The Impact of Service Climate and Personality Traits on Customer-Oriented Behaviour of Employees

Bagher Asgarnezhad Nouri[1]

Abstract

Most companies in today's competitive and globalized business environment understand the importance of customer orientation. Customer orientation is mainly related to customer well-being. Research has shown that customer orientation leads to better financial performance and higher market share. The aim of this research has been to investigate the effect of service climate and personality traits on customer-oriented behavior. The standard questionnaire of Mechinda and Patterson (2011) has been used to measure the research variables. The population of the research consists of the employees of Ardabil Gas Company, which is equal to 161 subjects. Owing to the limited population, no sampling method was used and all employees were investigated. Data analysis was carried out using structural equation modeling and PLS software. The results showed that personality traits such as conscientiousness, agreeableness, extroversion and emotional stability, employees' perceived service climate, and job satisfaction have had a positive impact on customer-oriented behavior. Moreover, service climate had a mediating role in the relationship between personality traits and customer-oriented behavior.

Keywords: *Service climate; employee personality traits; customer-oriented behaviour*

Introduction

Today, due to the increasing importance of marketing system in the company's sustainable competitive advantage, customer-oriented behavior of employees has become one of the significant issues among different companies. This concept is even more important in the service sector than in other sectors of economy, because success in such a segment depends to a large extent on the market-oriented behavior of employees in providing customer services. Customer-oriented behavior is defined as the ability of the service provider to help customers- leading to service quality, customer satisfaction, loyalty, and organizational performance. Customer-oriented behavior also refers to specific behaviors displayed by service providers during interactions with customers (Choi and Joung, 2017). The impact of customer-oriented behavior of employees is absolutely obvious in today's companies. Identifying and applying factors that affect the customer-oriented behavior of employees will, in the long run, bring positive results to the organization. Much research has been done about the customer orientation, but most research focuses on the outcomes of customer orientation. Research has shown that customer orientation leads to better financial performance and higher market share. While many studies have revealed the effects of customer orientation,

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[1] Bagher Asgarnezhad Nouri, Associate Professor of Business Management, Department of Business Management, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Iran. E-mail: asgarnezhad.research@uma.ac.ir.

but little research has focused on the factors affecting customer orientation (Yazdani et al., 2011).

Due to the complexity and variety of factors affecting customer-oriented behavior, this study examines two factors of service climate and personality traits (Brown et al., 2002). The main problem for some organizations in developing customer-oriented behavior among employees is due to the lack of proper service climate or disproportion between personality traits of employees and their job requirements, which causes the delivery of high-quality services to the target customers to be obstructed. This problem is even more prevalent in service companies, because with regard to the service features, it can be expected that customer-oriented behavior of employees in this category of companies is considered as one of the key factors for success in achieving a sustainable competitive advantage.

Current strategic priorities for service organizations include identifying ways to develop and maintain service climates that promote superior customer experiences and better understanding how to more effectively engage service employees (Musgrove et al, 2014). Service climate is defined as "the shared perceptions of employees concerning the practices, procedures, and kinds of behaviors that get rewarded and supported with respect to customer service and service quality" (Sehat and Lameyi, 2016; Schneider et al, 1998). That is, service climate is built on foundations of caring for both customers and employees (Schneider et al, 1992) and it is designed to empower, assist and motivate employees to provide superior customer service and high levels of service quality (Little et al, 2006). Improving Service climate is a concrete means for corporations to enhance employee's service behavior (Schneider et al, 1998). A Positive service climate motivates employees to perform because the cues received from the work environment signal that this behavior is valuable to the organization and customers (Chang, 2016).

Personality (disposition) represents the innate characteristics of an individual and has been shown to be correlated with employee performance in a range of job contexts (Mechinda and Patterson, 2011). This research stream has generally supported the notion that "personality is an important determinant of individual behavior in the workplace" (Panaccio and Vandenberghe, 2012). Researchers believe that the job satisfaction of an employee or his willingness to give up a job depends on the degree to which his personality is appropriate to the work environment (Moey and Lam, 2004). Personality traits are a good predictor of career success of individuals (Wille et al., 2013). Given that how communication and how service staffs interact with customers depends to a certain extent on their personality, it is obvious that the personality of the staff affects the quality of service. Therefore, it is necessary to have coordination between the employee's personality and his/her job (Akbari, 2004).

Today, we witness the widespread growth of services in societies so that service sector has become a major economic contributor in the economic development of different countries including Iran. Among various service sectors, the gas company has a special role in economic development of Iran. This service sector is related to a wide range of people and, more importantly, has the duty and mission of delivering high quality services to the Iranian society. Additionally, applying appropriate marketing strategies to improve service quality and customer satisfaction is so important in this sector (Allahyari et al, 2015). Because the gas company is one of the largest suppliers of energy resources for the majority of Iranian households who use gas energy to carry out their personal homework in their daily lives. Considering the importance of service climate and the personality traits of organizational

service providers, this research aims at investigating the effect of service climate and the personality of service providers on the customer-oriented behavior of Ardebil Gas Company employees. It should be noted that at the National Iranian Gas Company, no studies similar to the main purpose of this study have been carried out. The results of this research can help managers of companies operating in the gas sector to adopt suitable strategies for continuous development of customer-oriented behavior of employees taking into account the concepts discussed in this study and thereby can attract customers' satisfaction. Ultimately, they will always provide them superior quality services.

