

***Food and Organizations: The Relationship of Organizational Support and Attitude
Towards Office Gastrodiplomacy Among Employees of a Public Organization***

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Abstract

Office gastrodiplomacy refers to how food shapes and influences our social relations within organizations, usually in positive ways. Although already a pervasive practice, it is only recently that this concept has received wide attention from industry practitioners and researchers in the behavioral sciences. This emerging topic traces its origins to socio-anthropological studies applied to modern work environments like office settings. To expound scholarship in this field, particularly in the local parlance, this study aims to present novel findings on how organizational support, in aspects involving staff development, resources, and emotional support, affects attitude towards office gastrodiplomacy. A total of 327 respondents participated in a one-shot survey administered from September to December 2019 at the 25 offices of a public organization in the Philippines. Employing a descriptive-relational design, descriptive findings revealed that employees indicated being ‘fairly supported’ by their offices, while a higher proportion of respondents stated that they generally have a ‘favorable attitude’ towards office gastrodiplomacy. Relational statistics, however, generated a ‘not significant relationship’ between the two variables as a whole and across the three components. The researchers argue that it is likely that such a finding is a result of how the respondents only received organizational support in ‘fair’ terms. As such, results may somewhat differ if a ‘high’ favorable attitude to office gastrodiplomacy is complemented with ‘high’ organizational support. It is then proposed that a similar design may be replicated among employees in private organizations who may offer a different perspective, especially as regards aspects of organizational support.

Keywords: Office Gastrodiplomacy, Organizational Support, Public Offices, Philippines

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INTRODUCTION

Office gastrodiplomacy refers to how food shapes and influences our social relations within organizations, usually in positive ways. While the term ‘gastrodiplomacy’ had already been popularized in international relations (Rockower, 2011), recent developments saw the need to adopt a somewhat similar terminology but applied in different contexts. As defined by the foremost scholar in the field, Dr. Charles Spence, gastrodiplomacy is the ‘use of food to convey a specific message to others’ (Spence, 2016). To delineate their contribution on this emerging topic, Bajar and dela Pena (2021) contextualized gastrodiplomacy as practiced within organizations and particularly the offices, thus the term ‘office gastrodiplomacy.’

Although already a pervasive practice, it is only recently that this concept has received wide attention from industry practitioners and researchers in the behavioral sciences. A few studies in the past explored this phenomenon (e.g. Rozin et al., 1999, Kozinski, 1993; Halvorson & Rudelius, 1977) but findings remained elusive as there was little attention dedicated to this topic especially as a research agenda. It was only by the last two decades that a burgeoning number of researchers explored the phenomenon of office gastrodiplomacy; although literature is not consistent on how it attributes this practice and the absence of a common terminology thereof.

This emerging topic traces its origins to socio-anthropological studies applied to modern work environments like office settings. In behavioral studies in general, current research attributes how food elicits favorable psycho-social behaviors such as social cohesion, familiarity, group acceptance, and social affiliation (Davey, 2016; McCouat, 2014; Williams & Bargh, 2008). Meanwhile, management studies revealed similar findings as applied within organizations. At present, many researches explored how food consumption and food provision in the offices may be attributed to better employee performance. For example, the studies of Kniffin et al. (2015), Taylor (2014), and Balachandra (2013) suggest that work productivity among employees increases when work organizations provide food during lunch, office meetings, or as readily available in the office pantries. Interestingly, researchers also reported that provision of food in the offices significantly: improves supervisor-employee relations and employee-employee relations (McCouat, 2014; Gallo, 2014; Williams & Bargh, 2008); increases work satisfaction (Malcolm, 2016; Taylor, 2014); improves employee retention and abstention (Taylor, 2014); and contributes significantly to employee’s sense of motivation and consequently work engagement (Wooley & Fishbach, 2016; Rot et al., 2015; Schwarts & Porath, 2014; Baldoni, 2013; Halvorson & Rudelius, 1977).

