

Social Exchange Theory and Organizational Citizenship Behavior: Contemporary Perspectives in the Hotel Industry

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The hotel industry is a service intensive sector where frontline employees simultaneously interact with supervisors, coworkers, and guests. Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), defined as discretionary behaviors not formally rewarded, is critical for hotel success. Social Exchange Theory (SET) provides a framework for understanding OCB through reciprocal obligations, yet conceptual integration of Leader Member Exchange (LMX) and employee reciprocity in the hotel context remains limited. **Methods:** This conceptual paper synthesizes existing literature from Scopus indexed journals published between 1960 and 2025. A systematic search of databases including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar yielded 68 relevant articles comprising empirical studies, conceptual papers, and systematic reviews. Theoretical synthesis was employed to develop propositions and a conceptual model integrating SET, LMX, and employee reciprocity specifically for the hotel industry. **Results:** The synthesis reveals that OCB has evolved through five phases, with hotel research adopting three orientations: customer oriented, service oriented, and change oriented OCB. High quality LMX reduces employee envy and fosters thriving at work, enhancing service oriented and change oriented OCB, moderated by psychological empowerment and professional respect. Employee reciprocity emerges as a core mediating mechanism linking organizational, supervisory, and guest exchanges to OCB, including customer empowering behaviors and customer citizenship behaviors triggering reciprocal employee citizenship behaviors. **Conclusion:** SET remains a powerful framework for OCB in hotels when expanded to multiple exchange relationships. Future research should focus on longitudinal designs, cross cultural comparisons, technology impacts, and the dark side of OCB. Practical implications include building professional respect, psychological empowerment, and facilitating positive guest employee exchanges.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The hotel industry possesses characteristics that fundamentally distinguish

it from other industrial sectors. A hotel is not merely a place providing accommodation and food and beverage services; rather, it is a social ecosystem where human interactions form the core of value creation. [1] explicitly state that the hotel industry is a service intensive industry that heavily depends on the quality of interactions between frontline employees and three primary groups, namely supervisors, coworkers, and guests. This characteristic places hotel employees in a unique position because they must simultaneously manage vertical relationships with superiors, horizontal relationships with colleagues, and external relationships with staying customers. These three types of relationships do not stand alone; instead, they influence each other and collectively shape the work experience as well as the service quality ultimately perceived by guests.

Another uniqueness of the hotel industry lies in the nature of its work, which is emotionally demanding, service oriented, and characterized by irregular time schedules. Frontline employees such as receptionists, restaurant servers, and housekeeping staff must consistently display friendly and helpful behavior even when facing high psychological pressure. In such situations, hotel organizations cannot fully rely on formal job descriptions or strict monitoring systems to ensure service quality. Instead, the success of a hotel heavily depends on the voluntary willingness of employees to do more than their basic obligations. This willingness to go beyond formal tasks is known in the organizational behavior literature as Organizational Citizenship Behavior or OCB.

The classic definition of OCB was provided by [2], who described it as individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization. In the hotel context, OCB can manifest in various forms such as helping coworkers who are overwhelmed with guest service, voluntarily offering suggestions for improving work procedures, showing

sportsmanship when facing changing shift schedules, or maintaining a friendly smile toward guests despite experiencing emotional fatigue. These behaviors are not listed in employment contracts and rarely receive direct bonuses or promotions, yet their cumulative impact on hotel reputation, customer loyalty, and ultimately profitability is substantial.

Understanding how OCB can be cultivated among hotel employees requires a theoretical framework capable of explaining why individuals are willing to provide extra effort voluntarily. One of the most influential frameworks for explaining this phenomenon is Social Exchange Theory or SET. Unlike economic exchange based on explicit contracts and short term rewards, social exchange is based on unwritten and long term reciprocal obligations. Employees who perceive that the organization, supervisors, or even guests treat them well tend to reciprocate with positive behaviors including OCB. Conversely, if employees feel treated unfairly or unappreciated, they may reduce their voluntary efforts or even withdraw from positive behaviors.

The development of the OCB concept itself has undergone a long and dynamic academic journey. [3] identified five phases in the evolution of OCB research. The first phase began in the late 1970s when Bateman and Organ first introduced this construct as an effort to explain voluntary workplace behaviors not captured by traditional performance measurements. The second phase focused on developing the dimensionality of OCB, where researchers such as [4] identified at least five to seven distinct dimensions including helping behavior, sportsmanship, organizational loyalty, organizational compliance, individual initiative, civic virtue, and self development. The third phase began examining the dark side or potential negative consequences of OCB, for instance when employees perform too many extra role behaviors to the point of experiencing burnout or neglecting their primary tasks. The fourth phase attempted to balance

perspectives by simultaneously considering positive and negative aspects of OCB. Finally, the fifth phase, currently underway, seeks to update the understanding of OCB in an era of continuously changing workplaces, including the adoption of digital technologies, remote work, and the presence of artificial intelligence in customer service.

In the specific context of the hotel industry, research on OCB has developed significantly over the past two decades. [5] conducted a comprehensive systematic review and meta analysis of OCB studies in the hospitality industry. They found that the majority of research tends to adopt three main approaches, namely customer oriented OCB, service oriented OCB (SOOCB), and change oriented OCB. Another important finding was that antecedents of OCB in hotels originate not only from internal organizational factors such as leadership style and organizational justice but also from external factors such as guest behavior itself. This indicates that the dynamics of social exchange in hotels are more complex compared to the manufacturing sector or professional services.

