



The Effects of Compliments on the Feelings of Job Attitudes of Hotel Employees

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ABSTRACT

Hardly found is research clarifying the correlation between an individual's attitude change and compliment, through its positive measurement. In particular, it is much harder to find research that verifies such effects with hotel employees, who are highly dependent on personal services through a positive mechanism of compliments. This research, therefore, aims to propose a plan that can be utilized for future management of human resources in the hotel industry by clarifying the effects of compliments on the job attitude of hotel employees from first-class hotels in the Busan region. Results suggest that: The dependent variable - feelings of job attitude - is measured by both personal and organizational aspects. A simple regression model is used to test hypotheses 1 and 2, in which the results verify that both have statistically significant effects. Between the two, personal attitude shows higher influence. This indicates that verbal compliments have larger impacts on job attitude than institutional rewards related to human resource management, such as promotion or compensation. Conclusion suggests that compliments are not burdensome yet more efficient through frequent use.

Keywords: Compliment, Personal Attitude, Organizational Attitude

JEL Classifications: J5, L2, L8, M1, Z31

1. INTRODUCTION

As it became widely known that "compliments" are as powerful to even make whales dance, the positive effects of compliments and the likewise social atmosphere expanded to result in an increased degree of recognition on the value of compliments especially through a psychological approach (Moon, 2009). Until recently, subject areas such as children and educational studies usually took conceptual approaches to compliment, deepening the related theoretical studies from the perspective of self-respect. Yet, as the conceptual approach to compliment is developing based on the assumption of psychological transformations, the fact that compliments exert positive effects on individual morale, motivation and attitude is gaining more attention. This reflects the necessity of further discussions and empirical verifications on the assumption that compliments can change the constituents feelings in a positive direction (Ko et al., 2008).

The theoretical implication of these effects of compliments is only plausible when assuming a positive change in an actor's

individual psychological state. Along with the assumption that compliments will have a meaningful impact on other everyday aspects including attitude and morale enhancement, it is known that compliments increase one's feeling of competence, which leads to a boost of intrinsic motivation (Ahn and Lee, 1988). In other words, people who receive compliments will produce positive effects - and it is the dominant view to agree to this point.

Studies that measure compliment to empirically test its relationship with individual attitude changes, however, are rare. In particular, attempts to apply this kind of research to employees of companies with high dependency on personal services, such as hotel businesses, are very hard to find.

Therefore, this study aims to examine how the experience of receiving a compliment influences the personal and organizational job attitudes to employees of first-class hotels in the Busan area, and to suggest positive organization management strategies to hotels in Busan based on the findings.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1. Meanings of Compliments

Compliments refer to actions that leave positive impressions either expressively or suggestively through various measures recognized as positive to the complimented person, assuming that the speaker pleases the listener (Holmes, 1988). They can also be defined as intentional languages, actions and/or attitudes that point out one's desirable behaviors or strengths to implant joys of life and positive self-images (Kim, 1999; Jeon and Shim, 2008).

Meanwhile, based on the arguments made by Yoo (1996) and Kim (2000), Ko et al. (2008) consider compliments as one way of stimulating a certain behavior as well as a kind of verbal compensation to facilitate the learner's motivation. This thread of understanding assumes compliments as a category of verbal compensation, which is necessarily a conceptual approach based on evaluation and reinforcement. These scholars also perceive the notion of compliments through viewpoints of humanism, social cognitive theory, behaviorism and intrinsic motivation theory. From a humanism point of view, compliments are related to basic desires such as social recognition and respect, while social cognitive theory understands complimentary speeches (as referred to in humanism) or compliments as reinforcing an individual's self-perception or self-concept. Next, behaviorism defines compliments as a variety of things that people want to receive, such as social reinforcements, token reinforcements (money, points, seals and, etc.) and reinforcement activities (Jeon et al., 2004; Ko et al., 2008). Intrinsic motivation theory assesses compliments as an exception to play an important role, since most experimental studies of intrinsic motivation theory suggest that external compensations decrease intrinsic motivations and thus, in a condition where nothing else can be offered, even the existing intrinsic motivation may vanish (Ko, 2002; Deci and Ryan, 1985). In sum, to compliment is to discover each person's strengths and to support them (Jeon and Shin, 2008).

