Determinants of Service Behavior of Customer Contact Personnel in Local Authority

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Abstract

Determinants of service behavior of customer contact personnel are essential issues in the service or public organization. This research investigates 396 frontline employees of five local authorities in Kathmandu Valley. The researcher examines the relationships among service behavior, role stress, organizational commitment, customer orientation, and job satisfaction. The factors that influence the service behavior of CCP in the local authority are discussed in depth. The study's significant findings demonstrated an overall strong association of the set of independent variables with the dependent variable, service behavior. These four factors have positively influenced the service behavior of CCP of a local authority in Kathmandu Valley.

1. Introduction

Customer contract personnel's study of service behavior occupies an essential role in service marketing. It has never received so much attention as in recent years. Researchers indicate that service marketing is one of the major activities in the contemporary economy. More than half of the consumption expenditures are for buying services (Parasuram, Zeithaml, and Berry 1988). Kotler and Armstrong (2006) have argued an entirely distinct one from the earlier studies on service marketing. It is concerned with service that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. Thus, service is an intangible economic activity that creates or adds value to the offer and provides satisfaction to the service recipient.

Quinn, Baruch, and Paquette (1987) have provided a broad definition of service to include "all economic activities whose output is not a physical product or construction, is generally consumed at the time it is produced, and provides added value in forms that are essentially intangible concerns of its first purchaser." Koirala (2007) has argued that the size and dimensions of services marketing are growing all over the world. He also focused on the industrialized countries where more than half of the workforce is employed in the service industry. Nepal's service industry has grown very fast in the last two decades. Particularly, the growth in the financial, tourism, hotel, transport, education, government, and communication services has been remarkable.

Nepal has a two-tier local governance system, with the village and municipal bodies as the lower tier and district bodies as the higher. The village bodies are called village development committees, while municipalities serve the same function in town areas. The

district bodies are the district development committees (DDCs). Municipalities are divided into a minimum of nine wards, but the maximum number is not specified. Wards are the smallest units of local governance. Each district has been divided into nine to seventeen Ilakas, which cover a cluster of VDC and municipalities (Local Authority Fiscal Commission, 2000).

There are five municipalities in Kathmandu valley. Municipalities are classified into three categories based on their financial resources, population, and infrastructure development. Nepal contains 1 metropolitan 4 sub metropolitan, and 52 municipalities whereas Kathmandu valley covers one metropolitan named Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC), located in Kathmandu district, one sub-metropolitan named Lalitpur Sub-Metropolitan City situated in Lalitpur district, and three municipalities named Bhaktpur Municipality, Madyapur Thimi Municipality, and Kritipur Municipality located two of them in Bhaktapur district and the last one is located in Kathmandu district (Local Authority Fiscal Commission, 2000).

In a marketplace that is more global than ever before, organizations face fierce competition and need to create and strategically use Knowledge to obtain and maintain a competitive advantage to enhance their survivability (Tzokas and Saren, 2004). Society and organizations have seen major shifts from the industrial to the knowledge era (Bertels and Savage, 1998). During the late 20th century, organizations discovered and embraced concepts such as intellectual capital and service management (Bertels and Savage, 1998) and began recognizing service as the most critical sector (Drucker, 1995). Many embarked on becoming a learning organization and conceptualized service behavior as an essential ingredient to remain competitive.

Today, in the 21st century, organizations are faced with a rapidly changing service era. Within this era, the service-based economy emerges as organizations shift from traditional economic models to a more global approach (Heinrichs and Lim, 2005). During this age of increased information, there is a rise in competitive pressure due to the constant development of new products and services (Ashforth, 2001). Organizations are driven to meet global demands entailing innovative, effective, and efficient ways of conducting business, meeting customers needs at a rapid pace, and producing goods with fewer resources (Bertels and Savage, 1998). Kikoski and Kikoski (2004) have stated that organizations who "thrive in this 21st century may not be those that just learn, but those that inquire to create new knowledge in service—which, for their competitor, may still be unknown" Consequently, organizations have to adapt so that new service is created more efficiently and at a pace that allows them to remain ahead of competitors.

In service delivery organizations, CCPs play a crucial role in interacting with customers. They seek information from the customers and internal organizational service delivery procedures such as databases or websites, make sense of the information, and take action to meet customer demands. Creating and continually updating these databases is a key component of service management. Increasingly, frontline workers are relying on data sources to do their jobs, and it's critical that they can rapidly access these repositories and make sense of the Knowledge they obtain.

