>-.77</u>	.67	.23
11. This employee understood my specific needs	.07	<u>-.77</u>	.82	.26
12. This employee was considerate towards me	.46	-.47	.71	.24

Note. $N = 133$. Item main loadings are underlined. AD_M = average deviation agreement index.

The structure of the 12 service quality items that reflected consensual assessments among customers was examined at the employee level through principal components analysis using an oblique rotation. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 1. Two factors with eigenvalues greater than unity (5.87 and 1.44, respectively), accounting for an overall amount of 60.84% of the variance) were extracted. The first factor (6 items) dealt with the general appearance and presentation of employees toward customers, which we labeled *Self-presentation*. The second factor (4 items) referred to the extent to which employees were responsive to customer needs. We called it *Helping Behavior*. Two items were excluded from further analyses because of a substantial cross-loading (Item 12) or main loading being less than .40 (Item 7; see Table 1).

Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) was used to examine the relationships between predictors and customer data (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). HLM is suitable for analyzing data at multiple levels and accounts for the nesting of data at different levels. In the present study, customer data and employee responses were nested within restaurants. Although customer data are nested within employees, the relationships between employee variables and service quality were not handled at the customer level because there was no independent variable at that level. Our HLM thus included two levels, the employee and restaurant levels, and used dependent variables derived from customer responses aggregated at the employee level. All Level 1 variables were grand-mean centered, as recommended by Hofmann and Gavin (1998). We first ran the HLM using our control and independent variables as predictors. As none of the control variables proved to be significant, they were dropped from the models.

Results

We examined the dimensionality of commitment items using confirmatory factor analysis. Because of the small sample size ($N = 133$), we created three indicators per commitment construct by balancing the quality and content of the items (Dragow & Kanfer, 1985). Results are presented in Table 2. The seven-factor model yielded a good fit, $\chi^2(149, N = 133) = 221.129, p < .001$, comparative fit index (CFI) = .96, nonnormed fit index (NNFI) = .95, root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .05, and was superior to any simpler representation of the data as obtained by merging factors on a two-by-two basis ($p < .001$).

This provides good evidence that commitment dimensions were distinguishable across forms and foci in this study.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations for the study variables. All variables displayed good internal consistency ($\alpha s > .70$). Correlations among independent variables were low to moderate, with only the correlation between organizational AC and NC exceeding .50 ($r = .52, p < .01$ [one-tailed]). Also, the two service quality dimensions were only moderately associated with one another ($r = .49, p < .01$ [one-tailed]), signaling that they tapped into separate domains. Finally, one dimension of service quality, helping behavior, but not the other, was significantly associated with two theorized predictors, that is, POS ($r = .23, p < .01$ [one-tailed]) and HiSac ($r = .18, p < .05$ [one-tailed]), in the direction predicted by Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 3a.

The results of HLM analyses are presented in Tables 4 and 5. For self-presentation, although POS exerted no effect at the restaurant level, the Level 2 variance component was significant, $\chi^2(10, N = 12) = 48.13, p < .01$, suggesting that there was significant variation across restaurants on self-presentation. The pooled Level 1 predictors explained a small 10% of the variance of self-presentation (ns), leaving a large amount of its variance unexplained. For helping behavior, the HLM analysis also revealed significant variation across restaurants, as exemplified by its significant (Level 2) between-groups variance component, $\chi^2(10, N = 12) = 22.71, p < .01$. Its associated R^2 was 22% ($p < .001$), indicating that the model accounted for a sizeable amount of variance of helping behavior.³ It is obvious from these results that helping behavior is better explained by our HLM analysis than self-presentation.

Level 1 POS had no effect on self-presentation, $\gamma = .02, t(111) = .49, ns$ (one-tailed), but was significantly related to helping behavior,

³ Rather than using pseudo- R^2 estimates, the effect size assessments for self-presentation and helping behavior were derived from ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. As noted by Hofmann, Morgeson, and Gerras (2003), OLS regression provides an unbiased assessment of the percentage of variance accounted for by a model, which may not be the case for model parameters. We preferred this approach to using available pseudo- R^2 , whose computation differs depending on the formula proposed by authors (e.g., Kreft & de Leeuw, 1998; Snijders & Bosker, 1999) and whose meaning is different from the R^2 obtained via OLS regression.