Literature review and hypothesis development

Customer-oriented behavior (COB)

Over the last 40 years, customer-orientation has emerged as a cornerstone of the theory and practice of marketing management. Customer-orientation is the set of beliefs that puts the customer's interest first, while not excluding those of all other stakeholders, in order to develop a long-term profitable enterprise (Kim et al, 2004). Customer-oriented behavior (COB) Various terms have been used in the marketing literature to reflect employees' behavior in delivering excellent customer service, including prosocial behavior, extra-role customer service, organizational citizenship behavior, and COB (Pimpakorn and Patterson, 2010) or sales orientation – customer orientation (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). Customer orientation at the firm level is a set of beliefs that puts the customer's interests first, while not excluding those of all other stake- holders in order to develop a long-term profitable enterprise (Pimpakorn and Patterson, 2010). Hoffman and Ingram (1992) state that for a service organization, being customer-oriented is akin to practicing the "marketing concept" at the customer level. Given that for service firms, customer perceptions of service quality are significantly affected by the firms' employees, it is critical for these firms to have employees who engage in behaviors that lead to long-term customer satisfaction (Hoffman and Ingram, 1992). Accordingly, the study of the determinants of employees' customer-oriented behavior is of considerable interest to both service managers and researchers. A stream of research that examines the organizational factors that influence employees' customer-oriented behavior has begun to emerge in the marketing literature (Kim et al, 2004).

In her study of the USA and Japanese students, Winsted (2000 a, b) found several dimensions of COB but noted there were some differences across the two countries. Three dimensions were common to both countries. First, the concern dimension combined elements of empathy, assurance and responsiveness, as well as authenticity, listening and dedication. The second dimension, civility, included all behaviors that service personnel should avoid in order to provide adequate service and to protect against dissatisfaction. Example of such behaviors included not acting arrogantly, getting annoyed with or ignoring customers. The final dimension, congeniality, related to behaviors such as smiling, being happy, cheerful and enthusiastic. In addition, in the US sample, attentiveness was shown to be an additional COB dimension, while for Japanese courtesy was a priority. More recent work in a medical setting found patient satisfaction was positively associated with doctors' and nurses' ability to consistently enact the following key behaviors: communication skills, courtesy, attentiveness to patient needs, personalization, sensitivity as well as a capability (competency) dimension (Mechinda and Patterson, 2011).

Service provider personality

Several meta-analyses of research in this area have concluded that personality factors are indeed valid predictors of job performance (Sawyerr et al. 2009). The five factor model (FFM) is frequently used to describe the structure of personality. The FFM has been used in different countries, in various organizational settings and across rating sources (Digman, 1990). The FFM consists of five dimensions of personality, namely, conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotional stability, extraversion, and, openness to new experience. The five dimensions in the FFM have been defined using various characteristics of individuals: conscientiousness refers to being hardworking, responsible, careful and persevering (Sawyerr et al. 2009) Conscientious individuals are more likely to thoroughly and correctly perform work tasks, to remain committed to work performance, and to comply with policies. They tend to be responsible, dependable and persistent. This construct is related to performance across jobs and is valid predictor of success at work (Mechinda and Patterson, 2011). Agreeableness refers to being cooperative, trusting, flexible and caring Agreeable individuals tend to be successful in occupations where teamwork and customer service is important (Mechinda and Patterson, 2011). emotional stability refers to being relaxed, stable, tolerant of stress and secure; extraversion refers to being outgoing, energetic, talkative, sociable and enthusiastic; and openness to new experience refers to being broadminded, imaginative, intellectual and curious (Mount et al., 1998). The relationship between job performance and the two personality factors of agreeableness and emotional stability were stronger in jobs that involved teamwork (Mount et and,1998). It seems logical that extraversion, emotional stability, conscientiousness and agreeableness would all impact their propensity and ability to provide excellent patient service (Mechinda and Patterson, 2011). Indeed, FFM has been used to study relationships between personality and variables of interest to organizations such as leadership (Bono and Judge, 2004), job satisfaction, job performance and turnover (Panaccio and Vandenberghe, 2012).

In this research, four dimensions of conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotional stability and extraversion are used to measure the personality of service providers. Accordingly, the first hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Personality traits such as extroversion, emotional stability, and gentleness have effect on customer-oriented behavior.

Service climate

Strong organizational climates are associated with better performance from both managers and their subordinates (Tyler et al, 2014). Organizational climate refers to the perceptions of individuals regarding the set of descriptive characteristics that differentiate an organization (form other organizations) and influence their behavior (Dimitriades, 2007). Specific to service, when a firm has an organizational climate centered on providing services to customers, it is said to have a service climate (Schneider et al., 1992). Schneider et al. (1980) were among the first to investigate "service climate," which emerged from the generic construct of organizational climate. A firm's service climate can be defined as "employee perceptions of the practices, procedures, and behaviors that get rewarded, supported, and expected concerning customer service and customer service quality" (Chang, 2016).

Climate—the "feeling in the air"—is the "atmosphere that employees perceive is created in their organizations by practices, procedures, and rewards" (Schneider et al., 1994). Thus, service climate is a collective and shared phenomenon created through organizational practices focused on customer service. A climate for service tells employees superior customer service is expected and rewarded. Employees are thus more likely to provide good service to meet customer needs (Chang, 2016). Several researchers have noted that when considering the climate of an organization only the dimension(s) of organizational climate that is (are) likely to influence, or be associated with, the constructs of interest should be considered (Schneider and Reichers, 1983). Previous research (Schneider et al., 1998) suggests that service organizations must create a service climate to promote service quality as the means of retaining customers. An organizational climate for service has been defined as a set of descriptive characteristics concerning service delivery and service quality that differentiate an organization from others and influence the service-related behaviors of the individuals in the organization (Kelley, 1992; Dimitriades, 2007). According to what was said, the second hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Employees' perceived service climate has effect on customer-oriented behavior.