Ko et al. (2008) suggest that the forms and results of compliments can be summarized as Table 1. They classify compliments into verbal, nonverbal and material compliments according to their expression forms.

Park (2008) concluded that emotional labor is a leading variable that exerts significant effects on job-related attitudes especially

for hotel employees. This result suggests that for hotel employees, there may be a correlation between compliments and the results or working attitudes after receiving the compliments.

The whole literature review indicates that "compliments refer to offering verbal speech, actions and/or material benefits somewhat intentionally in order to embed joyfulness and positive mindsets to the other person in everyday life."

This study limits its measurement and hypothesis testing to verbal compliments based on the expression forms of compliments proposed by Ko et al. It is because most hotel employees will usually be more exposed to verbal compliments rather than material or nonverbal compliments.

2.2. Feelings of Job Attitude

It is known that job attitude is influenced by personal characteristics, dispositions, experiences and abilities (Park et al., 2008). While previous studies suggest the notion of job with similar terminologies including task, function, duty or responsibility and role, job basically connects what is required of the given department and what the given constituent of the organization has to do. It implies responsibilities and ranges (Yoon, 1997; Chae, 2007).

Meanwhile, attitude refers to an individual's consistent predisposition such as "good, bad" on a certain object (person or thing) or situation, signifying a belief, emotion and behavioral intention on a certain person or object (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1976; Choi, 1994). In other words, attitude generally means not only the belief and emotion but also responses on behavioral intentions one has towards certain situations, environments and/or persons.

Kim and Park (2007) measures the intrinsic attitude of employees with their turnover intention, organizational commitment and job satisfaction, while Yoo et al. (2006) understand attitude as a kind of effectiveness, using measures such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction and innovative action.

Also, according to the study of Seo and Lee (2006), job attitudes of employees refer to the attitudes developed by employees in the course of executing the assigned tasks. Park (2008) suggests that emotional labor is a leading variable laying significant

Table 1: Forms and results of compliments

Category		Classification	
Expression forms of compliments	Non-institutional	Verbal	Encouragement, recognition, and others
		Non-verbal	Physical contact Hug, handshake, shoulder touching, high-five, and others Physical non-contact Wink, thumbs-up, eye contact, applaud, smile, and others
	Institutional	Material	Assessment, award, material compliment, action compliment, prior support
Results of compliments	Positive effects	Achievement, sense of existence, organizational effectiveness (organizational commitment, job satisfaction, teamwork, sense of belongingness), feeling (morale), responsibility, self-confidence	
	Negative effects	Adverse effects, pressure	

Summarized by the author based on Ko et al., 2008

impacts on job attitudes of hotel employees. These all assume a correlation between compliments and the feeling or attitude of hotel employees after receiving compliments. As we can see from the existing literature, feelings of job attitudes can be summarized as the responses and beliefs that the employees feel after they receive compliments. Therefore, in order to measure the feelings of job attitudes, this study takes into consideration both personal and organizational aspects.

3. METHODS

3.1. Research Model and Hypothesis Setting

The research model depicted in Figure 1 is constructed through previous studies (Randall et al., 1999; Park, 2008; Park et al., 2008). Based on the verification of these relationships, this study examines the following hypotheses in order to prove how compliments influence the hotel employees feelings of job attitudes, in this case defined as personal and organizational attitudes.

Hypothesis 1: Compliments have a positive (+) influence on personal attitudes of hotel employees.

Hypothesis 2: Compliments have a positive (+) influence on organizational attitudes of hotel employees.

3.2. Hypothesis Testing Method

The collected data were coded to run a series of frequency analysis, factor analysis and reliability analysis through the SPSS 21.0 statistical program. A simple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses.

3.3. Operational Definitions

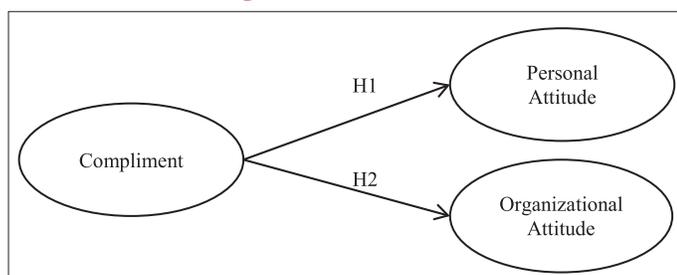
The operational definitions of compliment and job attitude used in this study are:

First, compliment refers to “whether a hotel employee received a verbal compliment from another member of the organization.”