One of the greatest challenges faced by the hotel industry in its efforts to maintain employee OCB is the increasing incidence of uncivil behavior in the workplace. [6] recently found that tolerance of workplace incivility has a substantial negative impact on hotel employees' OCB. When employees routinely experience or witness rude behavior from supervisors, coworkers, or guests, and when the organization appears to tolerate such behavior without consequences, employees tend to reduce their participation in voluntary behaviors. Furthermore, the same study also reported that continuous exposure to workplace incivility increases emotional exhaustion, which in turn further suppresses OCB. This finding is highly relevant to the hotel industry where frontline employees often become targets of complaints or anger from dissatisfied guests, yet on the other hand are expected to remain professional and friendly.

Given the complexity and high emotional demands of hotel work, it is not

surprising that researchers continue to search for factors that can protect or even enhance OCB even under difficult working conditions. This is where Leader Member Exchange or LMX plays a central role. LMX, which is a specific application of SET within the dyadic relationship between leaders and subordinates, explains how the quality of exchange between hotel managers and frontline employees can shape employee perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. Employees who enjoy high quality LMX relationships, characterized by mutual trust, respect, and reciprocal obligation, tend to be more resilient to work pressure and more motivated to perform OCB.

However, the relationship between LMX and OCB is not always direct. Recent research indicates that the psychological mechanisms explaining this relationship are often indirect and involve mediating variables such as employee envy, thriving at work, and organizational commitment. [7] found that LMX reduces envy among hotel employees, and this reduction in envy subsequently encourages service oriented OCB. This finding is important because it shows that one way LMX works is by creating a fairer and more collaborative work environment, so that employees do not need to compare themselves negatively with their peers.

Beyond LMX, the concept of employee reciprocity also emerges as a core mechanism linking various forms of social exchange to OCB. The norm of reciprocity, first formulated by [8], states that individuals feel obligated to repay the treatment they receive from others. In the hotel context, this norm can operate in three directions simultaneously. First, toward the organization, employees reciprocate perceived organizational support with OCB. Second, toward supervisors, employees reciprocate LMX quality with OCB. Third, toward guests, employees reciprocate positive guest behaviors such as customer empowering behaviors or customer citizenship behavior with customer oriented employee citizenship behavior. [9] empirically confirmed that employee

reciprocity plays a significant mediating role between OCB and key job attitudes such as customer oriented behavior and employee retention.

Despite the extensive use of SET to explain OCB across various sectors including hospitality, significant gaps remain in the existing literature. First, the majority of existing studies tend to focus on one type of exchange relationship in isolation, for instance only LMX or only perceived organizational support. However, hotel employees are simultaneously engaged in multiple exchange relationships with supervisors, coworkers, and guests as emphasized by [1]. Second, the mechanism of employee reciprocity is often assumed without being explicitly tested as a mediating variable. Third, there are few conceptual synthesis efforts that specifically integrate LMX and employee reciprocity within a single framework to explain OCB in the hotel context. Fourth, although research on OCB in hotels from various countries already exists, a conceptual framework capable of accommodating contextual variations such as generational differences (for example Generation Z employees), cultural differences, and new challenges from the digitalization of hotel services is still needed.

Therefore, this conceptual article aims to fill these gaps by developing a theoretical synthesis that integrates SET, LMX, and employee reciprocity in explaining OCB in the hotel industry. Specifically, this article will (1) review the development of the OCB concept and its application in the hotel context, (2) analyze how LMX influences OCB through various mediating and moderating mechanisms based on recent empirical evidence, (3) elaborate the central role of employee reciprocity as a psychological mechanism linking social exchange to OCB, (4) develop a conceptual model integrating these three elements, and (5) formulate practical implications for hotel managers as well as future research agendas. By conducting this synthesis, the article is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of OCB literature in the

hospitality sector while offering applicable guidance for practitioners in designing effective management interventions to enhance voluntary employee behavior in hotels.

Following this introduction, the article will continue with a review of theory and the development of the OCB concept, including definitions, the five phase evolution, and specific findings from the hotel industry. The next section will discuss SET as a theoretical foundation, followed by an in depth analysis of LMX and employee reciprocity. The article will conclude with a synthesis discussion, the proposed conceptual model, theoretical and practical implications, and promising future research agendas.

2. METHODS

This article is a conceptual paper that relies on logical reasoning, theoretical synthesis, and critical analysis of existing literature rather than primary data collection. Following the guidelines for conceptual papers in management and hospitality research [10], the primary purpose is to integrate and synthesize the existing body of knowledge on Social Exchange Theory (SET), Leader Member Exchange (LMX), employee reciprocity, and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) specifically within the hotel industry context.

A systematic literature search was conducted using Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect databases. The search employed keyword combinations including "Social Exchange Theory", "Organizational Citizenship Behavior", "hotel", "hospitality", "Leader Member Exchange", and "reciprocity". The search was limited to English language articles published in peer reviewed Scopus indexed journals from 1960 to 2025, with emphasis on the most recent publications from 2018 to 2025.

The article selection process followed a three stage procedure. The initial search yielded 847 records, which were reduced to 612 unique articles after removing duplicates. Title and abstract screening narrowed the pool to 124 potentially relevant articles. Full

text review resulted in 68 articles meeting the final inclusion criteria, comprising 35 empirical studies, 18 conceptual papers, and 15 systematic reviews or meta analyses.

Theoretical synthesis was employed as the primary analytical method, involving three interrelated activities: concept centric analysis of the four core constructs, relationship mapping to identify logical and empirical connections among constructs, and contextual grounding specifically for the unique characteristics of hotel work such as emotional labor and multiple exchange partners. Based on this synthesis, eight theoretical propositions were developed to form the building blocks of the proposed conceptual model.