Often, the literature discusses private-sector organizations as experiencing rapid change and needing to create service at a fast pace. In addition, many studies links service behavior to many private-sector organizations. There is a lack of empirical literature describing service creation in the public sector, such as the local

government. In addition, much of the academic literature portrays the public sector as static and slow to change, not acknowledging the degree to which government organizations change and the rapidity of this change in service certain situations. The purpose of this study was to explore interactions between frontline roles and how these interactions arbitrate the service behavior of CCP. The frontline roles studied were those of staff local authorities employed within a ward and central office of five municipalities in Kathmandu Valley. The purpose of the study is to determine the service behavior of customer contact personnel of Local Authorities in Kathmandu Valley

2. Literature review and research hypothesis of the study

Due to the unique characteristic of services, CCP has a major influence in forming an expectation of the controlling customer's experience and shaping the overall evaluation of the received service. Michaels and Day (1985) have argued that the tangibility of the service, except for remote encounters, cannot be separated from the provision of the service. They often represent the variability of the service provision. While they themselves do not vanish overnight, as may bed-night in a hotel, their service provision is only for that movement in time. In short, FLE performance is considered the most important intrinsic cue for service. In their scholarly work, Hartline and Ferrell (1996) have focused that service's intangible and interactive characteristic means that employees' behavior plays a key role in customer decision-making.

The study will analyze the various aspect of service behavior of customer contact personnel of Local Authorities (LAs) in Kathmandu valley. But none of the studies has attempted to determine the behavior of customer contact personnel in LA. Therefore, the research is needed to determine the behavior of customer contact personnel in the different service sectors of Nepal. This research also will make empirical test to determine the service behavior of employees and their relationship with organization and customer, which has not been tested till now in Nepal.

The purpose of the model of determinants of service behavior of CCP dimension is shown in Figure 1. The organization's service
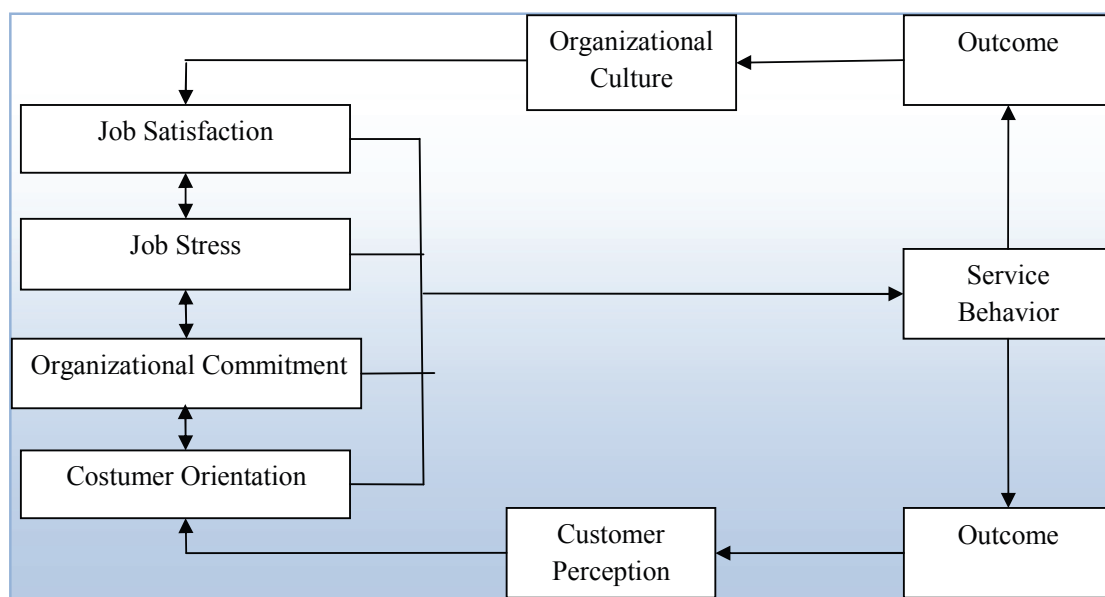

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of determinants of service behavior of CCP

behavior of CCP is modeled as exogenous variables in the model. The above conceptual framework determines service behavior in the local authority as job stress, organization commitment, customer orientation, and job satisfaction are used as independent variables, and service behavior is taken as the dependent variable. Based on the above framework, the following research hypotheses were formulated.