Job satisfaction

Hoppock (1935) proposed that job satisfaction is defined as employees' emotions and attitude toward their jobs (i.e., their subjective reaction toward their jobs). Locke (1976, pp. 1304) also defined job satisfaction as "a general pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (Choi and Joung, 2017). Job satisfaction is also defined as the general emotional evaluations of service providers for their job situation and job experiences (Lee et al, 2006). When employees are unhappy and disgruntled about some aspect of their job, it is very difficult for them to serve customers well (Mechinda and Patterson, 2011). Employees with positive feelings are likely to be more willing to engage in behaviours dictated primarily by their job-related tasks, thus contributing to organizational effectiveness. Empirical studies related to OB, OM and social psychology have consistently confirmed that job satisfaction has a positive linkage with work performance (Yee et al, 2015). There is an abundance of empirical evidence linking employee job satisfaction with customer satisfaction, customer orientation (Hoffman and Ingram, 1992), and role-prescribed customer service of employee (Lee et al., 2006). Chung et al. (2017) proposed that there would be a positive relationship between job satisfaction and customer-oriented behavior and found that employee job satisfaction had statistically significant impact on customer-oriented behavior (Choi and Joung, 2017). Hence our next hypothesis is largely a replication hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3:** Job satisfaction has effect on customer-oriented behavior.

Personality is a collection of emotional and behavioral traits that surrounds and accompanies a person in his everyday life. In other words, personality refers to regular traits through which one sets his interaction and agreeableness with others and the social environment (Sohrabi-zadeh et al, 2010). High quality social exchange relationships have been shown to weaken the positive relationships between personality and performance. According to Tett and Burnett (2003), employees are likely to perform better in organizations with climates that match their personality while organizational climate may moderate the relationships among personality, motivation and performance (Chen and Kao, 2014). Steinke (2007) analyses showed that job

satisfaction and empowerment only partially mediated the relationship between managerial practices, physical design, and job design and service climate. In addition, service quality, client satisfaction with service, and client empowerment were fully mediated by service climate (Steinke et al, 2008).

Hypothesis 4: Service climate has a mediating role in the relationship between personality traits and customer-oriented behavior.

Given the relationship between the variables of personality, customer-oriented behavior, satisfaction, and organizational climate, the model of the present research, which is shown in Fig. 1, is based on the research conducted by Mechinda and Patterson (2011).

Figure 1. The conceptual model of the research
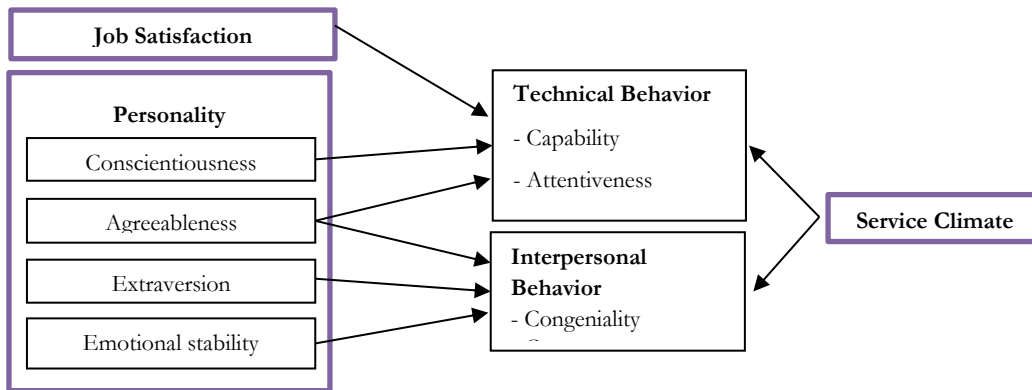
Methodology

Sample size and sampling method

Research on service climate, personality of employees, and customer-oriented behavior can help planners and managers to enhance the positive attributes of the organization and increase the satisfaction of referrals. Emphasizing the goals set for the replacement of other fuels with gas and the development of gas networks in the geographical range of Ardabil province, Ardabil Gas Company began its work in 2000. The company has announced its quality, environmental, and safety policies explicitly so that all employees of the company, while respecting the regulations governing the country's gas industry and having a full knowledge of these regulations, will commit themselves to implementing organizational policies (Allahyari, 2015). The population of the research consists of the employees of Ardabil Gas Company, which is equal to 200 subjects. Given the limited size of the population, using Census sampling method, all subjects of the population (employees of Ardebil Gas Company) were selected as the sample. Finally, after removing all misleading questionnaires, 161 completed questionnaires were collected.

Variables measurement

In this research, data collection was done using library and field methods. In the first step, library method was used to investigate theoretical literature and experimental background of the research. Hence, referring to scientific resources, especially international databases, studies related to the topic of the research were identified, and the theoretical and experimental

framework of the research was formulated. In the second step, field method was used to collect the data required for the completion of the questionnaires.

The research questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part of the questionnaire includes questions about some of the most important demographic characteristics of respondents such as age, gender, educational level and work experience. The second part also includes questions that are used to measures the variables of service climate (including the dimensions of leadership practice, standard communication, service recovery, human resource practice, service technology, customer treatment, participation), personality (conscientiousness, agreeableness, extroversion and emotional stability), and customer-oriented behavior (congeniality, attentiveness, courtesy, anticipation, and capability); and, to measure all variables, the standard questionnaire of Mechinda and Patterson (2011) has been used. The scale used for the questions of the questionnaire is the five-point Likert scale which includes the options of strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree. Accordingly, respondents were asked to respond to questionnaire questions by selecting one of five Likert scale options. See Table 1 in Appendix.