Quality assurance measures included transparent documentation of the search and selection process, exclusive use of Scopus indexed sources, inclusion of both seminal works [2], [8], [11] and recent publications, and iterative refinement of the conceptual model. Limitations of this conceptual approach include the absence of empirical testing, potential omission of relevant articles due to database coverage, and focused generalizability limited to the hotel industry rather than the broader hospitality sector.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Development of Organizational Citizenship Behavior Concept in the Hotel Industry

The evolution of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) as a theoretical construct has spanned more than four decades, during which the concept has undergone substantial refinement and expansion. [12] provided a comprehensive historical review of OCB development by identifying five distinct phases that reflect the maturation of this construct within organizational behavior literature. Understanding these five phases is essential for situating contemporary OCB research in the hotel industry within its proper historical and theoretical context. Each phase brought new insights, challenges, and directions that

have collectively shaped how researchers currently conceptualize and measure OCB among hotel frontline employees.

The first phase of OCB development began in the late 1970s when Bateman and Organ first introduced the construct as an effort to explain voluntary workplace behaviors that were not captured by traditional performance measurement systems [13]. During this phase, researchers recognized that formal job descriptions and contractual agreements could never fully specify all the behaviors necessary for effective organizational functioning. In the hotel context, this insight is particularly relevant because frontline employees constantly encounter unique situations with guests that cannot be anticipated by any manual or standard operating procedure. A receptionist who voluntarily stays beyond shift hours to resolve a guest's complaint or a housekeeper who notices and reports a potential safety hazard are both exhibiting the kind of discretionary behavior that Bateman and Organ sought to understand. This foundational phase established OCB as a legitimate and important area of inquiry separate from task performance.

The second phase focused on developing the dimensionality of OCB, a task most comprehensively undertaken by [4]. Through extensive literature review and empirical validation, these researchers identified at least five to seven distinct dimensions of OCB, including helping behavior, sportsmanship, organizational loyalty, organizational compliance, civic virtue, individual initiative, and self development. Helping behavior refers to voluntary assistance provided to coworkers facing task related difficulties. Sportsmanship reflects the willingness to tolerate inevitable inconveniences without complaining. Organizational loyalty involves promoting the organization's image and protecting it from external threats. Organizational compliance, also known as general obedience, refers to the internalization and acceptance of organizational rules and procedures. Civic virtue represents responsible participation in the governance of the organization.

Individual initiative captures voluntary acts of creativity and innovation. Self development encompasses behaviors aimed at improving one's own knowledge and skills. For hotel managers, recognizing these distinct dimensions is crucial because different interventions may be required to encourage different types of OCB among frontline staff.

The third phase of OCB research shifted attention toward the identification of the dark side or potential negative consequences of OCB [14]. Researchers began to question whether OCB was always beneficial for employees and organizations. Evidence emerged suggesting that employees who engage in excessive OCB may experience role overload, work family conflict, and emotional exhaustion. In the hotel industry, where emotional labor demands are already high, this dark side is particularly concerning. [6] found that tolerance of workplace incivility not only reduces OCB but also increases emotional exhaustion among hotel employees. This finding aligns with the third phase perspective that OCB should not be encouraged unconditionally without considering the well being of employees. Hotel managers must therefore balance their desire for extra role behaviors with attention to the sustainable workload of their frontline staff.

The fourth phase attempted to restore balance by simultaneously considering both positive and negative aspects of OCB [15]. Researchers in this phase recognized that OCB is neither uniformly beneficial nor uniformly harmful; rather, its consequences depend on contextual factors such as the frequency and intensity of the behaviors, the motives behind them, and the support available to employees. This balanced perspective has important implications for the hotel industry, where shift work, irregular hours, and intense guest interactions create conditions under which OCB could be either a source of personal fulfillment or a pathway to burnout. The fourth phase also encouraged the examination of moderators that might explain under what conditions OCB produces positive versus negative outcomes. Psychological empowerment, for instance,

has been shown to strengthen the positive effects of high quality leader member exchange on service oriented OCB [7]. This suggests that when hotel employees feel empowered, they are better equipped to engage in OCB without suffering negative consequences.

The fifth and current phase of OCB development seeks to update and expand the understanding of OCB in an era of rapidly changing workplaces [10]. Key drivers of change include the adoption of digital technologies, the rise of remote and hybrid work arrangements, the increasing presence of artificial intelligence in customer service, and generational shifts in workforce values. In the hotel industry, the fifth phase is particularly relevant as hotels adopt contactless check in technologies, robotic concierges, and mobile guest service platforms. These technological changes fundamentally alter the nature of interactions between frontline employees, supervisors, coworkers, and guests. Researchers in the fifth phase are exploring whether traditional dimensions of OCB remain relevant in technology mediated service environments or whether new dimensions need to be conceptualized. Additionally, the entry of Generation Z employees into the hotel workforce, with their distinct expectations regarding feedback, autonomy, and professional recognition [16], further underscores the need for updated OCB frameworks.

Within the specific context of the hotel industry, research on OCB has developed its own distinctive emphases beyond the generic five phase evolution. [17] conducted a systematic review and meta analysis of OCB studies in the hospitality industry, revealing that hotel focused OCB research tends to adopt three main streams or orientations. The first stream is customer oriented OCB, which refers to discretionary behaviors performed by hotel employees that are specifically directed toward enhancing the guest experience. Examples include a front desk agent who proactively offers local restaurant recommendations or a bellman who goes out of his way to retrieve a guest's

forgotten item. The second stream is service oriented OCB (SOOCB), which encompasses voluntary behaviors that improve the overall service quality of the hotel, not necessarily directed at a specific guest but at the service system as a whole. SOOCB includes actions such as voluntarily sharing service improvement ideas with management or helping new coworkers learn service protocols. The third stream is change oriented OCB, which involves discretionary behaviors aimed at initiating and implementing changes in hotel work processes, policies, or practices. This stream has gained prominence as hotels face increasing pressure to innovate and adapt to post pandemic market conditions. These three streams demonstrate that OCB in the hotel industry is not a monolithic construct but rather a multifaceted set of behaviors that can be directed toward customers, service systems, or organizational change.