The service provider is considered to occupy a boundary-spanning role (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal, 1964), in that their position or role in the company is to link the organization with its environment through their interaction with customers. As boundary spanning is highly correlated with role conflict and role ambiguity (Jackson and Shuler, 1985)... *it seems reasonable that customer-contact workers experience high levels of role stress* (Weatherly and Tansik, 1993). Therefore, the hypothesis can be formulated as below;

H₁: There is a positive relationship between service behavior and role stress of CCP in local authorities.

Organizational commitment helps an employee to understand his or her own role in the company. This regularly leads to an intensified valence as part of the motivation concept, based on an intrinsic desire to live the firm's values and contribute to achieving the company's customer-oriented goals. Additionally, previous research has indicated that staffs with high job satisfaction are likely to be more committed to their organization (Fletcher and Williams, 1996; Lok and Crawford, 2004). Affective commitment is a desire to continue with an employer because of a liking or a positive attitude toward the organization. This positive effect is sometimes referred to as 'psychological attachment' (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999) and is derived

from the emotional pleasure of staying with an employer (Hansen, Sandvik, and Selnes, 2003). This gives rise to the following hypothesis:

H₂: There is a positive relationship between service behavior and organizational commitment of CCP in local authorities.

The relationship of job satisfaction with employee attitudes and behaviors is well recognized (Lok and Crawford, 2004). How satisfied an employee is with their work environment is likely to have an impact on their attitude to service and also their commitment to the organization. It makes sense that if an employee is satisfied with their job they are more likely to exhibit good service behaviors, therefore placing importance on serving the customer. Bettencourt & Brown, (1997) have postulated that the positive emotional state of job satisfaction influences the valence component of the motivational dimension of COSE, as it supports the intrinsic work valence of the service employee. A result of the employee's perception of job fairness is that the employee is confident that the supervisor will honor his/her efforts in a satisfactory way, and this leads to an increase in the expectation component of motivation. Therefore, the hypothesis can be formulated as below;

H₃: There is a positive relationship between service behavior and job satisfaction of CCP in local authorities.

While a climate of customer orientation must emanate from senior management (Berryand Parasuraman, 1991) the actions of individual service providers are also crucial. Since ... *the people make the place* (Schneider, 1985), the service provider and the service are often seen as synonymous in the eyes of the customer (Bowen and Schneider, 1985). For example, the 'personal contact' of the service provider was the strongest influence on overall

customer service satisfaction (Crosby and Stephens, 1987); satisfaction with salespersons was a good predictor of satisfaction with a retail outlet (Westbrook, 1981), and in the professions, ... *interactions with the primary service provider are the most important in assessing service quality* (Brown and Swartz, 1989). Therefore, the hypothesis can be formulated as below;

H_4: *There is a positive relationship between service behavior and customer orientation of CCP in local authorities.*

The above diagrammatical research model can be written in a mathematical form and the mathematical model of this research is stated below:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \ldots + e_t$$

Where,
Y   =   Service behavior
β_0 =   Slope constant
X_1 =   Role stress
X_2 =   Organizational commitment
X_3 =   Customer orientation
X_4 =   Job satisfaction

Regression Model:
Service Behavior (Y) = β_0 + β_1 Role stress + β_2 Organizational commitment + β_3 Customer orientation + β_4 Job satisfaction

3. Research Methodology

This study is survey research under the descriptive research design that determines the behavior of CCP in local authorities in Kathmandu valley. The present study involves both exploratory and confirmatory dimensions because no tested model is available so far in the CCP service behavior. In this study, the necessary information about the service behavior of CCP is collected through a questionnaire as a primary source. To fulfill the research objectives, a set of research questions has been developed for collection, and the research hypothesis have been made to explore the opinions of the front line employees in different local authorities in Kathmandu valley. The research questionnaires were distributed among the employees in other local authorities. The collected data was analyzed and presented using the SPSS computer program.

Population and sample size

There are five municipalities in Kathmandu valley, where around 1200 employees are working as FLSs and regularly delivering service to the people (KMC and World Bank 201). The samples were purposively selected from the population. For this study, 500 questionnaires were distributed to one Metropolitan office, one Sub-Metropolitan office, and three municipalities in Kathmandu valley. Out of them, 464 questionnaires were returned and 68 were unusable. In this research, only 396 questionnaires were used collecting information from the CCP as junior staffs, supervisors, manager, senior officers and relevant other employees of these local authorities.