Data analysis methods

The present research, based on purpose is an applied research, based on the method of data collection, it is descriptive-correlational, and in terms of the collected data type, it is quantitative (questionnaire). In the data analysis part, using Smart PLS software and structural equation modeling with partial least squares method, all dimensions of the research conceptual model were evaluated. This method is considered to be the best analyzing tool in which the relationship between the variables is complex, sample size is small, and the distribution of data is abnormal (Dimantopoulos et al., 2012). Structural equations modeling is comprised of two parts of the measurement model and structural model, and the model variables are divided into two groups of latent and observed variables, the former are used at different levels. The measurement model part includes the questions (indicators) of each dimension, along with that dimension, and the relationships between questions and dimensions are analyzed in this part. The structural model part also contains all structures in the main model of the research, and the degree of correlation between structures together with the relationship among them is evaluated at this stage (Klein, 2010). In this research, convergent and divergent validity criteria were used to examine the validity of the questionnaire. Whenever one or more attributes are measured, the correlation between these measurements provides two important validity criteria. If there is a high correlation between factor loadings, the questionnaire has a convergent validity. This correlation is necessary to ensure that the test measures what is to be measured. By contrast, if the correlation between the tests that measure different characteristics is low, the tests have a divergent validity. In divergent validity, the difference between the indices of a structure and the indices of other structures is compared in the model. To evaluate the divergent validity of the measurement model, the criterion of Fornell-Larcker has been used.

Results

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The results of analyzing demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 2 in Appendix. Table 2 shows, 24.03% of respondents are female and 73.38% are male. 7.14%

of respondents aged 20-30 years, 42.21% are between 31 and 40, 31.83% are between 41 and 50, 16.82 are over 50, and 1.95% did not answer this question. In terms of educational level, 5.19% of respondents have associate degree, 54.55% have bachelor's degree, 3.9% have master's degree, and 3.9% did not answer this question.

Validity and reliability of the questionnaire

In conducting factor analysis, first of all, it should be ensuring that whether existing data can be used for analysis? In other words, are collected data suitable for factor analysis? For this purpose, the KMO index and Bartlett's test are usually used. The KMO index values and Bartlett's test for the data in this study are shown in Table 3 in Appendix.

According to Table 3, the value of KMO index is equal to 0.678, which is in the range above 0.6. Therefore, the sample size of research is sufficient for confirmatory factor analysis. Also, the significance level of Bartlett's Test is less than 0.05, which shows that the factor analysis is appropriate for identifying the structure of factor model so the assumption of recognition of correlation matrix is rejected. Therefore, given the results of KMO and Bartlett's tests, the collected data based on the research questionnaire are adequate and appropriate for conducting confirmatory factor analysis; therefore, a confirmatory factor analysis can be used to evaluate the questionnaire.

The decision criterion for maintaining or deleting questions from research questionnaire is based on the factor loadings derived from the implementation of confirmatory analysis method. A confirmatory factor analysis is used to identify the underlying variables of a concept or summarization of a set of data. The power of the relationship between the agent (hidden variable) and the observable variable by the factor load is shown. If the factor loading value of each of the questions is less than 0.5, then the question will be dropped from the questionnaire. But if the amount of factor load is more than 0.5, then it can be concluded that the questions are of good explanation and can remain in the questionnaire. The t-test statistic is also used to determine the significance of factor loads. Because the significance is assessed at the error level of 0.05, so if the value of t-statistic for the observed factor loads is larger than 1.96, then the relationship is significant. The results of confirmatory factor analysis are shown in Table 4 in Appendix.

In this study, the standard value for factor load is considered to be 0.5. The results of Table 4 show that for all the items, the values of factor loads are greater than the standard level of 0.5 and the values of *Student's t*-test at 95% confidence level are greater than 1.96. Therefore, according to the reported values, the appropriateness of questions and their ability to measure the variables of the research are confirmed and it can be claimed that the research questionnaire has an acceptable validity.

To evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire, partial least squares (PLS) method has been used. In this method, reliability is measured by means of two criteria: 1) Cronbach's alpha and 2) Composite reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficient indicates the ability of questions to explain their dimensions properly. Composite reliability coefficient also determines the correlation of the questions of one dimension to each other for the adequate fit of the measurement models (Frenel and Locker, 1981). The Cronbach's alpha and the reliability coefficient of the two criteria in Table 5 in Appendix indicate the acceptable reliability of the criteria for the research.

Validity of the questionnaire was evaluated using convergent and divergent validity criteria which are specific to structural equation modeling. Convergent validity refers to the ability of one dimension's indicators in explaining that dimension, whereas divergent validity indicates that the research model structures should have more correlation with their own questions than with other structures (Holland, 1999). At this step, the AVE (average variance extracted) criterion was used specifically for assessing convergent validity. The results of this criterion for the research variables are shown in Table 6 in Appendix.

The standard value for the acceptance level of AVE is 0.4 (Magner, Volcker and Campbell, 1996). As shown in Table 4, all structures-related AVE values are greater than 0.4, indicating the acceptance level for the convergent validity of the research questionnaire.

