

Do leader expectations shape employee service performance? Enhancing self-expectations and internalization in employee role identity

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Abstract

This paper expands the Theory of Planned Behavior to explore the role of leaders' normative expectations in driving employees' service performance. Two quantitative studies in the context of retailing indicate that leaders' normative expectations for high-quality service are related to employee service performance, through employee self-expectations for quality service (Study 1; $N=75$), and service role identity (Study 2; $N=226$). Both studies apply Kelman's Theory of Social Influence by exploring how leaders influence employees' expectations and corresponding behaviors, through the three processes of social influence: compliance, identification, and internalization. Leaders' normative expectations for high-quality service enhances employee service performance not only by adjusting self-expectations to comply with an authority figure's expectations or by identification with the leader as a role model, but rather as a deep-rooted process where the leader's normative expectations are internalized into employee's role identity. The theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: employee service performance, expectations, subjective norms, role identity, social influence, leadership

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of the service sector in today's global economy is greater than ever. The service sector now generates more than 70% of the aggregate production and employment in OECD¹ economies and is continuing to grow (Wölfl, 2005). In Israel, according to OECD reports, service industries, including the public sector, account for 60% of the country's economic activity (Carmeli, 2008). Furthermore, in an ever-more dynamic environment, organizations are constantly looking for ways to retain their current clients and attract those of their competitors. Driving the performance of the service sector 'is important to enhance aggregate economic growth ... since the service sector has become the quantitatively most important sector in all OECD economies' (Wölfl, 2005).

A key subject of inquiry in the service quality literature has to do with the delivery of quality service (e.g., Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000; Schneider & White, 2004) in particular in consumer service organizations. Organizations engage in various forms of service quality improvement including training (Noe, 1986), and enablers of service climate (Schneider, Ehrhart, Mayer, Saltz, & Miles-Jolly, 2005). However, quality improvement can also be achieved through the direct influence of leaders

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¹ The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an international economic organization of 34 countries founded to stimulate economic progress and world trade.

(Hui, Lam, & Schaubroeck, 2001). Researchers have indicated that to acquire a better understanding of the antecedents of service quality, further attention should be paid to the leader–employee relationship (Schneider et al., 2005). By encouraging employees to provide high-quality service to customers, managers signal genuine commitment to service quality and related behaviors.

To expand this line of research, this paper explores the role of leaders' normative expectations (as perceived by employees) in driving employee service performance. This definition of leader expectations draws on the construct of normative expectations [the socially expected mode of conduct of organization members (Ajzen, 1991)]. Normative expectations are beliefs people have about the expectations of significant others in their lives as to whether or not to engage in a particular behavior. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, normative expectations (i.e., subjective norms) have influence individual's intention to perform (or not perform) a certain behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Jimmieson, Peach, & White, 2008; Ardhanari, Hadiwidjojo, Rahayu, & Rohman, 2013; Lee, Yang, & Chen, 2016). Previous research has concentrated on service leadership behaviors that set an example for quality service and communicate a commitment to a desirable service outcome (Schneider et al., 2005). When managers signal these expectations, employees are likely to try to meet their manager's expectations as regards the kind of service they provide to the organization's clients.

Thus, here it was posited perceived leaders' normative expectations should result in improved service performance when they cultivate employees' *self-expectations* to provide high-quality service to customers. However, leaders' normative expectations can take a deep-rooted form of social influence when they are embedded in employees' role identity. Thus, leaders' normative expectations are also likely to reinforce employees' service *role identity* (i.e., their perceptions that providing quality service defines who they are and what they stand for), and hence their high-quality service.

By investigating self-expectations and the role identity of employees and their connection to service performance, this study extends research that calls for work examining the effects of employee attributes in service settings. This study focuses on service quality, not on actual sales, based on the reasoning that high-quality service is likely to affect potential customers' decisions concerning present and future sales. This article thus aims to contribute to managerial expectations and service research in several ways. First, researchers have underscored the need to examine how leaders can foster service quality (Schneider et al., 2005). Integrating leadership theory with service quality research is an area that deserves further research attention (Liao & Chuang, 2007). This article is an attempt to integrate both external and internal expectations in the context of service organizations. Specifically, it deals with expectations communicated by significant others, in this case leaders, in facilitating employee self-expectations and service role identity to build attitudes and behaviors that are conducive to improved service performance in the workplace.

The following sections present the theoretical development of the research models and their examination on service employees in one of the branches of a large supermarket chain in Israel (Study 1), and in three units in a large communication company where the employees provide technical support to customers (Study 2).

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Employee service performance at work

Increasingly intense competitive pressures are pushing organizations to improve their service quality level. Service quality is important because it is associated with cost, financial performance, and customer retention. Increasing the service quality enhances customer satisfaction, which ultimately retains valued clientele. This effect of service quality has been found for retail banking (Krishnamurthy, SivaKumar, & Sellamuthu, 2010; Mittal & Gera, 2012), the restaurant industry

(Qin & Prybutok, 2008; Tam, 2004), lodging industry (Olorunniwo, Hsu, & Udo, 2006), and in telecommunications companies (Song, Lee, & Lee, 2013).

The service literature has emphasized the importance of studying how organizations can promote the delivery of service quality (e.g., Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000; Schneider & White, 2004). This interest has produced research from several perspectives. Grönroos (1990) differentiated between technical and functional service quality: technical service quality is concerned with the result or outcome that the customer actually receives from the service (*'what'*), whereas functional service quality refers to the manner in which the service is delivered (*'how'*).