Second, job attitude is defined as “the personal and organizational level of attitude a hotel employee feels after receiving a compliment.”

To measure the above concepts, the study utilized the following measurements. To start with measuring compliments, verbal compliments were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 meaning strongly disagree, 3 neither agree nor disagree and 5 strongly agree), based on the research by Ko et al. (2008). Also, 3 questions were devised to measure verbal compliments of encouragement, recognition and acknowledgement.

Figure 1: Research model



Moreover, feelings of job attitudes were measured by personal and organizational aspects of feelings after receiving a compliment. To measure both attitudes, each aspect was composed of 4 questions in the form of “I felt that ~” on what the respondent felt after receiving a compliment, and was measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 meaning strongly disagree, 3 neither agree nor disagree and 5 strongly agree).

3.4. Survey and Data Collection Methods

The survey was conducted through self-administered questionnaire to a sample of employees working at first-class hotels in the Busan area for 15 days from January 6th to 20th, 2016.

Among the total of 300 copies of the distributed questionnaire, 271 copies were retrieved - yet, excluding the 4 copies answered with identical numbers and the 2 copies that were unfinished, a total of 265 copies were used for the final analysis.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Analyzing the General Characteristics of the Sample

After analyzing the characteristics of the 265 samples, 119 respondents were male (45.1%) and 145 respondents were female (54.9%). People in their 30s were the largest group of 127 respondents (47.9%), followed by those in their 20s with 78 people (29.4%), together occupying more than 77% of the total.

Most of the respondents, 143 people to be correct, graduated from a 2 years college program (54.0%), while 107 respondents had a bachelor degree (40.4%) and 8 with graduate degrees (3.0%).

The income level of the respondents show that the group with an income of 1.01-2 million KRW was the largest with 108 respondents (40.8%), amounting up to more than half of the total sample when combined with an income level of 2.01-3 million KRW of 76 respondents (28.7%).

Regarding the largest group from each criterion, 200 respondents are formal employees of the given hotel (75.8%) regarding the employment form of employees, while 218 of the respondents are junior employees (82.3%), with 111 of the respondents currently working at the cooking and beverages teams (41.9%) and 125 respondents working for more than 10 years and 1 month (47.2%).

4.2. Analyzing the Additional Questions

On the question “whether the respondent experienced receiving a compliment when working in the last 3 years,” 243 hotel employees (91.7%) answered they had such an experience. This result means that in case of first-class hotels in Busan, most employees usually do receive a certain kind of compliment fairly frequently.

When asked who complimented them in the last 3 years, 144 employees (40.9%) answered that it was from their superior at work - recording the most common answer, followed by a

somewhat surprising number of 95 employees (27.0%) who said they received compliments from customers. Next, 88 employees (25.0%) answered they were complimented by colleagues. These results show that compliments were frequently offered by superiors, customers and colleagues.

Next, to a multiple-response question on the reasons for receiving compliments, most employees answered “Because of their good manners of customer service,” amounting up to 102 employees (29.1%), followed by good working attitude with 79 employees (22.5%), good work performances with 71 employees (20.2%), successfully completing excessive duties with 43 employees (12.3%), usual lifestyle or attitude with 24 employees (6.8%), self-enlightenment with 22 employees (6.3%) and for other reasons with 10 employees (2.8%). This result indicates that as the hotel business is centered on services, proper responses to customers are above all the most valued quality from its employees. In other words, we can say that efforts to provide customer-oriented services is the foremost agenda for hotel employees.

4.3. Reliability and Validity Check

This study applied the factor analysis technique, which is widely used to measure the validity of a study’s major concepts. To simplify the factor loading, a varimax orthogonal rotation method was conducted with the criteria of above 0.4 for factor loading, above 1 for eigenvalue and above 0.6 for Cronbach’s α . The orthogonal rotation results eliminated one question due to inappropriate factor composition. After running another factor analysis, the research was composed of a total of 3 questions. For factors with eigenvalue larger than 1, I named them action compliment, material compliment and verbal compliment. The total variance explained value for these questions is 71.301%, with Cronbach’s α values of 0.821 for action compliments, 0.755 for material compliments and 0.785 for verbal compliments. As one question related to compliment was eliminated in the factor analysis process, a total of 10 questions were used for the research. All results are presented in Table 2-10.