In divergent validity, the correlation of the model structures with their own indices is compared to the correlation with other structures of the model. This is achieved by comparing AVE root of each structure with the values of the correlation coefficients among the structures. If the structures are correlated with their own indices, the proper divergent validity of the model is confirmed (Table 7 in Appendix). As seen in the matrix of Table 5, the values of the main diagonal matrix (the root of the AVE coefficients of each structure) are greater than the lower values (correlation coefficients between each structure with other structures), suggesting the acceptability of the divergent validity of the structures.

Table 7 provides the possibility for the comparison of the research structures with their own questions and other structures. For example, the first column, which is related to the structure of customer-oriented behavior, shows that the correlation of this structure with its questions is about 81% (0.81). This number is greater than the numbers at the bottom of the column, which show the degree of correlation between the structure of employees' capability and other structures. This is true about other columns too. Hence, the divergent validity of the research questionnaire can be verified.

Hypotheses testing

The research model test was performed using the least squares method. Fig. 2 and 3 in Appendix show the research model and its latent and observed variables in the form of reflective measurement models together with path coefficients between the variables, as well as the values of the coefficient of determination and student's t-statistic. In this model, customer-oriented behavior (COB) is the dependent variable, while service climate (SV), personality traits (IB), job satisfaction (JS) are the research independent variables.

A summary of the results obtained from the above figures can be found in Table 8 in Appendix, which is used to examine the hypotheses.

The results show that the impact of path coefficient of personality traits on customer-oriented behavior is 0.30, with t=3.84. As the value of t is greater than 1.96, it can be said with 95% confidence that personality traits have a positive and significant impact on customer-oriented behavior. In other words, by changing one unit in personality traits, 30% change can be observed in the variable of customer-oriented behavior. Thus, the first hypothesis is confirmed. Similarly, the path coefficient of service climate on customer-oriented behavior is 0.17, with t=2.11. As the value of t is greater than 1.96, it can be said with 95% confidence that the employees' perception of positive service climate has a positive and significant effect on customer-oriented behavior. In other words, by changing one unit in the employees'

perception of positive service climate, 17% change can be seen in customer-oriented behavior. Therefore, the second hypothesis is also confirmed. The path coefficient of job satisfaction on customer-oriented behavior is 0.38, with the value of t=3.95, and as the value of t is greater than 1.96, it can be said with 95% confidence that job satisfaction has a positive and significant impact on customer-oriented behavior. In other words, by changing one unit in job satisfaction, customer-oriented behavior will change by 38%. Therefore, the third hypothesis is confirmed too. Given the direct impact of personality traits on customer-oriented behavior that is equal to 0.30, as well as the indirect impact of personality traits on customer-oriented behavior that is through service climate and is equal to 0.09= 0.17*0.53, the result shows that with 95% confidence, service climate influences the relationship between personality traits and customer-oriented behavior. Moreover, the effect of all personality traits on customer-oriented behavior is 0.39 and, hence, the fourth hypothesis is confirmed.

Finally, the criterion used for the evaluation of the structural model is R^2 values. R^2 is a criterion that shows the effect of an exogenous variable on an endogenous variable, and its value is calculated only for the exogenous structures of the model. In the case of exogenous structures, the value of this criterion/standard is zero. Three values of 0.19, 0.33 and 0.67 are considered as the criterion value for the weak, moderate and strong values of R^2 respectively. In this research, R^2 values were obtained as 0.44 and 0.28 and thus it can be said that the research model has a relatively good fit. Tenon House et al. (2005) introduced goodness-of-fit (GOF) for assessing the fit of the model. According to Tenon House and his colleagues, GOF in PLS model is a practical solution to the problem of examining the general fit of the model and functions fit indices in covariance-based methods and, hence, can be used for checking the validity or quality of the PLS model in general. Ranging from zero to one, this index also functions like fit indices where values close to one represent the good quality of the model (Momeni et al., 2013) and is calculated as follows.

GOF=$\sqrt{}$average (AVE)*average (R^2)

GOF value in this research is 0.50 and thus the overall fit of the model is acceptable.

Discussion

This research is an attempt to analyze the impact of service climate and personality traits on customer-oriented behavior among employees of Gas Company in Iran. The results of the first hypothesis study indicate that personality traits such as conscientiousness, extroversion and emotional stability have a significant positive impact on customer-oriented behavior of employees, but there was a negative relationship between personality traits including agreeableness with customer orientation. According to the principles of consumer behavior, it is obvious that personality traits are known as the main source of many human behaviors. In this study, based on the personality model, it was concluded that enhancement of conscientiousness, extraversion and emotional stability among employees can promote customer-oriented behaviors among them. Such results are consistent with the findings of Chen and Kao (2014) and Mechengda et al. (2011). Also, Brown et al. (2002) found a negative relationship between emotional instability and customer-oriented behavior and a positive relationship between compatibility and customer-oriented behavior. Frey and McDaniel (1998) also found a significant positive relationship between customer orientation and personality dimensions of compatibility, emotional stability, and conscientiousness. Hurley

(1998) also found that people who had higher grades in extroversion and compatibility have better service performance (Hurley, 1998).