Furthermore, [18] provided empirical evidence that internal brand management in hotels significantly influences OCB among frontline employees. Their study demonstrated that when hotel organizations effectively communicate brand values to employees and align internal processes with brand promises, employees are more likely to engage in OCB that supports brand delivery. This finding is particularly significant because it establishes a link between strategic human resource management practices (internal branding) and discretionary employee behaviors (OCB). For hotel managers, this implies that OCB can be systematically cultivated not only through high quality leader member exchange relationships but also through structured internal communication and training programs that strengthen employees' identification with the hotel brand. When frontline employees internalize brand values, they are more likely to go beyond formal job requirements to deliver brand consistent service experiences to guests. In summary, the development of OCB as a concept has progressed through five distinct phases, and within the hotel industry, this evolution has manifested in three specific orientations while being influenced by

strategic practices such as internal brand management.

3.2 Social Exchange Theory as the Theoretical Foundation

Social Exchange Theory (SET) provides the foundational framework for understanding why employees engage in discretionary behaviors that extend beyond their formal job descriptions. The core premise of SET is that social relationships, unlike purely economic transactions, are governed by norms of reciprocity and mutual obligation rather than explicit contractual terms. [11] defined social exchange as voluntary actions motivated by expected returns from others. In an economic exchange, the terms are explicitly negotiated and the benefits are immediately specified, such as an employee receiving a wage in exchange for performing defined tasks. In contrast, social exchange involves unspecified obligations where one party provides a benefit to another without precise knowledge of when or how the benefit will be returned. This uncertainty is not a weakness of social exchange but rather its defining feature, as it creates space for trust, gratitude, and long term relational commitment to develop. Within the hotel industry, frontline employees constantly engage in social exchanges with supervisors, coworkers, and guests, each of which carries the potential to generate reciprocal obligations that manifest as organizational citizenship behavior.

The mechanism that transforms social exchange into behavioral outcomes is the norm of reciprocity, a concept most clearly articulated by [8]. The norm of reciprocity states that individuals feel obligated to repay, in proportion to what they have received, the positive treatment they have experienced from others. This norm is not merely a descriptive observation about human behavior but a prescriptive moral code that operates across cultures and social contexts. When a hotel manager provides a frontline employee with flexibility in scheduling, recognition for good work, or support during a difficult guest interaction, the norm of reciprocity creates a psychological debt that

the employee feels compelled to repay. Because the employee cannot always repay the manager directly or immediately, the debt is often discharged through behaviors that benefit the manager's goals or the organization more broadly, such as helping coworkers, showing sportsmanship under pressure, or voluntarily contributing ideas for service improvement. Conversely, the norm of reciprocity also implies that negative treatment will be repaid with negative behavior, such as withdrawal of effort or retaliation, though positive reciprocity has received far more attention in organizational behavior research.

The influence of SET within organizational behavior research has been profound and enduring. [19] conducted an interdisciplinary review of SET and concluded that it has become one of the most influential frameworks for understanding workplace attitudes and behaviors. They traced how SET has been applied to explain phenomena ranging from organizational commitment and procedural justice to psychological contracts and leader member exchange. The enduring appeal of SET lies in its parsimony and its intuitive resonance with everyday workplace experiences. Employees naturally understand that when an organization or supervisor treats them well, they should reciprocate with positive attitudes and behaviors. SET provides the theoretical language and structure to study these intuitive understandings systematically. In the hotel industry, where employee turnover rates are historically high and service quality depends heavily on discretionary effort, SET offers a powerful lens for diagnosing why some employees go above and beyond while others do only the minimum required.

In a recent systematic review of SET applications across organizational contexts, [20] identified that SET is most frequently operationalized through three specific constructs: perceived organizational support (POS), leader member exchange (LMX), and psychological contract. Perceived organizational support refers to employees' global beliefs about the extent to which the

organization values their contributions and cares about their well being. Employees who perceive high levels of POS are likely to reciprocate with increased OCB because they feel a sense of obligation to repay the organization's investment in them. Leader member exchange captures the quality of the dyadic relationship between a supervisor and a subordinate. High quality LMX relationships, characterized by mutual trust, respect, and obligation, generate stronger reciprocal responses from employees compared to low quality, purely transactional relationships. Psychological contract refers to employees' beliefs about the mutual obligations that exist between themselves and their organization, beyond the formal written contract. When employees perceive that the organization has fulfilled its psychological contract obligations, they reciprocate with OCB; when the psychological contract is breached, OCB declines. These three constructs are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary, each capturing a different level or type of social exchange relationship within organizations.

Within the specific context of the hospitality industry, [21] developed and tested a conceptual model of employee organization relationship (EOR) using SET as the theoretical anchor. Their study focused on frontline employees in hotels and restaurants, examining how perceived organizational support influences OCB through the mediating mechanism of employee organization relationship quality. [21] argued that hotel employees who perceive strong organizational support tend to develop a higher quality relationship with their organization, characterized by trust, commitment, and a sense of mutual obligation. This enhanced relationship quality, in turn, translates into increased OCB because employees feel a genuine desire to contribute to the success of an organization that has demonstrated care for their well being. An important contribution of their model is the recognition that the employee organization relationship is not merely an aggregation of individual exchanges but a distinct relational construct that mediates the

effects of organizational practices on employee behaviors. For hotel managers, this implies that investments in organizational support mechanisms, such as fair treatment, recognition programs, and career development opportunities, are likely to generate returns in the form of OCB, but only if those investments are perceived by employees as genuine and consistent. The model also suggests that hotels should periodically assess the quality of the employee organization relationship, rather than focusing exclusively on measuring OCB directly, because relationship quality serves as an early indicator of future citizenship behaviors. In summary, SET, with its emphasis on voluntary exchange and reciprocal obligation, provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding OCB in the hotel industry, operationalized through POS, LMX, and psychological contract, and contextualized through hospitality specific models such as that proposed by [21].