Even though broadly discussed in the current literature, the studies mentioned did not have a coherent description of the phenomenon, and nonetheless of a single terminology. Convinced by this pressing need, Bajar and dela Pena (2021) offered to provide a definition of this practice which they called as ‘office gastrodiplomacy.’ Considering, however, that this concept is in its premature conception, the present paper tries to expound understanding of this phenomenon for further investigation. In this paper, we attempt to identify how organizational support, in aspects involving staff development, resources, and emotional support, affects attitude towards office gastrodiplomacy. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following questions: Is there a significant relationship between organizational support and attitude towards office gastrodiplomacy? Are the components of organizational support, namely staff development, resources, and emotional support, significantly related to their attitude towards office gastrodiplomacy?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Organizational Support

Organizational support refers to how the organization takes into account the general well-being of the employees (Eisenberger et al., 1990). In organizational support theory, it supposes that, to meet socio-emotional needs and to determine the organization's readiness to reward increased work effort, employees develop global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, et al., 1986). Research suggests that much of employees' attitude towards work is determined by how their respective organizations provide their needs. This is supported by the study of Beheshtifar et al (2012) who stated that there is a meaningful relationship between perceived organizational support and positive work attitude.

In a study by Chow (2005), the author revealed that employees seek a balance in their exchange relationship with organizations tending to have attitude and behaviors commensurate with the degree of support the employer gives them as individuals. In another study with nurse managers, Sorum (2007) revealed that organizations who invest in the education of employees return the favor in form of a more motivated and productive workforce. It is for this reason that employees owe a sense of gratitude fostering stronger bonds between the employees and the organization.

Among the components of organizational support are staff development, organizational resources, and emotional support.

Staff Development

Staff development is at the heart of employee utilization, productivity, commitment, motivation, and growth (Obioma, 2012). They are the policies, programs, and practices that aim at honing employees' skills and enhancing their job-related competencies (Johnsto & Johnston, 1998). According to Tan and Beltran (2009), staff development is a planned experience to help employees perform effectively and to enrich their competence in education, administration, and research. It is the retraining of employees to better their performance in areas of skills, knowledge, and attitude. In studies of Kantseet, et al (2010), Gesme (2010) and Ahmad and Kariaas, cited by Truitt (2012), findings revealed that staff development through education and training affects the work attitude of employees. In contrast, Teubes (2002) revealed that there is no significant relationship between staff development and work attitude of employees.

Obioma (2012) reported that the lack of staff training and development programs lead to poor or negative attitudes towards work. Corollary to this, he noted that it will eventually result in low performance and productivity. Staff development therefore impacts how employees view their work and how they perceive the support from their organization. Diaz (2006) noted that whether employees attend or not to seminars and training, their degree of openness and harmony towards their superiors remains the same. This is supported by the findings of Teubes (2002) who argued that there is no empirical evidence that proved training to be impactful in changing attitude managers in the IT companies and tends to think otherwise that they are just a waste of time.

Resources

Resources, and the sufficient provision thereof, are fundamental in every organization. They are prerequisites to an efficient and effective work. This is supported by the contentions of Mtsie (2011) who found out that shortage of human and material resources were related to negative attitudes among employees. Moreover, the same finding was revealed in the study of Leblebici (2012) where Turkish employees indicated an adverse attitude towards work as affected by the quality of their workplace environment such as lighting, personal storage, general storage, work area such as their desk, and circulation space. According to Rodley (2012), furniture impacts employees' attitude arguing that they must be comfortable and effectively working. He further contends that employees who are provided with appropriate workspace and proper, updated, and well-working equipment needed for a particular job position will lead to a more likely positive attitude towards work than those who are dealing with frustrating and broken ones.

Emotional Support

Selcuk and Ong (2003) points out that emotional support is provided when organizations acknowledge employees' efforts and contributions, values and cares about them, ensure an honest environment, and that which encourages volunteering and consistency in organizational policies, and activities. According to Bryan (2009), employees feel more positive about their work when their superiors listen to their ideas and concerns, give them regular feedback about their performance, and consistently show respect to them. It is supported by the contentions of Leblebici (2012) who said that being treated fairly is important for all employees. Fair treatment motivates employees to do and develop their tasks with full interests. Likewise, the justice theory of Adams (1965) posited that fair and unfair treatment in the organization has a significant impact on one's attitude.