According to the results, it can be said that employees who are at a higher level in the traits of conscientiousness, extraversion and emotional stability, will show a greater desire to provide customer-oriented behavior and as a result will achieve better job performance. It is obvious that any employee who is orderly, hardworking, self-regulating, motivated, meticulous and persistent, or generally conscientious, will in fact be committed to a culture of customer orientation. On the other hand, the more employees reduce the symptoms of emotional instability, including anxiety, anger, depression, and anxiety, or increase their overall emotional stability, the better they will behave in dealing with the customer. Therefore, we can consider emotional stability as a predictor of customer orientation in service firms. A noteworthy point in this study is the negative impact of adaptation on customer orientation. Akbari (2004) also concluded that there is a very weak positive relationship between compatibility and customer orientation in service firms and perhaps this finding is due to the lack of adaptation culture in such organizations. It is also possible that supervisors in service firms do not consider adaptation indicators including trust, cooperation, flexibility, patience, kindness and altruism as a measure of customer orientation, and instead focus on the behavior of other employees, including duty orientation, etc.

Analysis of the second hypothesis of the research showed that employees' perception of the service climate has a positive impact on customer-oriented behavior. The service climate of the organization is one of the inclusive factors that can affect many human resource-related criteria. In service companies, due to the essential role of employees in providing customer service, it can be expected that the type of service climate the company is one of the most important factors in the development of customer-centric thinking among employees. Mchinda et al. (2011), Pimpacorn and Patterson (2010) and Lamie et al. (2016) also achieved such results in their research. This result shows the importance of service climate on customer orientation. Employees with a sense of support for the processes and actions and management of the organization, show a high commitment to their work and provide better services to customers, which leads to customer satisfaction and minimizes customer complaints.

The third hypothesis test indicates that job satisfaction has significant positive impact on the customer-orientation behavior. This result consistent with the results of research conducted by Choi et al. (2017), Ingram (2015), Mchinda et al. (2011), Lee et al. (2006) and Hoffman and Ingram (1992). Job satisfaction is recognized as one of the main drivers of job motivation among employees. Workers with high job satisfaction may have better compatibility with the marketing system that has dominated the company. It is obvious that any employee in the organization who is satisfied with income, work environment, supervisor, etc. or has overall job satisfaction, then he will do his job well and as a result, customer orientation in the organization will be realized automatically. Will be found. Therefore, the attention of managers and supervisors to creating job satisfaction in employees in this field is very effective and efficient.

Finally, according to the findings from the fourth hypothesis test, it was concluded that the service atmosphere has a mediating role in the relationship between personality traits and customer-oriented behavior. As a result, in dealing with customers, Rostami et al. (2015) also concluded that job satisfaction and organizational commitment had a mediating role on the

customer-oriented behavior of staff. Therefore, strengthening the personality traits tailored to the customer-oriented behaviors of employees will only be successful if the atmosphere dominating the organization is in line with marketing-based culture. Chen and Kao's (2015) and Mchinda et al. (2011) research also confirm this result.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to investigate the effect of service climate and personality of service providers on customer-oriented behavior of the employees in Ardabil Gas Company. Nowadays, organizations operate in a dynamic, flexible and variable environment. One of the most prominent features of the modern era is the dramatic and continuous changes and developments which occur in the socio-cultural, political, economic, technological and transnational conditions of the societies. In such difficult circumstances, those organizations will succeed that are able to make their customers satisfied and give more value to them. One of the most important factors for achieving this goal, especially in service organizations, is the existence of a positive service climate in organizations (Kordnäich, 2004). Research on service climate, personality of employees, and customer-oriented behavior can help planners and managers to enhance the positive attributes of the organization and increase the satisfaction of customers. Focusing on the goals set for the replacement of other fuels with gas and the development of gas networks in the geographical area of Ardabil province, Ardabil Gas Company began its work in 2000. The company has announced its quality, environmental, and safety policies explicitly so that all employees of the company, while respecting the regulations governing the country's gas industry and having a full knowledge of these regulations, can commit themselves to implementing organizational policies (Allahyari, 2015). Based on the results of previous studies, service climate and personality traits of employees can lead to job satisfaction and, hence, customer-oriented behavior of the employees. Accordingly, this research examined the impact of the variables of service climate and personality of employees on customer-oriented behavior. Based on the analysis of the first research hypothesis regarding the significance and positiveness of the path coefficient and t, it can be argued that the dimensions of personality traits including conscientiousness, agreeableness, extroversion and emotional stability have a positive impact on customer-oriented behavior. These results are in line with the results of the research by Mechinda et al. (2011), Brown et al. (2002), Chen and Kao (2014). In the second hypothesis, given the significance and positiveness of these coefficients, it can be stated that employees' perceived service climate has a positive impact on customer-oriented behavior. These results are consistent with the results of the researches by Mechinda et al. (2011), Pimpakern and Patterson (2010), and Rostami et al. (2015), where these researchers concluded that job satisfaction and organizational commitment have a mediating role with regard to customer orientation. Regarding the third hypothesis, given the significance and positivity of the path coefficient and t, it can be argued that job satisfaction has a positive effect on customer-oriented behavior. These results are in line with the results of the researches by Mechinda et al. (2011), Choi et al. (2017), Lee et al. (2006), Ingram (2015), Hoffman and Ingram (1992). Moreover, regarding the fourth hypothesis, given the significance of the coefficients, it can be said that service climate has a mediating role in the relationship between personality traits and customer-oriented behavior. These results are in line with the results of Mechinda et al. (2011), Chen, and Kao (2014) who concluded that service climate modifies the relationship between personality and performance of the employees as well as the relationship between social

support and service climate. Service climate is based on the understanding that employees have practices, procedures, and behaviors that are expected and rewarded in accordance with customer service and service quality. In other words, the more employees feel they are rewarded on the basis of customer service, the better the service climate (Schneider et al, 1998). Personality refers to the inherent predispositions of employees to act or behave in different ways, captured through various traits or dimensions. In this study, employee personality is operationalised applying the Big Five Personality Model (Henning- Thurau, 2004). The term customer-oriented behavior (COB) refers to specific behaviors displayed by service personnel during service encounters – such behavior that leads to satisfied customers (Pimpakorn and Patterson, 2010). A good service climate in the organization together with the good personality of employees leads to job satisfaction and customer-oriented behavior that in turn will improve the employees' performance and customer satisfaction.