As a result of conducting a factor analysis on personal attitudes among feelings of job attitudes, through varimax orthogonal rotation, it was constructed into a single dimension. The 4 questions have an eigenvalue of 3.160 with a total variance explained 79.009%. The factor name has thus been titled personal attitude.

Similarly, as a result of conducting a factor analysis on organizational attitudes among feelings of job attitudes, through varimax orthogonal rotation, it was constructed into a single dimension. The 4 questions have an eigenvalue of 3.089 with a total variance explained 77.228%. The factor name has thus been titled organizational attitude.

4.4. Hypothesis Testing

A simple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses. On testing hypothesis 1 – “Compliments have a positive (+) influence on personal attitudes of hotel employees” - verbal compliments have a significant influence ($\beta=0.360$, $t=6.267$) on the personal

Table 2: Characteristics of the respondents

Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	
Male	119 (45.1)
Female	145 (54.9)
Age	
20s	78 (29.4)
30s	127 (47.9)
40s	52 (19.6)
Over 50s	8 (3.0)
Education	
College degree	143 (54.0)
Bachelor degree	107 (40.0)
Graduate degree	8 (3.0)
Income	
<1 mil KRW	41 (15.5)
1.01-2 mil KRW	108 (40.8)
2.01-3 mil KRW	76 (28.7)
3.01-4 mil KRW	33 (12.5)
4.01-5 mil KRW	7 (2.6)
Employment form	
Informal	64 (24.2)
Formal	200 (75.8)
Position	
Junior employee	218 (82.3)
Manager	38 (14.3)
Senior manager	8 (3.0)
Current team	
Management/support team	3 (1.1)
Room team	31 (11.7)
Beverages team	111 (41.9)
Cooking team	65 (24.5)
Others	54 (20.4)
Working years at current industry	
<2 years	61 (23.0)
2 years 1 M-5 years	27 (10.2)
5 years 1 M-10 years	52 (19.6)
Above 10 years 1 M	125 (47.2)

Table 3: Analyzing the experience of receiving compliments (in the last 3 years)

Question	Yes/no	Frequency (%)
Experience of receiving a job-related compliment in the last 3 years	Yes	243 (91.7)
	No	21 (7.9)

Table 4: Analyzing the complimenters

Category	Subject	Frequency (%)
Those who offered compliments	Superior	144 (40.9)
	Customer	95 (27.0)
	Colleague	88 (25.0)
	Junior	17 (4.8)
	Others	8 (2.3)

attitudes of the complimented hotel employees at a $P<0.01$ level. Therefore, hypothesis 1 cannot be rejected.

This result signifies that more verbal compliments would cause the complimented employees to feel interested in their works and add on to their confidence to not only concentrate better on their responsibilities but also feel pleasures. In other words, compliments can be a very effective tool for members of a given

organization to develop a positive mindset themselves and to make positive contributions to the organization.

Second, examining hypothesis 2 - “compliments have a positive (+) influence on organizational attitudes of hotel employees” - through a simple regression analysis, it was verified that verbal compliments have a significant influence ($\beta=0.352$, $t=6.092$) on the organizational attitudes of hotel employees at the $P<0.01$ level. Therefore, hypothesis 2 cannot be rejected. In other words, it can be interpreted that more verbal compliments make the employees who received the compliments develop a positive attitude towards the organization.

Table 5: Analyzing the reasons for receiving compliments

Category	Subject	Frequency (%)
Reasons for receiving compliments	Manner of customer service	102 (29.1)
	Working attitude	79 (22.5)
	Good work performance	71 (20.2)
	Excessive duties to implement	43 (12.3)
	Lifestyle	24 (6.8)
	Self-enlightenment	22 (6.3)
	Others	10 (2.8)

This result implies that compliments make room for desirable attitudes of employees.

