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IT SERVICE CLIMATE AND IT SERVICE QUALITY

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Extended Abstract

Previous research (Kettinger and Lee 1994; Pitt et al. 1995) has adapted the service quality construct and the SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman et al. 1988, 1991, 1993) from the marketing literature, using it to gauge business users’ expected and perceived levels of IT service quality. In this research, we look inside the IT function to identify variables that affect IT service quality. By focusing on IT professionals and the IT department, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of service quality and assist managers to pinpoint the causes of service shortfalls.

This study offers a theory-based extension to IT service quality research. We look to the organizational psychology literature, with its stream of theory-based research on organizational climate to connect management practices with organizational outcomes through employees’ shared cognition of their work environment (Campbell et al. 1970; Kopelman et al. 1990). Much of that literature has focused on one type of climate, i.e., service climate (or climate for service), which has been established as a predictor of the quality of service provided to customers (Schneider and Bowen 1985; Schneider et al. 1980; Schneider et al. 1996; Schneider et al. 1998). Building on these studies, we apply service climate theories to the IT context and introduce a new construct, IT service climate, which is defined as IT professionals’ shared perceptions of the practices, procedures, and behaviors that are rewarded, supported, and expected in the IT function with regard to providing IT service to business customers.

Schneider et al. (1998) developed a multidimensional scale of service climate (i.e., customer orientation, managerial practices, customer feedback, and a global measure) in studies of banking services. While these dimensions may also apply
to IT, new dimensions unique to the IT service context may be identified in empirical research. Thus, the key empirical task of this study will be to develop an instrument for the IT service climate construct and establish its validity. Of particular importance is its predictive validity – that IT service climate predicts the quality of service received by business clients.

While the climate construct is likely to apply at both corporate and unit levels of analysis, this research will focus on the level of the IT unit, which is defined as a subunit within the IT department that has a specific management structure in place, serving a single business client unit (Nelson and Cooprider 1996). The main advantage of this choice is that it requires a smaller number of organizations to participate in the study because one organization may have multiple such IT units. Therefore, the service climate instrument will be developed at the level of the IT unit to predict the quality of service received by the business client unit it serves.

Because Schneider and colleagues’ original service climate measurement instrument is proprietary, the instrument for the new IT service climate construct will be built from group up. Following the guidelines set forth by Churchill (1979) and Moore and Benbasat (1991), construct validation will be carried out in three phases: (1) item generation, (2) scale development and pilot test, and (3) final instrument validation. Phases 1 and 2 have been completed, and Phase 3 final validation is ongoing.

This study represents an effort to comprehensively introduce organizational climate as a useful theoretical lens for researchers interested in many IT-related phenomena, with a focus on its application in the IT service context. It has the potential to extend IT service quality research by identifying IT service climate as its antecedent and offering a measurement instrument. Such an instrument will assist IT managers in taking targeted actions to improve service quality. IS-SERVQUAL, as a dependent-variable instrument, will then become more useful to managers after IT service climate is established as an antecedent.

References

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