Recommendations and limitations

Based on the findings of this research, accordingly, it is proposed to the major policymakers of Gas Company in Iran to emphasize the importance of market orientation and customer orientation in strategic planning of company, and provide the necessary financial and non-financial support for successful implementation of marketing system in the company. In addition, the customer-oriented approach should be considered more than before to formulate perspectives and strategies of Gas Company and by providing the appropriate training and education programs for employees, the organization's vision is reflected on a large scale for employees, and customer orientation is institutionalized among staffs. It is recommended that the managers of the Iran Gas Company, in selecting their employees, consider the proportion between the job and personality traits of employees. As a result, managers should use appropriate personality tests in decisions related to hiring or upgrading employees. Incentive and punitive programs suitable for employees such as periodic selection of employees with the best customer-oriented behavior in line with the corporate vision of Gas Company can be very helpful and will lead the employees to adopt more market-oriented behaviors. By performing psychological tests, they can choose the person for the intended job based on the individual's personality. In their selections, they can consider personality traits such as extroversion, emotional stability, and agreeableness so that the selected employee will have a customer-oriented behavior which in turn will lead to improved performance and customer satisfaction. Also, given that most of the organizational tasks in the Gas Company are considered as headquarters jobs, and employees interact with a significant number of customers each day, employees with contractual and social personality types will have a higher probability of success in developing customer-oriented behaviors. Another suggestion is to conduct research to identify the ways in which the service atmosphere dominating the company can be changed in line with the more appropriateness of marketing system governing the company. As the gas company is a service company, it is recommended that the managers of this company pay special attention to the concept of service climate which is related to the employees' perception of the activities and encourage the employees for providing high quality services. Also, given that most of the organizational tasks in the Gas Company are considered as headquarters jobs, and employees interact with a significant number of customers each day, employees with contractual and social personality types will have a higher probability of success in developing customer-oriented behaviors. By creating appropriate and stress-free workplaces, managers can provide the financial and non-financial

needs of their employees and thereby provide them with job satisfaction which can lead to the customer-oriented behavior of the employees. Establishing briefing meetings for planning in order to create a service atmosphere tailored to the customer-oriented behaviors of staff is another effective executive suggestion for Gas Company's managers. By forming these meetings, managers' awareness of the importance of the concept of market-based service atmosphere increases and their commitment to implementing decisions made at these meetings is guaranteed to a significant extent. Moreover, through encouraging employees to work better and holding appropriate training courses, managers can provide a good service climate to improve customer-oriented behavior and customer satisfaction. Eventually, managers at the Gas Company should pay attention to identifying and meeting the basic needs of employees in order to provide the necessary conditions for balancing the personality of the individual and corporate environment.

Researchers are suggested to examine the service climate and personality traits of the service providers on customer-oriented behavior in other private and public companies in Iran. It is recommended that the present study be conducted in other subsidiary companies of National Gas Company in different geographical regions of the country and the results of the research should be compared comparatively. Such a comparison can be made by the specialized committees of Gas Company in pursuit of customer-oriented objectives and superior provision of services to the customers in a fundamental way. Such a comparison can also be done by doing research in developing and developed countries. It is suggested that researchers examine the other determinants customer-oriented behavior such as internal marketing, market-oriented culture, leadership style and etc. Another suggestion is to conduct research to identify the ways in which the service atmosphere dominating the company can be changed in line with the more appropriateness of marketing system governing the company.

One of the limitations of the research is that there are few domestic and international researches on the subject of the present research that makes it difficult to compare the results of the previous studies with the results of this research. Low motivation of respondents in answering the questions of the questionnaire is another limitation of the research. Using questionnaire as the only tool of data collection is another limitation; moreover, some questionnaires were not returned.

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Appendix. Tables and Figures

Table 1. Structure of questions in the questionnaire (Mechinda and Patterson, 2011)

Variable	Components	Number of Questions
Service Climate	Leadership Practice	3
	Standard Communication	2
	Service Recovery	2
	Human Resource Practice	3
	Service Technology	3
	Participation	2
Personality	Conscientious	4
	Agreeable	2
	Extraversion	2
	Emotional Stability	3
Customer-Oriented Behavior	Congeniality	3
	Anticipation	3
	Courtesy	2
	Attentiveness	2
	Capability	1
Job Satisfaction	-	3

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Classes	No.	Percent
Gender	Male	113	73.38
	Female	37	24.03
Age	Between 20 and 30	11	7.14
	Between 31 and 40	65	42.21
	Between 41 and 50	49	31.82
	Over 50	26	16.82
	No response	3	1.95
Education	Associate degree	8	5.19
	Bachelor's degree	84	54.55
	Master's degree and higher	6	3.9
	No response	6	3.9

Table 3. KMO Index values and Bartlett's Test

	KMO index	**0.678**
Bartlett's Test	Chi square	889.122
	Degree of freedom	15
	Significance level	0.000