5. CONCLUSION

Excluding a few, almost no studies on compliments have been done with hotel businesses as the subject. In this respect, this study contributes to the academia by designing and conducting a study on hotel employees. Utilizing the measure of compliments developed by a previous study (Ko et al., 2008), this study especially selects verbal compliments, which is considered the most frequent form of compliments usually received by hotel employees, as the independent variable to run an empirical test to examine what kinds of effects it has on feelings of job attitudes afterwards. According to the results, verbal compliments do have significant impacts on feelings of job attitudes to hotel employees, including both personal and organizational attitudes. It further implies that because verbal compliments lead to positive personal and organizational attitudes of hotel employees, they can be implemented as useful organization management measures. In other words, frequent compliments within a non-excessive range will spread a positive atmosphere throughout the given organization and thus is a highly desirable

Table 6: Validity and reliability check on compliments

Factor	Measured content	Factor loading	Eigen value	Variance ratio	Cronbach's α
Verbal compliment	I said someone was good at it	0.841	2.128	71.301	0.785
	I said to recognize something	0.825			
	I said something encouraging	0.821			

Table 7: Validity and reliability check on personal attitude

Factor	Measured content	Factor loading	Eigen value	Variance ratio	Cronbach's α
Personal attitude	I feel interested in the job	0.919	3.160	79.009	0.911
	I feel pleasure in the job	0.887			
	I feel concentrated on the job	0.878			
	I feel confident about the job	0.871			

Table 8: Validity and reliability check on organizational attitude

Factor	Measured content	Factor loading	Eigen value	Variance ratio	Cronbach's α
Organizational attitude	I feel contributed to the organization	0.892	3.089	77.228	0.902
	I feel a sense of belongingness	0.882			
	I feel working hard to the organization	0.872			
	I feel the necessity to work hard for the organization	0.869			

Table 9: Analyzing the effects of compliments on personal attitude

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Regression coefficient	Standard error	β	t-value	Significance level
Personal attitude	Verbal compliment	0.320	0.051	0.360	6.267	0.000**
	Adjusted $R^2=0.130$	$F=39.369$	$P=0.000^{**}$			

** $P<0.01$

Table 10: Analyzing the effects of compliments on organizational attitude

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Regression coefficient	Standard error	β	t-value	Significance level
Organizational attitude	Verbal compliment	0.321	0.053	0.352	6.092	0.000**
	Adjusted $R^2=0.124$	$F=37.107$	$P=0.000^{**}$			

** $P<0.01$

leading variable to instilling positive mindsets to individuals as well.

Also, to the multiple-response question asking whether the respondent had any experience of receiving a compliment in the last 3 years, about 91.7% of the respondents said they had such experience and those compliments were from superiors (40.9%), colleagues (25.0%) and customers (27.0%). In other words, compliments were from superiors, customers and colleagues in order, which shows that the role of superiors is still important in compliments. Furthermore, to the multiple-response question asking the reasons for compliments, answers included manner of customer services (29.1%), nice working attitude (22.5%) and positive work performances (20.2%). This result indicates that above all things, customer-oriented behaviors and attitudes have the highest possibility to earn a compliment, supporting existing theories that customer-oriented efforts should be prioritized. For verbal compliments, a total of 3 questions were originally composed but as it was constructed as a single dimension according to the factor analysis, I named the factor as verbal compliment. Further, feelings of job attitudes were classified into personal and organizational attitudes, each tested through a factor analysis.

As the correlation between the measured variables was very high, they were constructed to a single dimension. By distinguishing between questions related to personal attitudes and those to organizational attitudes, the study was able to conduct a factor analysis for each set. As a result, two variables of personal attitude and organizational attitude were derived.

Next, the study tested hypotheses 1 and 2 with a simple regression analysis, and both were verified to have statistically significant influences, while suggesting that personal attitudes have slightly larger impacts than organizational attitudes. It means that more compliments will positively influence the complimented employee in both personal and organizational aspects to eventually contribute to the individual and the organization.

In conclusion, it is definitely proved that verbal compliments can become an effective tool for employee management, transcending both time and space. According to the study results, it is expected that conducting a compliment-management practice program for the employees at hotels will contribute to not only establishing sound mindsets for the employees as an individual but also spreading a positive atmosphere at the organizational level. Yet, as this study was only conducted to a limited extent covering only the first-class hotels in the Busan area, it seems necessary to expand the study to a national-level.

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