The questionnaire was classified into five sections. Section one contained 8 questions about the respondent's personal details with few demographic variables such as gender, age, designation, qualification and work or job experience of the respondents. Section two, three, four and five contained 12 questions in each section about the role stress, organizational commitment, customer orientation and job satisfaction respectively. All variables are designed in five Likert type scale.

Data collection procedures

This research less depends on secondary data which were collected through published or unpublished reports and journal articles.

A judgmental sampling technique was followed to gather the opinion of the respondents. Structured questionnaire methods supplemented and unstructured interviews were extensively used in gathering necessary inputs for the study. Different journals, magazines, newspapers and web sites were also used to collect relevant information in the study. The questionnaires were administered among the respondents within a month. But, the time of collection was longer, 4 to 5 times visited to collect the questionnaires. All items were designed on five Likert type scale.

Statistical tools and techniques for data analysis

In this research, different statistic tools were used to determine customer contact personnel's service behavior in Kathmandu valley local authorities. To achieve the pre-determined objectives, the computer software SPSS 13 version is extensively used to measure the relationship between the variables under this study. Other inferential statistics such as Mean, Standard deviation, ANOVA, Correlation, Reliability test and Regression are used to determine the perception of the respondents and determine the service behavior of CCP in LAs.

Test of reliability

The test of reliability of the collected data refers to the extent to which a scale produces consistent results measurements has been made. One of the internal consistency reliability has been used for this research. Reliability test is an approach of assessing the internal consistency of the set of items when several items are summated in order to form a total score for the scale. The most commonly used statistic for estimating internal consistency was Cronbach's alpha. The chronbach's alpha (α) is not a statistical test which measures the reliability of data that is most widely used (Geore & Mallery, 2009). They described a rule of thumb that applies to most situations as; α > 0.9 is excellent, α > o.8 is good, α > 0.7 is acceptable, α > 0.6 is questionable, α > 0.5 is poor and α < 0.5 is unacceptable.

In this research, the value of Cronbach's alpha were 0.76, 0.84, 0.78 and 0.83 for role stress, organizational commitment, customer orientation and job satisfaction respectively in which the alpha value of role stress was acceptable and other variables are good. There were 48 items included within four variables. Eight items were removed because of unsatisfied scale using the above value of Cronbach's alpha in reliability test. In this study, the calculated values of Cronbach's alpha individual items were between in 0.7 to 0.84.

4. Analysis and Result

The research purpose was achieved using both qualitative and quantitative approaches among the CCP renowned for their high contact position, namely 'Local Authority' who do not enjoy the status of the professional services, such as other civil servant Teacher, lawyers and doctors. The survey instrument measured the constructs of service behavior, role conflict, and organizational commitment

Table 1 shows the variables' means, standard deviation, and correlations. The correlation among various determinants of service behavior was found positive. One of the main objectives is to identify the factors that influence the service behavior of CCP in local authorities in Kathmandu Valley. The analysis has shown that there is a positive relationship between service behavior and other related variables using correlation. The correlation has shown that there are strong correlation between service behavior and job stress, organizational commitment, customer orientation, and job satisfaction among the five local authorities in Kathmandu valley. Its

Table 1: Means, standard deviation and Correlations of variables

Variables	Mean	S.D	1	2	3	4	5
Role stress	21.24	5.55	1				
Organizational commitment	24.76	7.1	0.33**	1			
Customer orientation	22.98	6.03	0.37 *	0.55**	1		
Job satisfaction	29.15	7.21	0.44**	0.37**	0.05	1	
Service behavior	25.46	5.78	0.70**	0.73 **	0.71**	0.51**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

p-value is also less than 0.05, showing that the relationship between variables is highly significant.

Table 2 shows the model summary of determinants of service of CCP. The relationships of service behavioral variables have been tested by regression analysis to determine the service behavior of CCP within five local authorities in Kathmandu valley. The result model summary of CCP within all municipalities has concluded that the values of R (0.95) produced by the regression models range from 0 to 1, indicating stronger relationships between service behavior and other variables. Likewise, R^2 (0.902) is the proportion of variation in the dependent variable explained by the regression model, which ranges from 0 to 1. Furthermore, the standard error and DW test values are 0.315 and 1.045, respectively. Where the DW test value lies between 0 to 4. This resembles that there is no autocorrelation between error terms. Therefore, the independent variables, role stress, organization commitment, customer orientation, and job satisfaction do an excellent job explaining the variation in the dependent variable of service behavior of local authority in Kathmandu valley. In other words, all models are significant at a one percent significance level. Therefore, in the regression analysis, the independent variables; role stress, organizational commitment, customer orientation and job satisfaction do a good job explaining the variation in the dependent variable of service behavior of local authority in Kathmandu valley.