Another approach to assess service quality relates to the comparison of customers' expectations (based on customers' requirements, previous experience, and public reputation) and their perceptions of the service experience (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1994). The higher the service quality, the more new and existing customers can be attracted and retained, and even lured away from competitors (Li, Shue, & Lee, 2006).

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1994) evaluated service quality by identifying the disparity between expectations and perceptions on five dimensions of service: tangibility (the physical surroundings, equipment and appearance of employees), reliability (accurate and dependable service), responsiveness (providing fast and efficient service performance), assurance (providing trust and confidence, such as knowledge and politeness on the part of the employees), and empathy (personal service, individualized attention). Through interactions between service providers and customers, 'moments of truth'² emerge and play a key role in shaping customer purchasing decisions (Schneider & White, 2004).

Research evidence has consistently demonstrated the importance of employee–customer interactions on customers' perceptions of service quality. Studies suggest that the more satisfied employees are the higher the quality of service they provide to customers (Schneider & Bowen, 1985; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996). Thus, increasing service quality is a key managerial challenge, because it involves managing and shaping employee work behaviors. Organizations realize the importance of creating an enabling service context in which employees can provide quality services to customers (Schneider et al., 2005). As Schneider et al. noted:

'Managers ... must behave in ways that make it clear to followers that service quality is important. They must model service for employees, they must set goals for customer satisfaction, and they must plan for making service happen....' (2005: 1029)

Leader normative expectations for quality service

Normative expectations refer to socially expected modes of conduct of organization members (Ajzen, 1991). Ajzen and Fishbein's well-established Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977) and its derivative, the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Jimmieson, Peach, & White, 2008; Ardhanari et al., 2013; Lee, Yang, & Chen, 2016) suggest that the beliefs people have about the expectations of significant others in their lives to engage or not in a particular behavior have a strong influence on behavioral intentions. Social norms are an influential mechanism for shaping behaviors in a variety of domains such as health (Albarracín, Johnson, Fishbein, & Muellerleile, 2001; Louis, Davies, Smith, & Terry, 2007), local government (Jimmieson, Peach, & White, 2008), consuming (Ardhanari et al., 2013), and customer service (Lam & Schaubroeck, 2000). Further, research has shown that managers' and other referents' expectations (coworkers, customers, family) are important in reinforcing one's self-expectations and involvement in corresponding behaviors (Farmer, Tierney, & Kung-McIntyre, 2003; Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2007; Ardhanari et al., 2013). Thus, normative expectations are likely to account for variations in employee work performance.

² Interactions between a customer and a firm (through a product, sales force, or visit) that give the customer an opportunity to make a judgment about the quality of the firm's service.

Theory and research evidence suggest that leaders' expectations play a role in shaping followers' expectations and behaviors (Eden, 1990; Eden et al., 2000; Edwards, 2001). One widely studied form of expectation is the 'Pygmalion Effect,' which refers to the likelihood that positive expectations on the part of significant others (e.g., leaders, coworkers, customers, family) will shape people's behavior to coincide with these expectations.

Although both the Pygmalion Effect and normative expectations refer to the leader's expectations and their positive impact on employees' outcomes, these concepts are not identical. Whereas the Pygmalion Effect refers to the leader's expectations concerning a particular employee (which can be distinct from other employees), a leader's normative expectations cover general expectations for all employees in the same job.

This study focuses on employee perceptions of leader normative expectations regarding employees' service quality. Leaders communicate their expectations to provide high-quality service through a variety of practices such as periodic performance appraisals, rewards, training, supportive feedback, setting challenging goals, etc.

Leader normative expectations and employee self-expectations for quality service

Employees notice their managers' expectations and behaviors, and adjust their self-expectations and behaviors accordingly (Tyler & Lind, 1992). Thus, manager expectations and behaviors shape followers' perceptions and behaviors because they set an example of how to behave. Leader normative expectations direct employees' attention and efforts to achieve what is important for the organization to survive and thrive in its market. These expectations enable employees to channel personal energies and resources to focus on their work tasks. This process increases employee self-expectations for performing their tasks as expected.

This effect of leader expectations on employee self-expectations is consistent with abundant research on ways in which transformational leaders transform or change followers' values, beliefs, and attitudes. Transformational leaders communicate their expectations to followers regarding excellence, quality, and/or high performance. The effectiveness of high performance expectations has been explained through several theoretical lenses (Bommer, Rich, & Rubin, 2005). First, a leader who communicates specific and challenging standards is assumed to be more competent, and thus more deserving of employee effort than other leaders who do not know what they are looking for. Second, when a leader conveys high performance expectations to a subordinate, there is an implicit communication of the leader's confidence in the employee's ability to meet this standard (Bommer, Rich, & Rubin, 2005). The leader sends a message implying 'I know you can do this well,' which nurtures subordinates' belief that they can accomplish certain goals, and shapes perceptions of self-worth. This type of message develops higher self-expectations as regards the ability to perform better (Eden, 1990; White & Locke, 2000).

The leader's confidence in the follower's abilities is also translated into increased employee self-efficacy. Self-expectations and self-efficacy differ conceptually, but both have an important place in social and behavioral research (Ajzen, 1991). Self-expectations do not mean that the individual has the confidence or competence to successfully complete tasks and achieve goals. For instance, research has shown that self-expectations for creativity interact with creative self-efficacy in predicting individual involvement in creative work (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2007). In addition, the literature indicates that self-efficacy is embedded within the process of a leader's influence on employee performance. Research on management in service settings shows that managers who commit to a high level of service performance display empowering behaviors that support employees in their efforts to shape customer perceptions of service quality (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996). Thus,

Hypothesis 1: Leader normative expectations (as perceived by employees) are positively related to employee self-expectations to provide high-quality service.