Attitude towards office gastrodiplomacy

In the Master's thesis of Bajar (2020), the author developed an instrument that assessed attitude towards office gastrodiplomacy which the author defined as 'the positive or negative feeling associated with office gastrodiplomacy.' Using intensive review of literature, the author developed a 21-item questionnaire to be rated by the respondents using a dichotomous scale consisting of two responses (Yes/No). In 2021, the author published a substantial portion of the work which discussed the relationship between socio-demographic profile and attitude towards office gastrodiplomacy. Gathering data from 327 respondents from different offices of a public organization, the study revealed that attitude towards office gastrodiplomacy is significantly related with age and length of service. This finding denotes that younger employees tend to have significantly higher positive attitudes compared to older employees. The same explanation can be said between the relatively newer employees than the older ones. The authors proposed that this phenomenon may be attributed to higher appetite levels of the young. Moreover, they also suggested that another possible reason is how younger individuals tend to see food and eating rather as a social activity than as a nutritional and biological process (Bajar & dela Pena, 2021).

METHODS

This study is a descriptive-relational study that employed a one-shot survey design. A non-experimental paper, this research aimed to determine the relationship between organizational

support and attitude towards office gastrodiplomacy. A total of 327 respondents participated, administered from September to December 2019 at the 25 offices of a public organization in the Philippines. Prior ethical review checks and approval were obtained to proceed with the data collection. The questionnaire consists of two parts: the first part consisted of 15-item questionnaire on organizational support adopted from Matutina (2013); and the second part consisted of 21-item researcher-made questionnaire measuring attitude towards office gastrodiplomacy. The questionnaire also included a consent form where respondents indicate their voluntary participation in the study. They were also informed that they have the right to refuse to answer the questionnaire if they were not willing to participate in the study. Data were processed and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. Descriptive statistics such as mean and frequency distribution were calculated for all variables. For inferential statistics, Chi-Square test and Cramer's V were used. The findings of this paper are part of a separate substantial portion of the master's thesis of the main author.

The socio-demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1. On average, the respondents were 42.3 years old. Out of 327 respondents, 29.7% aged 24-35 years old, 31.8% aged 36-45 years old, and 38.5% aged 46-65 years old. Female respondents (61.8%) outnumbered male respondents (38.2%). In terms of educational attainment, at least one in ten is undergraduate (13.5%), at least seven in ten are college graduates (72.5%), while there are at least one in ten in the postgraduate level (14.1%). The data in Table 2 further revealed that respondents had an average of 11.2 years of experience. The distribution further showed that more than half (63.6%) are short tenured employees with 1-10 years of experience, almost one-third (27.8%) are middle tenured employees with 11-25 years of experience, and barely one-tenth (8.6%) are long tenured employees with 26-40 years of experience. Meanwhile, data of the monthly income showed respondents earned an average of Php 22,311.3. At least half of them are low income earning within the bracket Php 8,000 – Php 16,000. Nearly one third (28.1%) are within the middle income earning within the bracket Php 16,001 – Php 30,000. The remaining one-fourth (21.7%) are high income employees earning above Php 30,001. Finally, as to the nature of job position, professional employees constitute 57.2% which is closely followed by sub-professional employees consisting 42.8% of the total respondents.

Table 1. Socio-demographic of the respondents

A. Socio-demographic Profile of Respondents		F	%
Age			
	24 – 35 years old	97	29.7
	36 – 45 years old	104	31.8
	45 – 60 years old	126	38.5
	Total	327	100.0
	Mean Age = 42.3 years old		
Sex			
	Male	125	38.2
	Female	202	61.8
	Total	327	100.0
Educational Attainment			
	Undergraduate	44	13.5
	College Graduate	237	72.5
	Postgraduate	46	14.1
	Total	327	100.0
Length of Service			
	1 – 10 years	208	63.6
	11 – 25 years	91	27.8
	26 – 40 years	28	8.6
	Total	327	100.0
	Mean Length of Service = 11.2 years		
Monthly Income			
	P8,000 – 16,000	164	50.2
	16,001 – 30,000	92	28.1
	above 30,001	71	21.7
	Total	327	100.0
	Mean Monthly Income = Php 22,311.3		
Nature of Job Position			
	Sub-professional	140	42.8
	Professional	187	57.2
	Total	327	100.0

FINDINGS

Relationship between Organizational Support in terms of Staff Development, Resources, and Emotional Support and the Attitude towards Office Gastrodiplomacy

Table 2 presents the relationship of the sub-categories of organizational support in terms of staff development, resources, and emotional support and attitude towards office gastrodiplomacy.