The research has examined using descriptive statistics, correlation, F, and ANOVA. All results have been satisfied. Now, Regression analysis has been used with standardized data using SPSS, which determine the service behavior of CCP in each local authority.

The table 3 shows the coefficients of determinants of service behavior of CCP in each municipality and overall in Kathmandu Valley. Firstly, the regression model of

Table 2: Model summary of determinants of service behavior of CCP

Institution	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
BM	0.839	0.705	0.665	0.649	1.1 7
KM	0.940	0.884	0.870	0.445	1.216
KMC	0.984	0.969	0.968	0.154	0.800
LMC	0.989	0.979	0.978	0.174	0.774
MTM	0.984	0.967	0.964	0.145	1.238
All Municipalities	**0.950**	**0.902**	**0.901**	**0.315**	**1.045**

Table 3: Coefficients of determinants of service behavior of CCP using regression analysis

Service behavior of BM $=$ -0.228 + 0.288 X_1 + 0.449 X_2 + 0.636 X_3 + 0.079 X_4
Service behavior of KM $=$ -0.005 + 0.193 X_1+ 0.477 X_2+ 0.702 X_3+ 0.240 X_4
Service behavior of KMC $=$ 0.049 + 0.385 X_1+ 0.475 X_2+ 0.467 X_3+ 0.527 X_4
Service behavior of LMC $=$ -0.006 + 0.460 X_1+ 0.424 X_2+ 0.369 X_3+0.533 X_4
Service behavior of MTM $=$ -0.220 + 0.441 X_1+ 0.448 X_2+ 0.378 X_3+0.637 X_4
Service behavior All Municipalities $=$ -0.004 + 0.391 X_1+ 0.407 X_2+ 0.494 X_3 +0.499 X_4

Note: X_1 = Role stress, X_2 = Organizational commitment, X_3= Customer orientation and X_4= Job satisfaction

Bhaktpur Musicality has concluded that a 1 unit change in role stress brings 0.288 units to change in-service behavior of CCP. Similarly, 1 unit change in organizational commitment, customer orientation, and job satisfaction will change 0.449, 0.636, and 0.079 units in service behavior, respectively. Secondly, the regression model of Kritipur Municipality has explained that a 1 unit change in role stress brings 0.193 units to change in-service behavior of CCP. Similarly, 1 unit change in organizational commitment, customer orientation, and job satisfaction will change 0.477, 0.702, and 0.240 units in service behavior, respectively. Thirdly, the regression model of KMC has demonstrated that 1 unit change in role stress brings 0.385 units of change in-service behavior of CCP. Similarly, 1 unit change in organizational commitment, customer orientation, and job satisfaction will change 0.475, 0.467, and 0.527 units in service behavior, respectively.

Likewise, the regression model of LSMC has explained that1 unit change in role stress brings 0.460 units to change in-service behavior of CCP. Similarly, 1 unit change in organizational commitment, customer orientation, and job satisfaction will change 0.424, 0.369, and 0.533 units in service behavior, respectively. Furthermore, the regression model of MTM has illustrated that1 unit change in role stress brings 0.441 units to change in-service behavior of CCP. Similarly, 1 unit change in organizational commitment, customer orientation, and job satisfaction will change 0.448, 0.378, and 0.637 units in service behavior, respectively.

Finally, the regression model of the local authority in Kathmandu Valley has clearly explained that a 1 unit change in role stress brings 0.391 units to change in-service behavior of CCP. Similarly, 1 unit change in organizational commitment, customer orientation, and job satisfaction will change 0.407, 0.494 and 0.499 units in service behavior respectively. It has also concluded that the evidence of all variables; role stress, organizational commitment, customer orientation and job satisfaction are significant since this p value is less than 0.05 i.e. $p < 0.05$. In other words, service behavior depends on these explanatory variables; job stress, organizational commitment, customer orientation and job satisfaction of CCP in local authority in Kathmandu Valley.