Table 4. Results of confirmatory factor analysis

Obvious and hidden variables	Customer-oriented behavior	Personality traits	Job satisfaction	Service atmosphere
Compatibility		0.836005		
Prediction	0.787687			
Attention	0.921812			
Ability	0.528978			
Inherent convergence	0.903395			
Conscience		0.882203		
Modesty	0.905163			
Emotional stability		0.710191		
Extroversion		0.723498		
Human resources				0.815485
Job Satisfaction			1.000000	
Leadership				0.646777
Partnership				0.722007
Service improvement				0.784236
Information technology				0.491115
Standard Services				0.646071

Table 5. Results of Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient	Composed Reliability
Service climate	0.78	0.84
Personality	0.80	0.86
Customer-oriented behavior	0.86	0.91
Job satisfaction	1.00	1.00

Table 6. Results of AVE

Variable	Personality Traits	Service Climate	Customer-Oriented Behavior	Job Satisfaction
AVE	3.06	3.44	3.66	3.53
Standard Deviation	0.88	0.75	0.91	0.97

Table 7. Comparison matrix of AVE root and correlation coefficients of structures (Divergent validity)

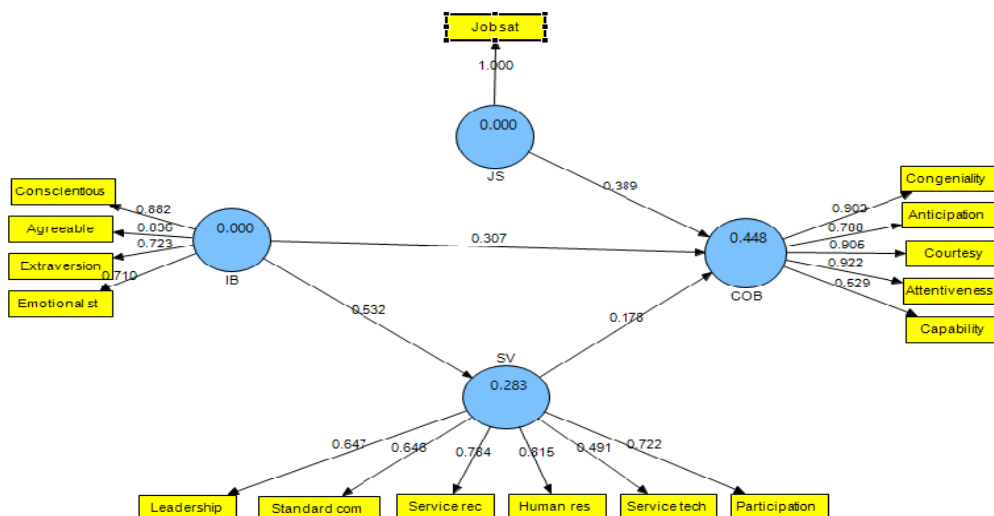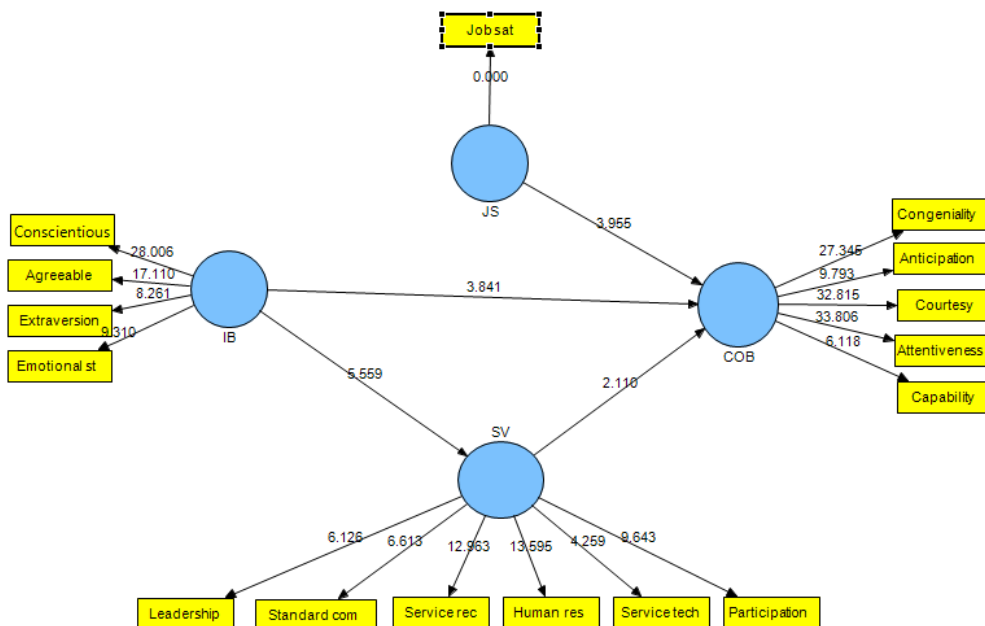| Dimensions	Customer-Oriented Behavior	Personality Traits	Job Satisfaction	Service Climate
Customer-Oriented Behavior	0.81			
Personality Traits	0.51	0.78		
Job Satisfaction	0.53	0.28	1	
Service Climate	0.46	0.53	0.31	0.755

Figure 2. The estimated model of the research in the state of standard coefficient

Figure 3. The estimated model of the research in the significance state

Table 8. The Results of testing the hypotheses

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Path Coefficient	Standard Error	Critical Factor
H_1	Personality Traits	Customer-Oriented Behavior	0.30	0.08	3.84
H_2	Service Climate	Customer-Oriented Behavior	0.17	0.08	2.11
H_3	Job Satisfaction	Customer-Oriented Behavior	0.38	0.09	3.95
H_4	Personality Traits	Service Climate	0.53	0.09	5.55