Employee self-expectations and employee service performance

Employees with higher self-expectations are often more highly motivated to devote an effort to their performance. White and Locke (2000) showed the importance of *expectancy theories of motivation* (Vroom, 1964; Hackman & Porter, 1968) in accounting for employees' motivation and performance. *Expectancy theories* suggest, in part, that individuals will make greater efforts to perform a task if they have high expectations that their efforts will pay off in terms of increased performance. Based on the expectancy theory, Yen (2015) found that salespersons worked harder to excel in their sales performance when they expected to achieve the outcome they valued. This is indicative of the positive links between expectations, effort, and performance (White & Locke, 2000).

People's behaviors tend to be consistent with their expectations, and these behaviors in turn influence outcomes. People's self-expectations thus drive a self-fulfilling prophecy (McNatt & Judge, 2004). Self-produced expectations that result in improved performance are known as the 'Galatea effect' (Eden, 1986). The Galatea effect occurs when subordinates' raised expectations of themselves are realized in their higher performance. Raised self-expectations can come from different sources, such as verbal persuasion (when individuals are told that they have high potential), and trait self-expectation differences (when people have expectations about what they can accomplish in terms of their abilities and competencies (Eden, 1990). Thus,

Hypothesis 2: Employee self-expectations for service quality are positively related to employee service performance.

The mediating role of employee self-expectation in the relationship between leader normative expectations and service quality

Higher subordinate expectations may mediate the relationship between higher leader expectations and improved subordinate performance. When leaders expect their subordinates to perform at a higher level, the latter are likely to develop higher self-expectations. Much of the effect of expectation raising on performance operates through subordinates' own self-expectations, suggesting that the latter are a strong mediating variable in the process (Eden, 1990, 1986). Furthermore, once high performance has been attained, the model becomes cyclical in two senses. When a subordinate performs well, high self-expectations are reinforced and the motivation and high performance are elicited via the Galatea effect (Eden, 1986). Subordinate's high performance confirms the leader's expectations that the subordinate had high performance capabilities. The leader then maintains (or increases) his or her high expectations of the subordinate. For example, Carmeli and Schaubroeck (2007) found that self-expectations as regards creativity mediate the relationship between leader perceived expectations and creative involvement at work. Tierney and Farmer (2004) also found that leaders' higher expectations for employee creativity indirectly resulted in higher creative performance of their employees. Thus it was posited here that leaders' normative expectations as regards service quality should be associated with employees' self-expectations for service quality, and should in turn, result in enhanced service performance. Managers attempt to concretize their expectations by signaling, cultivating and reinforcing employees' expectations of themselves to provide high-quality service to customers. Furthermore, when employees have a clear vision of service quality and are motivated to engage in the delivery of this service, they report higher service performance. This may imply that clarifying managerial expectations reduces feelings of stress and uncertainty in employees, and thus releases personal energy and resources for performance at work. Thus,

Hypothesis 3: Employees' self-expectations for service quality mediate the relationship between leaders' normative expectations and employees' service performance.

STUDY 1: METHOD

Respondents and data collection

The respondents in the current study were sampled from a branch of one of the largest supermarket chains in Israel. This supermarket chain operates more than 150 stores and has reported annual revenues of more than US\$ 1 billion. The supermarket branch is located in the Tel Aviv-Jaffa metropolitan area and employs about 175 service employees.

Contacts were made with store's managing director to explain the study in general terms to obtain his support and that of the executive team. The goal was framed as a study of the service performance of employees engaged in serving and helping customers directly. The team was first to identify those employees who had close (daily) interactions with customers. In total, 96 employees working as butchers, pastry salespeople, cashiers, and customer service agents composed the target research sample.

Data were collected from employees and their direct managers/leaders through structured surveys that were administered by two research assistants during normal working hours. Data on leaders' expectations regarding service quality and employee self-expectations were collected through a survey administered to employees. Data about employee service performance were collected from their leader (a total of five leaders). Participation was voluntary for all employees and their managers, and response confidentiality was guaranteed. In total, 72 questionnaires were received from the employees, which represented a response rate of 75%. Women comprised 58.3% of the sample. This is representative of the population of women employed in this supermarket branch. The average respondent age was 33.25 years (SD 17.81), and the mean tenure in the organization was 5.16 years (SD 3.50). In total, 78% of the employees were married or living with a partner. About 22% of the respondents had a BA degree. This is a representative sample that reflects the store's total population.

Measures

The survey questions can be found in Appendix 1.

Employee quality service performance

Employees' service performance was assessed by the employees' leaders. Drawing on the service quality literature (e.g., Stevens, Knutson, & Patton, 1995; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Malhotra, 2005), a 20-item measure of employee service performance was constructed. The leaders were asked to indicate the extent to which their employees provided quality service to store customers. These included aspects of reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy, and caring. Responses were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = 'not at all' to 7 = 'to a large extent.' Sample items are 'completely satisfies every customer's needs' and 'makes customers feel personally comfortable.' The Cronbach's α for this scale was 0.97.