Table 2
Confirmatory Factor Analysis Fit Indices for Commitment Models

Model	χ^2	df	CFI	NNFI	RMSEA	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf
1. Seven-factor	221.129***	149	.96	.95	.05		
2. Six-factor (HiSac & LoAlt = 1 factor)	340.507***	155	.90	.88	.09	119.378***	6
3. Six-factor (AC-ORG & NC-ORG = 1 factor)	291.851***	155	.93	.91	.08	70.722***	6
4. Six-factor (AC-CUS & NC-CUS = 1 factor)	313.198***	155	.92	.90	.09	92.069***	6
5. Six-factor (AC-ORG & AC-CUS = 1 factor)	310.851***	155	.92	.90	.09	89.722***	6
6. Six-factor (NC-ORG & NC-CUS = 1 factor)	371.653***	155	.89	.86	.10	150.524***	6
7. Five-factor (HiSac, LoAlt, & CC-CUS = 1 factor)	404.486***	160	.87	.85	.11	183.357***	11
8. Four-factor (AC-ORG, NC-ORG, HiSac, & LoAlt = 1 factor)	443.707***	164	.86	.83	.12	222.578***	15
9. Five-factor (AC-CUS, NC-CUS, CC-CUS = 1 factor)	445.632***	160	.85	.82	.13	224.503***	11
10. One-factor	759.963***	170	.69	.66	.18	538.834***	21

Note. $N = 133$. CFI = comparative fit index; NNFI = nonnormed fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; AC-ORG = affective commitment to the organization; NC-ORG = normative commitment to the organization; HiSac = continuance commitment – high sacrifice; LoAlt = continuance commitment – perceived lack of alternatives; AC-CUS = affective commitment to customers; NC-CUS = normative commitment to customers; CC-CUS = continuance commitment to customers. Values reported in the $\Delta\chi^2$ column refer to contrasts with the seven-factor model. *** $p < .001$.

$\gamma = .06, t(111) = 2.04, p < .05$ (one-tailed). Hypothesis 1a was thus partly supported. Using the intercepts-as-outcomes model (Hofmann, Griffin, & Gavin, 2000), Level 2 POS was again unrelated to self-presentation, $\gamma = -.02, t(10) = -.12, ns$ (one-tailed), yet exerted a significant effect on helping behavior, $\gamma = .23, t(10) = 2.36, p < .05$ (one-tailed), suggesting that the restaurant-level POS influenced the extent to which employees exhibited helping behavior. Hypothesis 1b was thus partly supported.

Counter to Hypothesis 2, organizational AC was not significantly related to self-presentation, $\gamma = -.09, t(111) = -2.33, ns$ (one-tailed), nor to helping behavior, $\gamma = -.12, t(111) = -3.04, ns$ (one-tailed). We also predicted that HiSac would be positively and LoAlt negatively related to service quality (see Hypotheses 3a and 3b). HiSac was significantly related to both self-presentation, $\gamma = .04, t(111) = 1.67, p < .05$ (one-