3.3 Leader Member Exchange in Hotels: The Core Mechanism of Social Exchange

Building upon the foundational principles of Social Exchange Theory discussed in the preceding section, Leader Member Exchange (LMX) emerges as the most direct and contextually immediate application of SET within organizational settings. While perceived organizational support and psychological contract capture employees' relationships with the organization as an abstract entity, LMX focuses specifically on the dyadic relationship between a leader and a subordinate. This distinction is critical because employees often experience the organization through their immediate supervisor, making the quality of the LMX relationship a primary determinant of how employees interpret organizational policies, practices, and expectations. As an application of SET, LMX theory posits that leaders develop differentiated relationships with different subordinates, ranging from high quality exchanges characterized by mutual trust, respect, and obligation to low

quality exchanges limited to formal contractual terms [19]. In the hotel industry, where frontline employees work in close physical proximity to supervisors and where immediate guidance is often needed to resolve guest issues, the quality of LMX can shape not only daily work experiences but also long term patterns of discretionary behavior.

Recent empirical research has substantially refined the understanding of how LMX translates into OCB, moving beyond simple direct effect models to examine mediating mechanisms and boundary conditions. [22] conducted a study that linked empowering leadership to OCB through the mediating role of organizational commitment, while also identifying leader authenticity and trust as crucial moderators. Their findings demonstrated that when leaders genuinely empower employees by delegating authority, encouraging autonomous decision making, and expressing confidence in subordinates' capabilities, employees develop stronger organizational commitment. This heightened commitment, in turn, drives OCB because employees who are committed to their organization are more willing to exert extra effort on its behalf. Importantly, [22] found that the empowering leadership OCB relationship was stronger when leaders were perceived as authentic and when employees trusted their supervisors. For hotel managers, these findings imply that empowerment initiatives will fail to generate OCB if employees perceive the empowerment as inauthentic or if trust has been eroded by past inconsistencies between words and actions. In the high pressure environment of a hotel, where supervisors must frequently make quick decisions and frontline employees must act with considerable autonomy, authenticity and trust are not optional enhancements but essential preconditions for LMX to produce OCB.

A particularly comprehensive investigation of LMX in the hotel context was conducted by [7], who surveyed 288 frontline hotel employees in India. Their study examined a mediated moderation model in which LMX influences service oriented

organizational citizenship behavior (SOOCB) through the mediating mechanism of employee envy, with psychological empowerment serving as a moderator. The findings revealed that high quality LMX significantly reduces employee envy, which refers to the negative emotion arising from upward social comparison when an employee perceives that a coworker has received more favorable treatment from a supervisor. In hotel settings where performance is highly visible and where supervisors distribute rewards and recognition unevenly, envy can be particularly corrosive to team cohesion and service quality. [23] demonstrated that when LMX is high, employees feel fairly treated and valued, which diminishes their tendency to compare themselves negatively to peers. This reduction in envy subsequently leads to increased SOOCB, as employees channel their energy into constructive service behaviors rather than into resentful rumination. More importantly, the study found that psychological empowerment moderates the relationship between LMX and employee envy, such that the negative effect of LMX on envy is stronger when employees feel psychologically empowered. Psychological empowerment encompasses four dimensions: meaning, competence, self determination, and impact. When hotel employees perceive that their work is meaningful, that they have the skills to perform effectively, that they have autonomy in how they execute their tasks, and that their actions make a difference, they become less susceptible to envy even in situations where LMX quality might be variable. Thus, psychological empowerment serves as a psychological resource that amplifies the beneficial effects of LMX while protecting employees from the destructive emotion of envy.

The cultural and generational specificity of LMX OCB relationships is highlighted by research conducted in the Indonesian hotel context. [24] investigated LMX and OCB among Generation Z employees working in star rated hotels in Bali. Their study is particularly valuable because Generation Z, defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, now constitutes a

growing proportion of the hotel workforce globally, and this generation holds distinct expectations about workplace relationships compared to previous generations. [24] measured LMX using its four dimensional structure: affect (mutual liking and friendship), contribution (willingness to exert extra effort), loyalty (public support for each other's decisions and character), and professional respect (recognition of each other's professional competence). The results revealed that among these four dimensions, professional respect was the strongest predictor of OCB, surpassing affect, contribution, and loyalty. This finding carries profound implications for hotel managers who supervise young employees. Generation Z hotel workers, according to this study, do not primarily seek friendship with supervisors (affect) or even loyalty as traditionally defined. Instead, they crave recognition of their professional competence. They want their supervisors to see them as knowledgeable and skilled professionals, not merely as young workers performing entry level tasks. For hotel managers, this suggests that expressing professional respect through actions such as seeking employees' input on service improvements, crediting their ideas publicly, and providing challenging assignments that demonstrate trust in their capabilities may be more effective in generating OCB than traditional relationship building approaches based on socializing or personal rapport.