5. Discussion

The collected data have been presented and analyzed using different statistical tools and techniques i.e., SPSS program to meet the pre-determined objectives. The primary objective of the study was to analyze the service behavior of customer contact personnel and identify the factors that influence service behavior of CCP in local authorities in Kathmandu Valley. The research was conducted successfully, because the findings drawn from the study were consistent with theoretical models of management. The research findings are;

In this study, demographic variables have been included to assess the service behavior of CCP based on gender, qualification, age, designation and experience. As a result, research has found that more than one third of employees have Master Degree, whereas females suffer from role stress but are more satisfied than males. Middle age employees are more satisfied but have little Knowledge about customer orientation and officers are more satisfied and committed to the organization than others.

The correlation coefficient between service behavior and role stress is 0.70. Similarly, the correlation coefficient between service behavior and organizational commitment, service behavior and customer orientation, and service behavior and job satisfaction are 0.73, 0.71 and 0.51 respectively. They are highly positively correlated to each other, showing the strong positive association between them.

The regression result resembles that 1 unit change in role stress brings 0.391 units change in service behavior of CCPs in local authorities in the same direction. Beside its p-value is less than 0.01 which is highly significant. Thus, it resembles that there is positive relationship between role stress and service behavior. Similarly, 1 unit change in organization commitment, customer orientation and job satisfaction bring 0.407, 0494 and 0.499 units change in service behavior respectively. On the other hand, its p-value is less than 0.01 which is highly significant. Thus, it reveals that there is positive relationship between service behavior and role stress, organizational commitment, customer orientation and job satisfaction. Thus, these four factors have positively influenced to determine service behavior of CCP of local authority in Kathmandu Valley.

The role stress, organizational commitment, customer orientation and job satisfaction

can perform better service behavior and increase the employee performance in service organization. In this research, first, general status of the selected front line service employees was studied. Among them, their work load, work pressure and working environment that may affect effective service delivery to the people. However, there was in general practice on service delivery in the local authorities. Secondly, the organizational commitment directly contributes on the organizational competitiveness by enhancing wisdom, attitudes and dedication of the employees.

The perception of the respondent is positive towards the organizational commitment however, there was general practice in organizational commitment in the local Nepalese bodies. Thirdly, customer orientation is also major part that every employee has to keep in his mind about the Knowledge of customer expectation. If the expectation reaches near to customer's desired expectation, the customer will be satisfied. In general, it has found that CCP have positive perception about the customer expectation in local authority.

Finally, this research studied only a handful of potential antecedents of service behavior from the service provider's perspective. An understanding of these issues is paramount to understanding the nature of the service encounter, therefore, further research is required to delineate additional antecedents of service behavior. As the service encounter is a dynamic interaction, the mirror image research of this study would also be interesting to understand the customer's perspective.

6. Implication

The study for determinants of service behavior of customer contact personnel of LAs in Kathmandu Valley which was especially

focused in five municipalities, is now completed. Hopefully, this research study will help share Knowledge with interested academicians, executive officers, Mayors and other political representatives of municipalities, Ministry of Local Development, and any others directly or indirectly involved in local governance. Based on the result of the study, the researcher has made the following recommendations for concern various parties.

1. The management of local authorities should know about the importance of role stress, organizational commitment, customer orientation, and job satisfaction theories and practices for the frontline employees' service behaviors.

2. The study recommends not only the proper understanding of role stress, organizational commitment, customer orientation and job satisfaction of service behavior of CCPs to the head of the institution but also should be able to ensure its implementation so to achieve set objective.

3. LAs should concern about the expectation of customers or clients and focus on the fulfillment of their desired expectation delivering appropriate service and orient through CCPs. And, LAs should always aware to minimize the expectation gap to satisfy customers or clients.

4. FLEs are the main sources collecting the information from customer; they create organization's impression and value as well as they can make good relation with customer provided that they are satisfied with current job. Therefore, LAs should focus to satisfy FLEs providing different kinds of incentives and facilities.

5. LAs should think about the job stress of CCPs and come across the major things which usually make stress on their daily work and organization should find out and reduce about it.

6. LAs should address the CCP's interest and career development and apply some policies; right man in right place, carrot and stick system, just in time (JIT). As a result, CCP will be more responsible and committed towards organization, at the same time; they deliver appropriate service to customer or client.

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