tailed), and helping behavior, $\gamma = .07, t(111) = 2.81, p < .01$ (one-tailed). Hypothesis 3a was thus supported. On the other hand, LoAlt was negatively related to both self-presentation, $\gamma = -.05, t(111) = -1.90, p < .05$ (one-tailed), and helping behavior, $\gamma = -.05, t(111) = -1.82, p < .05$ (one-tailed), supporting Hypothesis 3b. Counter to Hypothesis 4, organizational NC was unrelated to both self-presentation, $\gamma = -.01, t(111) = -.26, ns$ (one-tailed), and helping behavior, $\gamma = -.04, t(111) = -1.03, ns$ (one-tailed). AC to customers was positively related to both self-presentation, $\gamma = .09, t(111) = 2.19, p < .05$ (one-tailed), and helping behavior, $\gamma = .08, t(111) = 1.82, p < .05$ (one-tailed), lending support to Hypothesis 5a. NC to customers had no effect on self-presentation, $\gamma = -.01, t(111) = -.31, ns$ (one-tailed), or on helping behavior, $\gamma = -.04, t(111) = -.92, ns$ (one-tailed), disconfirming Hypothesis 5b.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for the Study Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Sex	1.47	0.50	—														
2. Organizational tenure	1.01	1.42	-.02	—													
3. Employment status	1.37	0.48	.07	.19 [†]	—												
4. Type of contract	1.34	0.48	.06	.17 [†]	.81 ^{††}	—											
5. Size of restaurant	33.97	3.59	.23 ^{††}	.03	-.14	-.15 [†]	—										
6. POS	2.87	0.97	-.11	-.17 [†]	.07	.09	.07	(.93)									
7. Organizational AC	2.82	0.84	.07	-.09	-.03	.02	-.12	.42 ^{††}	(.78)								
8. Organizational NC	2.36	0.98	.06	-.20 [†]	.04	-.01	-.17 [†]	.38 ^{††}	.52 ^{††}	(.84)							
9. HiSac	2.63	1.20	.07	-.10	-.22 [†]	-.20 [†]	-.06	.18 [†]	.30 ^{††}	.42 ^{††}	(.73)						
10. LoAlt	2.19	1.09	-.05	.02	.08	.02	.19 [†]	-.15 [†]	-.27 ^{††}	-.12	.14	(.77)					
11. AC to customers	2.93	0.79	.09	-.07	.19 [†]	.20 [†]	.01	.32 ^{††}	.40 ^{††}	.39 ^{††}	.16 [†]	-.02	(.74)				
12. NC to customers	3.86	0.79	.10	-.03	.06	.10	.12	.25 ^{††}	.23 ^{††}	.17 [†]	.26 ^{††}	-.05	.40 ^{††}	(.78)			
13. CC to customers	2.05	0.92	.03	-.10	-.05	-.07	-.03	.26 ^{††}	.35 ^{††}	.48 ^{††}	.31 ^{††}	.05	.43 ^{††}	.09	(.86)		
14. Self-presentation	4.14	0.31	-.09	.08	.12	.13	.03	.00	-.10	-.02	.04	-.10	.11	.06	-.10	(.84)	
15. Helping behavior	3.98	0.33	-.05	.06	-.07	-.12	.03	.23 ^{††}	-.10	-.04	.18 [†]	-.12	.11	.02	.07	.49 ^{††}	(.85)

Note. $ns = 121-133$. Alpha coefficients are reported in parentheses on the diagonal. For sex, 1 = female, 2 = male; for employment status, 1 = fewer than 20 hours worked per week, 2 = 20 hours or more worked per week. For type of contract, 1 = student; 2 = regular employee. Self-presentation and helping behavior represent aggregate perceptions of customers regarding these aspects of the quality of service received from employees. POS = perceived organizational support; AC = affective commitment; NC = normative commitment; HiSac = continuance commitment – high sacrifice; LoAlt = continuance commitment – perceived lack of alternatives. [†] $p < .05$ (one-tailed). ^{††} $p < .01$ (one-tailed).

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Table 4
Results of Hierarchical Linear Modeling Analysis Predicting
Self-Presentation

Variable	Unstandardized coefficient	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Final estimation of fixed effects				
Level 1				
Intercept	4.17 ^{†††}	.39	10.73	10
POS	.02	.03	0.49	111
Organizational AC	-.09	.04	-2.33	111
Organizational NC	-.01	.04	-0.26	111
HiSac	.04 [†]	.03	1.67	111
LoAlt	-.05 [†]	.03	-1.90	111
AC to customers	.09 [†]	.04	2.19	111
NC to customers	-.01	.04	-0.31	111
CC to customers	-.04	.03	-1.14	111
Level 2				
POS	-.02	.14	-0.12	10
<i>R</i> ²		.10		
Final estimation of variance components				
	Variance component		χ^2	<i>df</i>
Level 2 (restaurant mean)	.030		48.13 ^{††}	10
Level 1 variables	.072			