Extending the LMX OCB relationship beyond service oriented behaviors to change oriented behaviors, [25] examined 325 hotel employees in Taiwan. Their study focused on how service innovative leadership, a specific leadership style that emphasizes creativity and proactive service improvements, influences change oriented OCB. Change oriented OCB refers to voluntary behaviors aimed at initiating and implementing changes in work processes, policies, or practices, as opposed to affiliative OCB which focuses on maintaining existing relationships and routines. identified thriving [25] at work as the mediating mechanism linking service innovative leadership to change oriented

OCB. Thriving at work is a psychological state comprising two dimensions: vitality (the sense of being alive and energetic) and learning (the sense of acquiring and applying knowledge and skills). The study found that when hotel leaders exhibit service innovative leadership by encouraging experimentation, tolerating calculated failures, and rewarding creative problem solving, employees experience higher levels of vitality and learning. This thriving state, in turn, motivates employees to engage in change oriented OCB because thriving individuals have both the energy and the cognitive resources to initiate improvements. This finding connects back to the earlier discussion of psychological empowerment, as both constructs emphasize the importance of creating psychological conditions that enable employees to flourish. For hotel managers, this research implies that LMX is not only about preventing negative states such as envy but also about actively fostering positive states such as thriving, which then drive innovation focused OCB.

Finally, the boundary conditions of LMX OCB relationships extend to individual demographic characteristics, including gender. Estiri, Amiri, Khajeheian, and Rayej (2018) conducted a study in the hospitality industry that examined whether the effect of LMX on OCB varies between male and female employees. Their findings revealed a significant moderating effect of gender, such that female employees showed stronger positive responses to high quality LMX compared to male employees. In other words, when women perceived that they had a high quality exchange relationship with their supervisor, they were more likely to engage in OCB than men under the same high quality LMX conditions. [14] offered several explanations for this finding, drawing on gender role theory and socialization research. Women, they argued, may place greater value on relational aspects of work and may be more attuned to the quality of interpersonal connections with supervisors. Consequently, when women experience high quality LMX, they feel a stronger sense of reciprocal obligation and respond with more

pronounced citizenship behaviors. For hotel managers who supervise diverse workforces, this finding suggests that investing in high quality LMX may yield particularly strong returns when directed toward female employees. However, the study does not imply that men are unresponsive to LMX; rather, the effect size is simply smaller. The practical implication is that hotels should strive for high quality LMX universally, while recognizing that different employees may respond to different dimensions of LMX with varying intensity. In summary, the literature on LMX in hotels consistently demonstrates that high quality leader member exchange reduces negative emotions such as envy, fosters positive psychological states such as thriving and psychological empowerment, and ultimately enhances multiple forms of OCB including service oriented and change oriented behaviors, with effects that are moderated by cultural values, generational expectations, and gender.

3.4 Employee Reciprocity in Hotels: The Psychological Engine of Social Exchange

The norm of reciprocity, as articulated by [8], serves as the psychological engine that translates social exchange into behavioral outcomes. Without reciprocity, social exchange would be indistinguishable from one way charity or exploitation. The norm creates a sense of moral obligation that compels individuals to repay, in proportion to what they have received, the treatment they have experienced from others. In the hotel industry, reciprocity operates as a three way mechanism connecting employees to organizations, employees to supervisors (as discussed in the LMX section), and employees to guests. While the preceding section focused on the vertical relationship between leaders and members, this section turns to the broader notion of employee reciprocity as a general psychological process that explains why OCB emerges from various exchange relationships. [9] directly examined employee reciprocity as a mediating variable between OCB and key job attitudes, specifically customer oriented behavior and employee retention. Their

study, conducted across service sector organizations including hotels, provided empirical confirmation for the assumptions of the service profit chain model. The service profit chain posits that internal service quality leads to employee satisfaction and loyalty, which in turn drives customer satisfaction and profitability. [9] demonstrated that this chain operates through the mechanism of reciprocity. Employees who engage in OCB develop a stronger sense of reciprocal obligation toward their organization, which then manifests as increased customer oriented behavior and a greater intention to remain with the organization. In other words, the act of performing citizenship behaviors reinforces the employee's own identification as a reciprocal contributor, creating a self sustaining cycle. For hotel managers, this finding challenges the assumption that OCB is merely an outcome of organizational practices. Instead, OCB itself can be an antecedent of positive job attitudes through the mediating pathway of reciprocity, suggesting that interventions that encourage initial acts of OCB, even small ones, may trigger reciprocal spirals that lead to sustained service excellence and lower turnover.

The reciprocity mechanism, however, is not confined to exchanges between employees and their organizations or supervisors. A growing body of research demonstrates that reciprocity also operates in the relationship between hotel employees and the guests they serve. [26] introduced the concept of customer empowering behaviors (CEB), which refers to actions taken by customers that grant autonomy, respect input, and acknowledge the competence of service employees. Examples of CEB in a hotel setting include a guest who asks a front desk agent for her opinion on room assignment, a guest who compliments a housekeeper on her efficiency, or a guest who allows a restaurant server to make decisions about table arrangement without micromanaging. [26] found that when hotel guests engage in empowering behaviors, they trigger a positive customer employee exchange (CEX), which is a relationship characterized by mutual respect, trust, and obligation between a guest

and an employee. This positive CEX, in turn, drives customer oriented citizenship behaviors (COCBs) from employees, such as proactively anticipating guest needs, offering personalized recommendations, and going beyond standard service protocols to create memorable experiences. This finding is theoretically significant because it extends the domain of SET beyond vertical leader member relationships and beyond organization employee relationships into the lateral relationship between employees and customers. In traditional service management literature, customers are viewed as recipients of service rather than as contributors to employee motivation. [26] inverted this perspective by showing that customers can be active agents in the social exchange process, and when they behave in empowering ways, employees reciprocate with enhanced citizenship behaviors directed precisely at those customers. For hotel managers, this implies that guest education and service design should not focus exclusively on what the hotel provides to guests but also on how guests can be encouraged to interact with employees in respectful and empowering ways. Simple interventions such as including notes in guest welcome packets about appreciating staff, or designing service touchpoints that naturally invite guest input, may activate the CEB COCB reciprocity loop.