Staff development. Higher proportion (84.6%) of those who received high support in terms of staff development thinks positively about office gastrodiplomacy than those who were poorly (80.8%) and fairly (79.8%) supported. Inversely, those who received fair (20.2%) support earned the highest percentage of respondents having a negative attitude unlike those who were poorly and highly supported (19.2% and 15.4%, respectively). The Cramer's V analysis generated a value of 0.053 with p value of 0.629 which is not significant at 0.05 confidence level. This implies that staff development bears no significant influence on attitude towards office gastrodiplomacy in general.

The finding above coincides with the study of Teubes (2002) who argued that there is no significant relationship between staff development and employee attitude. Perhaps a possible explanation relates with how current staff development programs in Philippine public organizations are now seen as a form of a 'compliance' measure, both in terms of the office administration and the employees. Since there are legislations that require government offices to implement staff development programs, public organizations abide by them, otherwise they will be called out by certain audit offices like the Civil Service Commission (CSC). On the other hand, public offices may require their employees to attend to these programs even though employees do not necessarily desire to participate. As such, office gastrodiplomacy may offer some relief but it is not enough to significantly say that it is related with staff development.

Resources. Of about within the same ranges, those who indicated that they were fairly supported (83.2%) had the highest proportion of respondents indicating favorable attitude towards office gastrodiplomacy as compared to those who received poor (81.6%) and high (80.2%) support. In contrast, much percentage (19.8%) of unfavorable attitudes come from those who think that they are highly supported than those who were poorly (18.4%) and fairly (16.8%) supported. Result of the Cramer's V analysis resulted in a value of 0.031 with p value of 0.853 which is not significant at 0.05 confidence level. This implies that resources have no significant influence whether one feels positive nor otherwise towards office gastrodiplomacy.

The finding mentioned is not consistent with the study of Leblebici (2012) who argued that there is a positive correlation between quality of workplace resources and employee attitude. In the context of public offices in the Philippines, there is no formal convention yet for the organization to provide employees with food. Hence, respondents in this study may not consider office gastrodiplomacy as part of their office resource. Considering the dynamism of Philippine politics which transcends to the different offices in the government, Filipino government employees may see office gastrodiplomacy as a favor extended to them by their supervisors. Although the money may be outsourced from the office budget, employees may think that it is because of the 'kindness' of their supervisors that they are being invited to eat food together whether or not on special occasions.

Emotional support. With the light proportional difference (0.1%), respondents who received fair support (82.1%) generally have a favorable attitude closely followed by those who received high emotional support (82.0%) and poor emotional support (80.8%). Meanwhile, those who received poor emotional support earned the highest percentage (19.2%) of respondents saying they have a negative or unfavorable attitude unlike those who were highly and fairly supported (18.0% and 17.9%, respectively).

The statistical analysis for the test of relationship revealed a Cramer's V value of 0.016 with p value of 0.961 which is not significant at 0.05 confidence level. This implies that emotional support is not a factor that affects employees' attitude towards office gastrodiplomacy.

The abovementioned finding is not consistent with several studies who argued that employees who were provided high emotional support feel more positive in their attitude (McCouat, 2014; Gallo, 2014; Williams & Bargh, 2008). A possible explanation can be attributed to how Filipinos generally perceive emotional support as an encompassing social value, to be not easily swayed just by how we share food with each other. Although food may offer a temporary relief on our emotions, it does not automatically translate to how we see our workplace to be necessarily concerned with our emotions. As eating is a daily and routine activity to human beings, it somehow diminishes the value of food-sharing as a means to reinforce emotional support in workplaces. Employees may not necessarily feel that they are emotionally supported by their organization when they are given food. On the other hand, they may only see it as an ordinary organizational activity absent with any special meaning, unless otherwise explicitly stated say for example during someone's birthday and the like.