Note. The HLM model for customers' perception of employee self-presentation is as follows: Level 1: Self-presentation = $\beta_0 + \beta_1$ (POS) + β_2 (Organizational AC) + β_3 (Organizational NC) + β_4 (HiSac) + β_5 (LoAlt) + β_6 (AC to customers) + β_7 (NC to customers) + β_8 (CC to customers) + *r*. Level 2: $\beta_0 = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}$ (POS) + u_0 ; $\beta_1 = \gamma_{10}$; $\beta_2 = \gamma_{20}$; $\beta_3 = \gamma_{30}$; $\beta_4 = \gamma_{40}$; $\beta_5 = \gamma_{50}$; $\beta_6 = \gamma_{60}$; $\beta_7 = \gamma_{70}$; $\beta_8 = \gamma_{80}$. POS = perceived organizational support; AC = affective commitment; NC = normative commitment; HiSac = continuance commitment - high sacrifice; LoAlt = continuance commitment - perceived lack of alternatives. [†] $p < .05$ (one-tailed). ^{††} $p < .01$ (one-tailed). ^{†††} $p < .001$ (one-tailed).

Finally, as predicted by Hypothesis 5c, CC to customers was not significantly related to self-presentation, $\gamma = -.04$, $t(111) = -1.14$, *ns* (one-tailed), or to helping behavior, $\gamma = -.03$, $t(111) = -.74$, *ns* (one-tailed).

Discussion

This study counts among the few studies that have addressed the link between employee attitudes and customers at the individual level (e.g., Homburg & Stock, 2004; Payne & Webber, 2006; Snipes et al., 2005; Stock & Hoyer, 2005). The use of service quality perceptions from multiple customers and the reliance on well-established models from organizational behavior, namely POS and employee commitment, also add to the contribution of this study. HLM analyses revealed that employee helping behavior was better explained by our independent variables than self-presentation. This suggests that other variables than those considered in this study might influence self-presentation. For example, past research has identified personality as an individual-level determinant of service behavior. Using the Big Five personality model, Liao and Chuang (2004) found conscientiousness and extraversion to be predictors of employee service performance in a sample of stores of a restaurant chain. Future research should

examine whether personality traits are differentially related to self-presentation and helping behavior.

POS was positively related to helping behavior both at the restaurant level and at the employee level.⁴ Its influence at the restaurant level is consistent with research finding supportive management practices to be a key component of a climate for service leading to customer satisfaction (Johnson, 1996; Schmit & Allscheid, 1995; Schneider et al., 1998; Susskind et al., 2003). The fact that POS also acted on helping behavior at the individual level illustrates that it may "serve as a socio-emotional resource for employees" (Armeli et al., 1998, p. 289). Conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1998; Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993) states that service employees typically experience chronic interpersonal job demands that lead them to tap into their resources to continue working efficiently. The socioemotional needs of such employees might be salient within encounter-based firms where they typically have to comply with role scripts and constantly monitor emotions (Gosserand & Diefendorff, 2005; Grandey et al., 2005). As an antidote against resource depletion (Hochwarter et al., 2006), POS may help contact employees maintain service performance (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Schaufeli & Buunk, 1996). Note that our finding is at odds with research showing that organizational AC mediates the effect of POS on work outcomes (e.g., Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001).⁵ However, these views are not incompatible. That is, POS's role as a socioemotional resource might be more relevant for predicting service performance, whereas its social exchange function might be more influential on organization-directed outcomes such as membership decisions. In the latter case, the effect of POS should be mediated by organizational AC. Future research should examine whether these two functions operate simultaneously in service environments.

Counter to predictions, organizational AC was not significantly associated with service quality. Like Payne and Webber (2006), who examined the relationship between AC and customer satisfaction at the employee level, we found that the sign of the organizational AC–service quality relationships was negative. This contradicts the foundations of commitment theory, which states that employees with high AC to the organization, due to their

⁴ Note that, contrary to POS, commitment variables were not considered as potential predictors of service quality at Level 2 in our HLM analyses. This is because POS refers to perceptions of the organization's actions, for which consensus should exist among employees insofar as the organization treats its employees in the same manner, and commitment refers to individual attitudes that should vary widely across individuals on the basis of a variety of influences among which the organization's actions are only a subset.