Further extending the boundaries of reciprocity in the hotel context, [5] conducted a cross cultural validation study on the concept of angel customers, which refers to guests who voluntarily demonstrate citizenship behaviors toward employees. Customer citizenship behavior (CCB) encompasses actions such as providing constructive feedback, helping other customers, showing tolerance for service delays, and expressing appreciation to employees. [5] found that when hotel employees perceive high levels of CCB from their guests, they respond with increased employee citizenship behavior (ECB) directed toward those guests. ECB includes behaviors such as showing genuine warmth, investing extra effort to solve guest problems, and proactively offering unexpected amenities or

upgrades. This finding is particularly important because it completes the reciprocity loop between employees and customers, demonstrating that the relationship is truly bidirectional. Employees are not merely passive recipients of customer behavior nor are customers merely passive recipients of employee behavior. Rather, each party's citizenship behaviors trigger reciprocal citizenship behaviors from the other party, creating a virtuous cycle that elevates the entire service encounter. [5] also examined cross cultural differences in this reciprocity process, finding that the effect of CCB on ECB was stronger in collectivist cultures where norms of reciprocity are more deeply embedded in social interactions compared to individualist cultures. For international hotel chains operating across multiple countries, this cultural moderation suggests that the same guest empowerment or customer citizenship initiatives may produce different levels of employee reciprocity depending on the cultural context. In collectivist societies such as many Asian countries, hotel employees may be particularly responsive to guest displays of respect and appreciation, whereas in individualist societies such as the United States or Western Europe, other motivators such as financial incentives or career advancement may play a larger role. Taken together, the studies reviewed in this section establish employee reciprocity as the core psychological mechanism that links multiple sources of social exchange, including organizational support, leader member exchange, and customer employee exchange, to OCB in the hotel industry. Reciprocity is not a single direction process but a dynamic, multidirectional force that connects employees to organizations, supervisors, and guests in a web of mutual obligation and discretionary effort.

3.5 Theoretical and Practical Implications

This conceptual article makes several contributions to the theoretical literature on organizational citizenship behavior in the hotel industry. First, the article reinforces the position of Social Exchange Theory as a grand

theory for explaining OCB in hotel settings, while simultaneously demonstrating the need to extend the traditional model beyond vertical leader member exchange to encompass multiple exchange relationships. Previous applications of SET in hospitality research have often focused on a single exchange relationship, such as between employee and supervisor or between employee and organization. This article synthesizes evidence showing that hotel frontline employees simultaneously engage in exchanges with supervisors (LMX), with coworkers, and with guests [1], and that each of these exchange relationships can independently and interactively influence OCB. By integrating findings from [23], [26], and [5], this article demonstrates that a comprehensive theoretical model of OCB in hotels must incorporate tripartite exchange relationships rather than assuming that LMX alone captures all relevant social dynamics.

Second, this article identifies employee reciprocity as a key mediating mechanism that has received insufficient attention in the hospitality OCB literature. While the norm of reciprocity [8] has always been central to SET, empirical studies have often treated reciprocity as an assumption rather than as a measured and tested mediator. By highlighting the work of [9] which explicitly tested employee reciprocity as a mediator between OCB and key job attitudes, this article calls for more systematic attention to the psychological process of reciprocal obligation. Understanding reciprocity as a dynamic mechanism rather than a static assumption opens new avenues for investigating why and when organizational interventions succeed or fail in generating OCB among hotel employees.

Third, this article highlights the importance of psychological empowerment [23] and professional respect [24] as contextual variables that strengthen or moderate the effects of LMX on OCB. These variables are not merely additional antecedents of OCB but rather function as boundary conditions that determine whether high quality leader member exchange translates into citizenship behavior. For

theoretical development, this suggests that researchers should move beyond asking whether LMX predicts OCB and instead focus on identifying the conditions under which this relationship is strongest or weakest. The moderation effects of psychological empowerment and professional respect also point to the importance of individual differences and generational values, as the study by [24] demonstrated that Generation Z hotel employees place particular value on professional respect compared to older cohorts. Future theoretical models must therefore incorporate both situational moderators such as empowerment practices and individual difference moderators such as generational identity or cultural orientation.

The theoretical synthesis presented in this article yields several actionable implications for hotel managers seeking to enhance organizational citizenship behavior among their frontline employees. First, hotel managers must consciously and deliberately build high quality leader member exchange relationships with every frontline employee, not merely with a select few high performers. The research by [24] specifically demonstrated that among Generation Z hotel workers, professional respect is the strongest predictor of OCB. This implies that managers should express professional respect through tangible actions such as seeking employees' input on service decisions, publicly crediting their ideas, delegating meaningful responsibilities, and acknowledging their professional competence. Traditional relationship building approaches based on socializing or personal rapport may be less effective with younger employees than actions that signal respect for their knowledge and skills.

Second, psychological empowerment practices must be integrated into hotel management systems, not treated as optional enhancements. [7] found that psychological empowerment strengthens the negative effect of LMX on employee envy, thereby amplifying the pathway to service oriented OCB. Hotel managers can foster psychological empowerment by delegating authority to frontline employees to resolve

guest complaints without seeking managerial approval, by providing training that builds competence, by explaining how each employee's role contributes to hotel performance, and by offering choice in work methods and schedules where possible. Empowerment should be genuine rather than performative, as employees quickly detect inauthentic empowerment attempts which can damage trust.