Leaders' normative expectations regarding service quality

Based on Callero's (1985) subjective social norm scale, Farmer, Tierney, and Kung-McIntyre (2003) constructed a six-item measure of perceived coworker expectations for creativity. As in Carmeli and Schaubroeck's (2007) study, four items from Farmer, Tierney, and Kung-McIntyre (2003) scale were adapted to assess leaders' normative expectations for service quality. The extent to which leaders' normative expectations influence employees is contingent on the employee's interpretation of these expectations (Tierney & Farmer, 2004). Thus, this measure was evaluated by employees, because what was important was how each employee perceived his/her normative expectations. Responses were made on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = 'not at all' to 5 = 'to a large extent.' Sample items are 'My supervisor expects me to provide our customers with quality service' and 'My supervisor would

probably be disappointed in me if I was not providing quality customer service.' The Cronbach's α for this scale was 0.87.

Employee self-expectations for service quality

Based on Carmeli and Schaubroeck's (2007) study, a 3-item scale was used to assess employees' own expectations for service quality (i.e., *self-expectations for service quality*). The items are 'Providing quality customer service at work is very important to me,' 'I expect myself to provide quality customer service at work,' and 'I would probably be disappointed with myself if I was not providing quality customer service at work.' Responses were made on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = 'strongly disagree' to 5 = 'strongly agree.' The Cronbach's α for this scale was 0.83.

Control variables

Employee gender, age, and job tenure in the organization were controlled for because they may account for variation in service performance.

STUDY 1: RESULTS

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the research variables. The bivariate correlations indicated that employee self-expectation for service quality was significantly correlated with employee service performance ($r=0.54$, $p<.01$). Leader normative expectation was positively related to both employee self-expectation for service quality and employee service performance ($r=0.67$, $p<.01$; $r=0.57$, $p<.01$, respectively).

To test the research hypotheses, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. Each regression equation entered the control variables in the first step. The results of model 2 in Table 2 support Hypothesis 1, which posited a positive relationship between leaders' normative expectations for service quality and employees' self-expectations for service quality ($\beta=0.67$, $p<.01$).

The next tests explored whether employee self-expectations were positively related to employee service performance (Hypothesis 2), and whether employee self-expectations for service quality mediated the relationship between the leader's normative expectations for service quality and employee service performance (Hypothesis 3).

According to Kenny, Kashy, and Bolger (1998), a variable (M) mediates the relationship between an antecedent variable (X) and an outcome variable (Y) if (a) X is significantly related to Y ; (b) X is significantly related to M ; (c) after X is controlled for, M remains significantly related to Y ; and (d) after M is controlled for, the X - Y relationship is 0. Kenny, Kashy, and Bolger described these steps as 'the essential steps in establishing mediation' (1998: 260).

TABLE 1. STUDY 1, MEANS, SD, AND CORRELATIONS

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender (1 = female)	–	–	1.00					
2. Age	39.96	16.19	0.14	1.00				
3. Tenure in the organization	15.59	29.88	–0.15	0.28*	1.00			
4. Leaders' normative expectations for service quality	4.35	0.69	–0.11	0.38**	0.14	1.00		
5. Employees' self-expectations for service quality	4.51	0.59	–0.10	0.25*	0.06	0.67**	1.00	
6. Employees' service performance	4.44	0.65	–0.13	0.30**	0.22	0.57**	0.54**	1.00

Notes: $N=72$, two-tailed test.

* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$.

TABLE 2. STUDY 1, HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION RESULTS FOR THE PREDICTION OF EMPLOYEE SELF-EXPECTATIONS AND EMPLOYEE SERVICE PERFORMANCE

	Model 1 β	Model 2 β	Model 3 β	Model 4 β
	Employee service performance	Employee self-expectations for service quality	Employee service performance	Employee service performance
Constant ^a	2.31**	2.07***	3.48**	3.03**
Gender (1 = female)	-0.07 (-0.69)	-0.03 (-0.37)	-0.08 (-0.82)	-0.06 (-0.60)
Age	0.08 (0.70)	0.01 (0.08)	0.15 (1.38)	0.08 (0.70)
Tenure in the organization	0.11 (1.03)	-0.04 (-0.44)	0.13 (1.23)	0.12 (1.18)
R ²	0.129	0.82	0.129	0.129
Adjusted R ²	0.091	0.041	0.091	0.091
F for R ²	3.36**	2.01	3.36**	3.36**
SE of the estimate	0.621	0.579	0.621	0.621
Employee self-expectations for service quality (Mediator)			0.48 (4.67**)	0.29 (2.23**)
ΔR^2			0.214	0.214
F for ΔR^2			21.84***	21.84***
R ²			0.343	0.343
Adjusted R ²			0.304	0.304
SE of the estimate			0.543	0.543
Leader normative expectations for service quality ^b	0.51 (4.73**)	0.67 (6.81**)		0.32 (2.32**)
ΔR^2	0.218	0.376		0.05
F for ΔR^2	22.39**	46.41**		5.38*
R ²	0.347	0.457		0.393
Adjusted R ²	0.308	0.425		0.347
SE of the estimate	0.541	0.448		0.526

Notes:

^aUnstandardized coefficients.

^bIndependent variable.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

The results of both model 3 and model 4 in Table 2 did not lend support to the hypothesized mediating role of employee self-expectations for quality service in the relationship between leaders' normative expectations for service quality and employee service performance. Leaders' normative expectations for service quality were positively associated with employee service performance ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < .01$) (model 1, Table 2), and employee self-expectations for service quality were positively related to employee service performance ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < .01$) (model 3, Table 2). However, when the mediator (employee self-expectations for service quality) was specified, the effect of leaders' normative expectations for service quality on employee service performance, though decreased in magnitude, remained statistically significant ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < .01$ vs. $\beta = 0.32$, $p < .01$); namely, the results indicated a partial mediation. Results of a Sobel test also did not support mediation ($p > .10$). There was only evidence for a partial mediation model; hence Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

STUDY 1: DISCUSSION

The findings of Study 1 indicated a positive relationship between leaders' normative expectations for service quality and employees' self-expectations for service quality (Hypothesis 1) and between

employee self-expectations and service performance (Hypothesis 2). There was also found a positive direct relationship between leaders' normative expectations for service quality and employee service performance, and a partial mediation of employee self-expectations on leaders' expectations and employee performance (Hypothesis 3).