⁵ We considered the possibility that organizational AC actually mediated the POS–service quality relationship at the individual level by checking whether the four conditions for a mediated effect to be observed were met. These conditions state that (a) the independent variable must be significantly related to the dependent variable, (b) the mediator must be significantly related to the dependent variable, (c) the independent variable must be significantly related to the mediator, and (d) the effect of the independent variable should be significantly reduced when the effect of the mediator is controlled for (Baron & Kenny, 1986). For both self-presentation and helping behavior, at least one of the above conditions was not met, suggesting that organizational AC did not mediate the POS–service quality relationship in this study. The results of these analyses are available on request from the first author.

Table 5
Results of Hierarchical Linear Modeling Analysis Predicting
Helping Behavior

Variable	Unstandardized coefficient	SE	t	df
Final estimation of fixed effects				
Level 1				
Intercept	3.33 ^{†††}	.28	11.70	10
POS	.06 [†]	.03	2.04	111
Organizational AC	-.12	.04	-3.04	111
Organizational NC	-.04	.04	-1.03	111
HiSac	.07 ^{††}	.03	2.81	111
LoAlt	-.05 [†]	.03	-1.82	111
AC to customers	.08 [†]	.04	1.82	111
NC to customers	-.04	.04	-0.92	111
CC to customers	-.03	.04	-0.74	111
Level 2				
POS	.23 [†]	.10	2.36	10
R ²		.22		
Variance component				
			χ^2	df
Final estimation of variance components				
Level 2 (restaurant mean)	.010		22.71 ^{††}	10
Level 1 variables	.077			

Note. The HLM model for customers' perception of employee helping behavior is as follows: Level 1: Helping behavior = $\beta_0 + \beta_1$ (POS) + β_2 (Organizational AC) + β_3 (Organizational NC) + β_4 (HiSac) + β_5 (LoAlt) + β_6 (AC to customers) + β_7 (NC to customers) + β_8 (CC to customers) + r . Level 2: $\beta_0 + \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}$ (POS) + u_0 ; $\beta_1 = \gamma_{10}$; $\beta_2 = \gamma_{20}$; $\beta_3 = \gamma_{30}$; $\beta_4 = \gamma_{40}$; $\beta_5 = \gamma_{50}$; $\beta_6 = \gamma_{60}$; $\beta_7 = \gamma_{70}$; $\beta_8 = \gamma_{80}$. POS = perceived organizational support; AC = affective commitment; NC = normative commitment; HiSac = continuance commitment - high sacrifice; LoAlt = continuance commitment - perceived lack of alternatives. [†] $p < .05$ (one-tailed). ^{††} $p < .01$ (one-tailed). ^{†††} $p < .001$ (one-tailed).

internalizing the organization's goals and values, should be inclined to work hard in favor of its customers (Allen & Grisaffe, 2001). However, it could be that the nature and strength of the association between organizational AC and service quality depend on the extent to which the organization's goals are compatible with customers' goals and expectations. Future research should examine whether organization-customer goal compatibility moderates the organizational AC-service quality relationship. On a related note, we found organizational NC to be unrelated to service quality as well. As the same result was observed for NC to customers, this suggests that introjecting the organization's and customers' goals is not enough to sustain service performance.

This study also provides new insights into the meaning and dimensionality of CC. HiSac was positively and LoAlt was negatively associated with service quality. For one, there might be a strong motivational basis underlying HiSac, which we postulated would be involved in its positive effects on service quality. HiSac refers to the sacrifice that would be incurred if employees left their organization. As exemplified in the work of Mitchell et al. (2001), the roots of organization-related sacrifice partly refer to the value and meaning of a job, the freedom with which it can be accomplished, or the respect it entails from others. These aspects sound motivational and should characterize employees who invest much of themselves in their job, hence providing high-quality services. In contrast, LoAlt negatively affected service quality. Although

some researchers have treated LoAlt as a potential antecedent to HiSac (e.g., Allen & Meyer, 2000; Jaros, 1997; McGee & Ford, 1987; Powell & Meyer, 2004), we think it may represent the negative side of CC, which is thought to render employees reluctant to do anything more than the minimum required to maintain their employment. It is plausible that the mindset of employees with a lack of alternatives is one of entrapment and disgruntlement that is easily perceived by customers via the service encounter.