Third, hotel managers should recognize that guests can be active sources of positive social exchange that trigger employee OCB. [26] demonstrated that customer empowering behaviors (CEB) such as granting autonomy to employees, respecting their input, and acknowledging their competence generate positive customer employee exchange (CEX) which in turn drives customer oriented citizenship behaviors (COCBs). This suggests that hotels should design service touchpoints that naturally invite guests to interact with employees in respectful and empowering ways. Training programs for frontline employees should include modules on how to invite and facilitate guest empowering behaviors, such as asking open ended questions that signal respect for guest opinions or providing guests with opportunities to offer feedback in ways that feel constructive rather than critical.

Fourth, creating organizational inclusion and ethical virtues can systemically enhance OCB across the hotel workforce. [27] found that when hotel organizations foster inclusion and demonstrate ethical virtues such as integrity, fairness, and transparency, employees are more likely to engage in OCB. For hotel managers, this implies that OCB cannot be cultivated through isolated interventions aimed at individual employees. Instead, a supportive organizational climate in which all employees feel included and where ethical behavior is consistently modeled by leadership creates the conditions under which reciprocity norms flourish. Practical steps include establishing clear codes of conduct, ensuring consistent enforcement of policies across all employee levels, creating employee resource groups

that support diversity, and publicly recognizing ethical behavior when it occurs.

3.6 Future Research Agenda

Despite the theoretical synthesis achieved in this article, several important gaps remain that point toward promising directions for future research. First, there is a pressing need for longitudinal studies in hotel settings that examine the causal directionality between LMX and OCB. As noted by [1], the majority of existing studies are cross sectional, which limits the ability to determine whether high quality LMX causes OCB, whether employees who exhibit high OCB are subsequently rewarded with higher quality LMX, or whether the relationship is bidirectional. Future research should employ time lagged designs, repeated measures, or natural experiments to establish temporal precedence and causal ordering. For example, researchers could track newly hired hotel employees over their first six months of employment, measuring LMX and OCB at multiple time points to observe how the relationship develops and whether changes in one construct precede changes in the other.

Second, cross cultural research is needed to compare how reciprocity mechanisms operate in hotels across collectivist versus individualist cultures. [5] found evidence that the effect of customer citizenship behavior on employee citizenship behavior was stronger in collectivist cultures, but systematic cross cultural comparisons remain rare. Future studies could simultaneously sample hotel employees from multiple countries, using the same measurement instruments, to test whether the mediating role of employee reciprocity varies across cultural contexts. Such research would have important implications for international hotel chains seeking to standardize management practices across diverse cultural settings.

Third, the impact of technology on social exchange dynamics and OCB in hotels requires urgent investigation. As hotels adopt artificial intelligence tools, service robots, contactless check in systems, and mobile guest service platforms, the nature of

interactions between employees, supervisors, and guests is fundamentally changing. Questions that remain unanswered include whether employees perceive AI driven performance monitoring as a form of organizational support or as surveillance, whether service robots can serve as exchange partners in a social exchange framework, and whether technology mediated guest employee interactions can generate the same reciprocity effects as face to face interactions. Future conceptual and empirical work should adapt SET to the era of smart hotels and human robot collaboration.

Fourth, research on the dark side of OCB in hotel settings is still in its early stages. As Madan, Srivastava, and Tripathi (2025) demonstrated, tolerance of workplace incivility reduces OCB and increases emotional exhaustion. However, less is known about when OCB itself becomes harmful. It is possible that hotel employees who consistently perform high levels of OCB may experience role overload, work family conflict, or burnout, particularly given the already high emotional labor demands of frontline service work. Future research should identify the thresholds beyond which OCB ceases to be beneficial and becomes detrimental to employee well being, as well as the individual and contextual factors that protect employees from such dark side effects. For hotel managers, understanding these thresholds would enable the design of OCB promotion strategies that enhance service quality without compromising employee health and retention.

In closing, this conceptual article has demonstrated that Social Exchange Theory, with its emphasis on reciprocity and multiple exchange relationships, provides a robust and nuanced framework for understanding Organizational Citizenship Behavior in the hotel industry. By integrating recent empirical evidence from diverse cultural and generational contexts, the article has advanced theoretical understanding while offering practical guidance for hotel managers. The proposed future research agenda invites scholars to build upon this synthesis, testing the conceptual model

empirically, extending it to new technological and cultural contexts, and continuing to refine our understanding of why and when hotel employees go the extra mile.

4. CONCLUSION

This conceptual article has synthesized the extant literature on Social Exchange Theory, Organizational Citizenship Behavior, Leader Member Exchange, and employee reciprocity within the specific context of the hotel industry. The central argument developed throughout this article is that extra role behaviors performed by hotel employees do not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, such behaviors represent reciprocal responses to the quality of social exchanges that employees experience with supervisors, with the organization, and even with guests. The article has traced the five phase evolution of OCB as a construct, demonstrating how the concept has matured from a simple observation of discretionary effort to a multidimensional construct with positive and negative manifestations. The review of SET as a theoretical foundation revealed that the norm of reciprocity serves as the

psychological engine that translates exchange quality into behavioral outcomes, operationalized through perceived organizational support, LMX, and psychological contract. The detailed analysis of LMX in hotels showed that high quality leader member exchange reduces employee envy, fosters thriving at work, and enhances both service oriented and change oriented OCB, with effects moderated by psychological empowerment, professional respect, generational identity, and gender. The examination of employee reciprocity extended the analysis beyond vertical relationships to include horizontal exchanges between employees and guests, demonstrating that customer empowering behaviors and customer citizenship behaviors trigger reciprocal employee citizenship behaviors. Taken together, the synthesis confirms that SET remains a powerful and relevant framework for understanding OCB in the hotel industry, provided that it is expanded to incorporate multiple exchange relationships and to recognize reciprocity as an active mediating mechanism rather than a passive assumption.

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