The social influence of leaders' normative expectations reflects the impact of conforming to expectations from significant others, which are based largely on dependent relationships; that is, the need to obtain a favorable reaction from others (a specific reward or approval, or to avoid blame and punishment) (Jimmieson, Peach, & White, 2008). This mode of social influence is defined as *compliance* in Kelman's (1974, 2006) classification.

Thus, the results of Study 1 raise the question of whether the effect of a leader's normative expectations on employee self-expectations reflects pressures to comply with the authority figure, or as posited, involves deeper roots of social influence. One route of social influence is through *identification*, where an employee identifies with the leader as a role model, and may seek to be like him or her (Kelman, 1974, 2006). However, the findings here point to another, more basic and profound route of social influence – *internalization* (Kelman, 1974, 2006). This occurs when the induced behavior is congruent with the employee's value system or self-concept and thus is intrinsically rewarding. Following Kelman's (1974, 2006) typology, Study 2 further examined whether a leader's normative expectations for high-quality service become internalized in an employee's role identity,³ and whether this in turn would enhance employee service performance. This line of research provided the basis for Study 2.

STUDY 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The purpose of Study 2 was to expand Study 1 by testing the importance of leader normative expectations on employee service role identity, and the role of this identity in enhancing employee service performance. Service role identity was defined as employees' self-concept of what service means to them as service providers. Despite the abundant work on role identity (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008), research on service role identity has been slow to accumulate.

The leader's normative expectations and service role identity

A role identity refers to a self-view, or the meanings a person attributes to a specific role (Burke, 1991). When individuals attribute meaning and significance to their roles, this becomes part of what they believe in, and thus maintains and reinforces their self-concept. A role identity emerges from the role's shared meaning of a reference group (i.e., expectations, behaviors, perspective), and from a schema that represents the self in that role (Collier & Callero, 2005). Thus, a role identity reflects an internalized set of role expectations of others (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Farmer, Tierney, & Kung-McIntyre, 2003). These expectations reflect behavioral expectations and, more importantly, expectations about what others expect one to be (Farmer, Tierney, & Kung-McIntyre, 2003). Research has provided ample support for the effect of perceived social expectations of significant others on role identity (e.g., Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Piliavin, Grube, & Callero, 2002; Farmer, Tierney, & Kung-McIntyre, 2003). As such, normative expectations of important 'social others' are a major source of individual's role identity through reflexivity, responses of others to one's own actions, or seeing oneself through such expectations.

³ It is important to note that role identity differs from the social influence of *identification*. A role identity is a self-view, or a meaning attributed to oneself in relation to a specific role, whereas identification refers to a state in which the individual (employee) is influenced by another person (supervisor), whom s/he identifies with as a role model.

The perceived rewards for shaping self-concept are based upon one's perceptions of others' expectations, especially those who are higher in status (Gore & Cross, 2014). Significant authority (i.e., the leaders) in the workplace is a key to shaping and cultivating self-concept. This is because employees attend to the signals that their leader sends them. They are sensitive to the ways their leader judges how they fulfill their role, reflect on it, and try to find meaning from signals they receive such that they maintain their self-concept and its congruence with what they believe is expected from them at work. They seek to create congruence between what is expected from them and the meaning they ascribe to carrying out their assigned role such that their self-conception is maintained and strengthened. Research has shown that the more valued the relationships with others, the more important the role identity, and the more likely it is that the person will strive to affirm that identity (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). Thus, employees whose leader has high expectations for service quality are likely to have a high service role identity. This led to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Leaders' normative expectations for high-quality service are positively related to employees' service role identity.

Service role identity and employee service performance

Role performance involves the adoption of a clear role identity by the service provider. However, only limited efforts have been directed toward examining whether and why one's self-concept of role identity (Burke, 1991; Stryker & Burke, 2000) can enhance work outcomes (Farmer, Tierney, & Kung-McIntyre, 2003). Further, little is known about the ways in which an individual's identity accounts for variation in performance in a service context.

Identities motivate behaviors (Rise, Sheeran, & Hukkelberg, 2010). Role identity establishes an intrinsic motivation to act, and thus enables a wide range of individual and collective acts (Collier & Callero, 2005). For example, variance in role identity salience is expected to be reflected in variance in the behavior associated with the role identity (Callero, 1985). When role identity is realized and affirmed it is likely to relate to behaviors that reinforce this conception. Self-identity drives intention, which in turn promotes behavior beyond the traditional components of the Theory of Planned Behavior, such as subjective norms (Rise, Sheeran, & Hukkelberg, 2010). Employees' outcomes were found to be higher when they had a stronger role identity related to their jobs. For example, employee creative role identity was positively related to employee creativity (Farmer, Tierney, & Kung-McIntyre, 2003; Song, Yu, Zhang, & Jiang, 2015). As such, if quality service to customers is meaningful to employees, they will make a substantial effort to deliver it. This is because failing to do so may undermine their self-concept. This role congruence is vital for employees to feel satisfied with what they do and thereby is likely to engender high-quality service (Schneider, 1980). Thus,

Hypothesis 5: Service role identity is positively related to employee service performance.