Besides organizational commitment, commitment to customers may be important in the context of service encounters (Payne & Webber, 2006). This study found support for the factorial validity of a three-component model of commitment to customers and for its distinctiveness with respect to organizational commitment. AC to customers was positively related to service quality. Although theory helps understand this positive effect (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001), more work is needed to fully comprehend the role of its CC and NC counterparts. For example, it might be that the sense of obligation toward customers and the cost incurred from having to invest time to know their needs are more relevant in service relationships contexts where there is a continuing pattern of interactions among employees and customers (Guttek et al., 1999).

This study has limitations. First, our sample was limited in size ($N = 133$). Of course, this constraint made this study a conservative test of our hypotheses. Nevertheless, future research should attempt to collect data over larger samples of employees and customers. Second, there is a need to investigate whether the present findings could be replicated in environments where employees engage in long-term relationships with customers. Third, as we found no effect for NC on service quality, the current study also addresses the recurrent concern as to the usefulness of NC regarding the prediction of important work outcomes (Ko, Price, & Mueller, 1997). Finally, there remains some uncertainty regarding the causal nature of relationships among constructs in the present study. It might be that when employees perceive that customers evaluate services positively, they feel more committed to them, yielding a kind of reverse contagion effect. The use of panel surveys that track both employee attitudes and service quality over time might help researchers draw more solid conclusions in terms of causality.

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Appendix

Commitment Items

Type of commitment	Item
Organizational commitment	
Affective commitment	1. I really feel that I belong in this organization. 2. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me. ^a 3. I am proud to belong to this organization. 4. I do not feel emotionally attached to this organization. ^a (reverse scored) 5. I do not feel like part of the family at my organization. ^a (reverse scored) 6. I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own. ^a
Normative commitment	7. It would not be morally right for me to leave this organization now. 8. It would not be right to leave my current organization now, even if it were to my advantage. 9. I think I would be guilty if I left my current organization now. 10. I would violate a trust if I left my current organization now. 11. If I got another offer for a better job elsewhere, I would not feel it was right to leave my organization. ^a
Perceived high sacrifice	12. I would not leave my organization right now, because I have a sense of obligation to certain people who work there. 13. I would not leave this organization because of what I would stand to lose. ^b 14. For me personally, the costs of leaving this organization would be far greater than the benefits. ^b 15. I continue to work for this organization because I don't believe another organization could offer me the benefits I have here. ^{b,c}
Perceived lack of alternatives	16. I have no choice but to stay with this organization. 17. I stay with this organization because I can't see where else I could work. 18. I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization. ^a
Commitment to customers	
Affective commitment	1. I feel close to my customers. 2. I feel emotionally attached to my customers. 3. My customers mean a lot to me. 4. I do not feel especially attached to my customers. (reverse scored) 5. In general, I have a liking for my customers. 6. I identify little with the expectations of my customers. (reverse scored)
Normative commitment	7. I think I am morally responsible for meeting the needs of my customers. 8. I feel I have a moral obligation to respond to the needs of my customers. 9. I would fail in my duty if I neglected my customers. 10. It would be wrong on my part to neglect the needs of my customers. 11. I feel obligated to meet the expectations of my customers. 12. I think I would be violating an implicit contract if I failed to respond to my customers' needs.
Continuance commitment	13. I have acquired so much knowledge concerning the expectations of my customers that it would not be possible for me to change employment. 14. I am so specialized in the services I provide to my clientele that I could not imagine doing anything else. 15. It would be difficult for me, given the skills that I have acquired, to reinvest in working with another clientele. 16. I have expended so much effort to get to know the needs of my clientele that it would not be advantageous for me to quit my present job. 17. Mastering the necessary skills for working with another clientele would require me a great deal of time and energy.

^a From "The Measurement and Antecedents of Affective, Continuance and Normative Commitment to the Organization," by N. J. Allen and J. P. Meyer, 1990, *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 63. Copyright 1990 by the British Psychological Society. ^b Item taken from "Side-Bet Theory and the Three-Component Model of Organizational Commitment," by D. M. Powell and J. P. Meyer, 2004, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 65. ^c This item was removed because it reduced the reliability of the scale.

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