Table 2. Relationship between Organizational Support in terms of Staff Development, Resources, and Emotional Support and the Attitude towards Office Gastrodiplomacy

	Attitude towards Office Gastrodiplomacy					
	Positive Attitude		Negative Attitude		Total	
	f	%	F	%	f	%
Staff Development						
Highly Supported	88	84.6	16	15.4	104	100.0
Fairly Supported	95	79.8	24	20.2	119	100.0
Poorly Supported	84	80.8	20	19.2	104	100.0
Total	267	81.7	60	18.3	327	100.0
Cramer's V: 0.053	<i>No relationship</i>		p=0.629		<i>Not significant</i>	
Resources						
Highly Supported	85	80.2	21	19.8	106	100.0
Fairly Supported	89	83.2	18	16.8	107	100.0
Poorly Supported	93	81.6	21	18.4	114	100.0
Total	267	81.7	60	18.3	327	100.0
Cramer's V: 0.031	<i>No relationship</i>		p=0.853		<i>Not significant</i>	
Emotional Support						
Highly Supported	105	82.0	23	18.0	128	100.0
Fairly Supported	78	82.1	17	17.9	95	100.0
Poorly Supported	84	80.8	20	19.2	128	100.0
Total	267	81.7	60	18.3	327	100.0
Cramer's V: 0.016	<i>No relationship</i>		p=0.961		<i>Not significant</i>	

Overall organizational support. With only a slight difference, a greater proportion (82.5%) of those who were poorly to fairly supported have a favorable attitude to office gastrodiplomacy unlike those who were highly supported (81.0%) (Table 3). Inversely, a higher proportion (19.0%) of those who were highly supported have a more unfavorable attitude compared to those who were poorly to fairly supported (17.5%). The result of the Cramer's V test for relationship between two variables yielded a value of -0.20 with p value of 0.721 which is not significant at 0.05 level. This indicated that the extent of organizational support has no significant influence on overall attitude towards office gastrodiplomacy.

The hypothesis therefore that there is no relationship between age and the affect component of attitude towards office gastrodiplomacy cannot be rejected. This finding is not consistent with the studies of Beheshtifar, et al., (2012) and Chow (2005) who established a correlation between extent of organizational support and employee attitudes. Several explanations elaborate in the discussion of the findings in the different subcomponents of organizational support offer a convincing explanation why current findings do not support the relationship between the variables. A key explanation, perhaps, relates to the nature of office organizations in the Philippines and how office politics work in practice. Most prominent in our explanations point out how Filipino values and conventions affect our attitude to food, in general. Although office gastrodiplomacy is a prevalent practice in whichever setting in the country, it is important to note we still take our investigation back to how our 'culture' affects our attitudes.

Table 3. Relationship of organizational support and attitude towards office gastrodiplomacy

	Attitude towards Office Gastrodiplomacy					
	Positive Attitude		Negative Attitude		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Organizational Support						
Highly Supported	149	81.0	35	19.0	184	100.0
Fairly Supported/ Poorly Supported	118	82.5	25	17.5	143	100.0
Total	267	81.7	60	18.3	327	100.0
Cramer's V: -0.20		<i>No relationship</i>		p=0.721		<i>Not significant</i>

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we provide a context on how office gastrodiplomacy may be quantitatively studied within organizations. We aim to contribute in the current literature and expound our understanding of this phenomenon which is broadly studied by scholars from other parts of the world, but to little attention in the local parlance. As we tried to further our scholarship on office gastrodiplomacy, we aimed to investigate whether this phenomenon can be related to other relevant variables in behavioral and management research like organizational support. One significant recommendation that we highly suggest is for future studies to test the same findings on business and for-profit organizations. Since our study is limited only to participants in the public offices, we safely assume that findings may not necessarily be identical to their counterparts in private offices. In addition, most of the literature by far observed those in the latter. It is interesting to conduct a comparison of the findings and from there determine the underlying reasons why findings might possibly be not consistent. In doing so, we may generate helpful insights where we better improve relationships within organizations and have a healthy working environment. As part of our final remarks, we encourage our readers to realize the importance of office gastrodiplomacy, encompassing wherever settings. The main goal of office gastrodiplomacy is to shape the relations within organizations towards a positive light. Considering that food is part of our daily survival, we may realize the importance of food not only as a biological and nutritional activity but also as a way for us to better not only our bodily but also social functioning. We may be able to realize that, at the end of the day, working in a healthy environment makes employees drive to excel more and be inspired to come to work. When employees have a desirable workplace, they partake in the vision of the organization and become actively engaged in pursuing its goals, and towards becoming committed partners of the organization.

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