The mediating role of service role identity in the relationships between leader normative expectations and service quality

Perceived expectations of others have been found to be a significant predictor of role identity, whereas role identity appears to be crucial in predicting intentions to behave in a certain way over a long period of time (Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Piliavin, Grube, & Callero, 2002). In a longitudinal study, Tierney and Farmer (2011) found that employee role identity and perceived relevant expectation from leaders were positively associated with an enhanced sense of employee capacity for related performance.

Drawing on these theories and research, it is likely that a leader's normative expectations for quality service will impact employees' service performance, through the development of the employee's service role identity. Thus,

Hypothesis 6: Service role identity mediates the relationship between leaders' normative expectations for quality service and employees' service performance.

STUDY 2: METHOD

Respondents and data collection

In total, 250 employees from three units in a large communication company were invited to participate in the study. All employees were service providers and engaged in providing technical support to customers. The units do business in the appliance, electronics, and personal computer industries. As in Study 1, the participants were asked to complete a structured survey. However, in this study respondents were asked to complete electronic surveys sent to them during work time. The average time for completing the questionnaire was 15 min.

Benefitting from strong co-operation on the part of employees who worked in the company and the electronic format of the survey, 226 completed questionnaires were received, for a response rate of 90.04%. The respondents' average age was 32.77 years (SD 7.61), and their average job tenure was 7.39 years (SD 5.60). In total, 24% of the respondents were female; 29% of the participants had a high school or equivalent degree, 46.9% had a BA degree, and the remainder of the participants had an MA degree.

Measures

Employee service performance

As was the case in Study 1, scales found in the service quality literature (e.g., Stevens, Knutson, & Patton, 1995; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Malhotra, 2005) were used to assess employee service performance. Nine items were used to assess employee service performance with a focus on the research context. Employees were asked to indicate the extent to which their manager thinks that they exhibit high or low service performance. Johnson (1996) found a positive correlation between employee and customer perceptions of service quality, consistent with previous studies (e.g., Schneider & Bowen, 1985). Sample items are: 'my manager thinks that I provide effective responses to customers' requests,' and 'my manager thinks that I provide high-quality service to the customers.' Responses were made on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = 'not at all' to 5 = 'to a large extent.' The Cronbach's α for this scale was 0.84.

Leaders' normative expectations regarding service quality

As in Study 1, following Carmeli and Schaubroeck's (2007) study, four items from Farmer, Tierney, and Kung-McIntyre (2003) scale were used to assess leaders' normative expectations for service quality (as construed by employees). Responses were made on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = 'not at all' to 5 = 'to a large extent.' Sample items are 'My supervisor expects me to provide our customers with quality service' and 'My supervisor would probably be disappointed in me if I was not providing quality customer service.' The Cronbach's α for this scale was 0.70.

Service role identity

Three items were adapted from Farmer, Tierney, and Kung-McIntyre (2003) scale to assess the extent to which an employee views the service role as his/her identity. Responses were made on a 5-point

Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = ‘not at all’ to 5 = ‘to a large extent.’ Sample items are ‘I often think about being a service provider’ and ‘To be a quality service provider is an important part of my identity.’ The Cronbach’s α for this scale was 0.80.

Control variables

Employee gender, age, and job tenure in the organization were controlled for. In addition, potential differences between the three organization’s units were controlled for by creating dummy variables.

STUDY 2: RESULTS

Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the research variables. The bivariate correlations indicate that service role identity was positively related to employee service performance ($r=0.37, p<.01$). The leader’s normative expectation was positively related to both service role identity and employee service performance ($r=0.35, p<.01$; $r=0.55, p<.01$, respectively).

To test the research hypotheses, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. Each regression equation entered the control variables in the first step. The results of model 2 in Table 4 support Hypothesis 4, which posited a positive relationship between leaders’ normative expectations for service quality and service role identity ($\beta = 0.33, p < .01$).

As in Study 1, guidelines by Kenny, Kashy, and Bolger (1998) for testing a mediation relationship were adhered to. With regard to the mediating role of service role identity in the relationship between leaders’ normative expectations for service quality and employee service performance, the results of both model 3 and model 4 in Table 4 did not support a full mediation relationship, but rather indicated a partial mediation model. Leaders’ normative expectations for service quality were positively associated with employee service performance ($\beta = 0.52, p < .01$) (model 1, Table 4), and service role identity was positively related to employee service performance ($\beta = 0.35, p < .01$) (model 3, Table 4), in support of Hypothesis 5. However, when the mediator (service role identity) was specified, the effect of leaders’ normative expectations for service quality on employee service performance, though decreased in magnitude, remained statistically significant ($\beta = 0.52, p < .01$ vs. $\beta = 0.46, p < .01$).

TABLE 3. STUDY 2, MEANS, SD, AND CORRELATIONS

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender (1 = female)	–	–	1.00							
2. Age	32.77	7.61	–0.21**	1.00						
3. Tenure in the organization	7.39	5.90	–0.20**	0.73**	1.00					
4. Unit no. 1 (PC industry)	0.31	0.47	0.18**	–0.44**	–0.46**	1.00				
5. Unit no. 2 (appliance industry)	0.42	0.49	–0.03	0.49**	0.54**	–0.57**	1.00			
6. Leaders’ normative expectations for service quality	4.47	0.49	–0.13	0.08	0.08	–0.17**	0.14*	1.00		
7. Service role identity	4.35	0.55	0.01	0.06	0.12	–0.15*	0.15*	0.35**	1.00	
8. Employee service performance	4.34	0.50	–0.13	0.06	0.12	–0.14*	0.24**	0.55**	0.37**	1.00

Notes:

$N=226$, two-tailed test.

* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$.

TABLE 4. STUDY 2, HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION RESULTS FOR THE PREDICTION OF SERVICE ROLE IDENTITY AND EMPLOYEE SERVICE PERFORMANCE

	Model 1 β	Model 2 β	Model 3 β	Model 4 β
	Employee service performance	Service role identity	Employee service performance	Employee service performance
Constant ^a	6.63**	7.18***	9.98**	4.65**
Gender (1 = female)	-0.08 (-1.40)	0.07 (1.12)	-0.15 (-1.42)	-0.09 (-1.67)
Age	-0.12 (-1.42)	-0.09 (-0.94)	-0.09 (-1.02)	-0.10 (-1.24)
Tenure in the organization	0.05 (0.61)	0.12 (1.22)	-0.00 (-0.05)	0.03 (0.35)
Unit no. 1	0.07 (1.03)	-0.06 (-0.73)	0.04 (0.57)	0.08 (1.22)
Unit no. 2	0.23 (3.17**)	0.05 (0.58)	0.26 (3.17**)	0.22 (3.11**)
R ²	0.082	0.034	0.082	0.082
Adjusted R ²	0.061	0.012	0.061	0.061
F for R ²	3.91**	1.56	3.91**	3.91**
SE of the estimate	0.487	0.546	0.487	0.487
Service role identity (mediator)			0.35 (5.60**)	0.19 (3.33**)
ΔR^2			0.115	0.115
F for ΔR^2			31.36**	31.36**
R ²			0.197	0.197
Adjusted R ²			0.175	0.175
SE of the Estimate			0.457	0.457
Leaders' normative expectations for service quality ^b	0.52 (9.39**)	0.33 (5.23**)		0.46 (7.94**)
ΔR^2	0.264	0.107		0.18
F for ΔR^2	88.15**	27.37**		63.09*
R ²	0.345	0.142		0.377
Adjusted R ²	0.327	0.118		0.357
SE of the estimate	0.412	0.516		0.403

Notes:

^aUnstandardized coefficients.^bIndependent variable.* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

The results of a Sobel test did not support mediation either ($p > .10$). Thus, a full mediation model was not found and Hypothesis 6 was not supported.

STUDY 2: DISCUSSION

The finding of Study 2 indicated a positive relationship between a leader's normative expectations for service quality and employees' service role identity (Hypothesis 4), as well as between employee service role identity and service performance (Hypothesis 5). There was also a positive direct relationship between leaders' normative expectations for service quality and employee service performance, and a partial mediation of employee service role identity on leaders' expectations and employee performance (Hypothesis 6).

These findings extend the results in Study 1 by providing evidence for the notion that a social influence (Kelman, 1974, 2006) can emerge not only from shaping and inducing self-expectations but also from cultivating and reinforcing one's role identity. The Study 2 findings point to the importance of the leader's normative expectations of service quality in enhancing service performance directly and indirectly, through service role identity in the context studied here.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Customers' positive experiences with a service depend to a large extent on the service quality of frontline workers. Customer satisfaction ultimately translates into customer retention and thus to organizational financial performance. The main goal of the current inquiry was to explore the ways in which leaders can induce employees' engagement in service efforts and shape their behaviors toward customers. The findings in Study 1 indicated that leader normative expectations were related directly and indirectly to employee service performance, through employee self-expectations, and in Study 2, through individual role identity.

Theoretical implications

The findings make several important theoretical contributions. By showing how employees' service quality is associated with their leaders' normative expectations for service quality, the findings lend further support to the literature [e.g., Theory of Planned Behavior and Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Albarracín et al., 2001; Ardhani et al., 2013)] on the influence of people's beliefs about the expectations of significant others in their lives regarding their behavioral intentions.

The current research is part of a growing attempt to apply features of the expectation model to broader work contexts. Scholars acknowledge that to date, very few studies have applied or examined the expectation process in the business sector, and none have considered the relevance of leaders' normative expectations on employee service performance (McNatt, 2000; Tierney & Farmer, 2004). This is of importance, since research in retail settings has produced mixed findings about the role of leader expectations on employee performance. For example, Chowdhury (2007) found that leaders' expectations for greater performance affected salespersons' self-expectations, which in turn influenced their performance, whereas Sutton and Woodman (1989) found no effects of leadership expectations on subordinates' sales performance. In addition, only a handful of studies have examined the role of service leadership in fostering service quality (e.g., Schneider et al., 2005) and they mainly employed a more general predictor construct of work climate, mostly at the level of the business unit rather than the individual level (Borucki & Burke, 1999). The current studies respond to Schneider et al. (2005) call to devote more efforts to the study of leader effects on service outcomes. They go beyond Pygmalion-related effects to expose the internalization of leader expectations into employee role identity.

Consistent with the notion that role identity is crucial to self-concept building (Stryker & Burke, 2000), this study sheds further light on the vital role of managers in cultivating and reinforcing the perceptions of employees about their work role. Employees develop their self-conception of what service means to them by finding meaning in the signals (e.g., assessments) that their leaders send them.

However, the main theoretical contribution of this study lies in integrating the two studies through the lens of Kelman's Social Influence Theory (1974, 2006). This theory suggests that an individual's attitudes, beliefs and behaviors are shaped by referent others through three processes: compliance, identification, and internalization. The findings here show how leaders signal their expectations to employees through all three processes of social influence: employees' service performance is influenced by the leader's normative expectations (as perceived by employee), not only as a result of *compliance* with an authority figure or *identification* with the leader as a role model, but rather as a deep-rooted process of *internalization* of these expectations into the employee's role identity. This process is not about subordinates looking up to their supervisors, but rather realizing expectations as congruent with their values and thus internalizing them into their role identity as service employees.

Limitations and future research directions

This study has several limitations which could be addressed in future research. Both studies (especially the first) were based on a small sample in a homogeneous context (a large supermarket chain and a communication company) in Israel. Although both are interesting contexts for service settings and are different from each other, it still raises concerns about sample bias. Workers in different business contexts may encounter different types of customers, suggesting that some macroeconomic or cultural bias could have influenced the results. Hence, generalizations of the findings to other industries should be made with caution. For better generalization of results, future studies should attempt to seek additional empirical evidence from larger and randomized samples from different cultures and industries.

Furthermore, because of the correlational nature of this study and the use of same-method (survey) data, no causal relationship between the research model variables can be derived. Nevertheless, the results of this study are consistent with previous research that has explored the potential effects of expectation. In addition, in Study 1 different sources were used to obtain the data: leaders' expectations and employees' self-expectations were obtained from employees and employees' service performance were obtained from managers. In Study 2 there was an attempt to mitigate the effects of same-source bias by evaluating construed external service performance. Moreover, the results are consistent across the two studies in the two different service settings. Clearly, longitudinal experimental studies are needed even though this would not completely resolve the difficulty of substantiating causality.

Further, when attempting to explain variance in employee outcomes, it is important to acknowledge unobserved variables. Although a coherent theory to explain employee service performance was provided, there is a need to investigate additional factors that may enhance employees' service quality such as employee personality, commitment and satisfaction, among others.

Some important theoretical issues emerge and should be further explored in future endeavors. Little is known about the factors that shape leaders' expectations concerning their employees. What is the role of organizational leaders' values in guiding their expectations, and their respective behaviors? If leaders' expectations are related to followers' self-expectations and ultimately their outcomes, what are the effects of organizational constituencies such as analysts, stockholders, customers, and suppliers on leaders' expectations concerning their employees and themselves? Future research could also explore how expectations of organizational leaders are shaped (e.g., do common beliefs held by competitors in the industry influence a manager's expectations). The results here indicated a positive relationship between leaders' normative expectations and employees' self-expectations regarding service quality, but tell us nothing about how conflicting expectations are resolved.

Given the interdependent nature of today's work structure, a number of questions can be raised concerning the role of manager expectations in creating an organizational context in which people are expected to display certain behaviors. For example, under which conditions would high, medium, or low expectations for employees be the most beneficial? Do expectations always lead to improved work outcomes? Under which conditions does 'too much of a good thing' (i.e., expectations) become destructive? These questions certainly merit future research. Finally, future studies could investigate the links between service role identity and self-expectations for quality service and their potentially reinforcing effects and mediating role in the relationship between leaders' expectations for quality service and employees' service performance.

Practical implications

The findings suggest several implications for managers who are engaged in improving the service performance of their employees. First, managers need to be aware of their expectations and how these

expectations are conveyed to their employees. Employees look up to their managers, interpret the messages they send as well as their behaviors, and come to conclusions. To avoid misinterpretation, managers need to convey specific expectations that are reinforced with adequate behaviors such that these expectations can be transformed into meaningful outcomes. Managers use a wide variety of persuasive tactics and communicative strategies to convey expectations to their employees and other organizational constituencies. The important thing is to convey consistency so that expectations and corresponding behaviors reinforce one another in a manner that helps employees to develop higher expectations of themselves and ultimately lead to better work outcomes. This process is complex and suggests the need for managers to develop expectations, set goals, display certain behaviors and make sure they are embedded in the organizational system as a whole.

Overall, the findings suggest a positive link between employee self-expectations regarding service quality and service role identity and service performance. However, managers should realize that certain conditions may strengthen or weaken this relationship. In addition, when seeking to enhance their employees' performance, managers need to bear in mind that good quality service may not necessarily be related to either creativity or efficiency. Hence, balancing a set of expectations which are imperative for organizational viability is a major managerial challenge that is extremely complex and requires a capacity to harmonize different, sometime contradictory, performance facets.

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APPENDIX 1

TABLE A1. ITEMS USED TO MEASURE THE STUDY VARIABLES

Items measuring leader expectations for service quality
My supervisor thinks that I provide quality customer service
My supervisor thinks that providing quality customer service is important to me
My supervisor expects me to provide our customers with quality service
My supervisor would probably be disappointed in me if I was not providing quality customer service
Items measuring employee service performance
Provides good quality of service to the customers
Provides customers with service on time
Keeps on top of correcting service mistakes
Can be counted on when it comes to providing quality customer service
Gives customers an accurate description of all our products and services
Provides the exact specific product/service customers ask for
Helps her/his coworkers with shifts
Always provides prompt and quick service to customers
Invests extra effort to handle customers' special requests
Completely satisfies every customer's needs
Makes customers feel personally comfortable
Provides customers with full information about our products/services and their components
Makes customers feel that they can count on her/him
Is well-trained, competent, and experienced in providing good customer service to our customers
Helps her/his coworkers so they can do their jobs well
Is sensitive to the customers' needs and desires
Makes customers feel that they are special
Knows how to comprehend customers' needs and desires
Is empathic and makes customers feel good even when things are not working out
Puts the customer's needs first

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