

Crafting a proactive civility climate: enhancing customer civility impacts employee performance through the moderating role of job coaching

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Abstract

Purpose – The global prevalence of customer incivility complexity negatively affects employee performance, which demands establishing an effective civility climate. Drawing on social exchange theory based on its nature of reciprocations, this study advances the knowledge by investigating how customer civility, shaped by civility climate, improves employee performance and how job coaching strengthens the relationship between customer civility and employee performance.

Design/methodology/approach – A systematic random sampling was employed within the Pakistan hospitality industry and approached 379 employees, 69 supervisors and 304 customers. A multilevel modeling technique was used to analyze the association between variables.

Findings – The findings reveal that a proactive civility climate significantly enhances customer civility, which boosts employee performance. Customer civility significantly mediates the relationship between civility climate and employee performance. While job coaching generally affects employee performance, its interaction with customer civility diminishes it in a scenario with high customer civility.

Originality/value – This study's contribution lies in its proactive approach to mitigating customer incivility by fostering a positive civility climate rather than relying on reactive strategies. It highlights the reciprocal cycle of social exchanges in the workplace. It uniquely examines the mediating role of customer civility and the moderating effect of job coaching on the relationship between civility climate and employee performance.

Keywords Civility climate, Customer civility, Job coaching, Employee performance,
Hospitality industry of Pakistan

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Customer incivility or disrespectful behavior toward frontline employees in the working environment has gained significant attention due to its adverse effects on employee well-being and the service sector (Hur *et al.*, 2021). Such behavior violates norms of mutual respect and often leads to employee stress, burnout, and decreased performance (Khanam and Tarab, 2024). Despite efforts to enhance customer positive gestures, the rise in customer incivility has underscored the need for effective strategies to mitigate its impact (Baker and Kim, 2020). Addressing this issue is critical, as it challenges global employee morale and service quality (Lages *et al.*, 2023). Factors contributing to customer incivility include poor service environments, employee behavior, and individual traits (Sliter and Jones, 2016). Studies reveal that incivility often becomes cyclical, with rude customer behavior triggering similar employee responses, perpetuating further incivility (Daniels and Simmons, 2023). Existing strategies, such as apologizing, compensating customers, and coaching employees to build resilience, primarily rely on reactive measures (Amoako *et al.*, 2021; Yue *et al.*, 2021). While these approaches provide short-term solutions, they fail to address long-term prevention.



Conversely, a proactive strategy, tailoring services to customer needs, has shown promise in reducing incivility but lacks robust evidence for widespread application (Lages *et al.*, 2023). To address this gap, fostering a civility climate, an environment that delivers on promises, solves problems, personalizes services, and exceeds expectations, emerges as a vital approach (Johnston, 2004). A strong civility climate encourages courteous customer behavior, reciprocating positive employee-customer interactions (Umar *et al.*, 2024). However, most research has focused on developed countries, leaving a significant gap in understanding hospitality-specific civility climates in developing regions like Pakistan, where unique socio-cultural dynamics and a rapidly growing tourism sector present distinct challenges (Hussain *et al.*, 2024).

This study seeks to fill these gaps through two key questions: (1) How can a civility climate establish customer civility and enhance employee performance in Pakistan's hospitality industry? Customer civility refers to customers' courteous, respectful, and considerate behavior toward service employees (Umar *et al.*, 2024). (2) How does job coaching, as a developmental tool, moderate the relationship between customer civility and employee performance? Job coaching strengthens this relationship by empowering employees through delegation, preparation for future tasks, and leadership opportunities, promoting exceptional performance (Taherdoost, 2024).

This research uses multilevel data analysis (Grimm *et al.*, 2016) to examine employees' perceptions of customer civility and job coaching, customers' experiences of the civility climate, and supervisors' observations of employee performance. The study grounded in social exchange theory (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017) demonstrates how civility climate fosters respectful exchange, which leads to improved customer civility and employee performance. Additionally, it highlights how job coaching amplifies these effects, advancing existing literature (Bani-Melhem, 2020). Ultimately, this study offers novel insights into the interplay between civility climates, customer behavior, and employee performance in the hospitality sector.

Literature review

This study integrates social exchange theory (SET) to explore the dynamics of exchange behavior between employees and customers in Pakistan's hospitality industry. SET posits that social behavior results from reciprocal exchanges to maximize benefits and minimize costs (Ahmad *et al.*, 2023). Positive interactions between customers and employees generate mutual rewards, while negative interactions lead to detrimental outcomes (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017). In hospitality, fostering a civility climate can encourage favorable reciprocal behaviors, which follow the notion of social exchange (Yoon *et al.*, 2022). This aligns with SET's emphasis on balancing costs, such as customer incivility-induced employee stress, with benefits, like enhanced employee performance through customer civility.

The conceptual framework grounded in SET examines how a civility climate mitigates negative interactions and fosters positive exchanges. As a moderating factor, job coaching strengthens this relationship by enhancing employees' delegation and leadership skills, enabling them to exceed performance expectations. The following sections explore key variables and the development of hypotheses.

Civility climate and customer civility

Civility climate shapes positive customer behaviors, such as fulfilling promises, resolving issues, providing personalized services, and exceeding expectations (Jauhari *et al.*, 2024).

Delivering promises consistently adherence to commitments builds trust and fosters optimistic customer responses, aligning with SET's principle of reciprocity (Uzir *et al.*, 2021).

Solving problems effectively conveys customer respect and value, which encourages reciprocal civility (Panchapakesan *et al.*, 2021).

Personalized services tailor interactions cater to customer preferences, strengthening emotional connections and prompting positive behaviors (Umar *et al.*, 2024). For instance, a personalized note or complimentary service can enhance the customer experience.

Exceeding expectations surpasses customer expectations through surprise gestures fosters memorable experiences and reinforces reciprocal exchanges (Huang *et al.*, 2024).

Despite the benefits of a civility climate, customer incivility remains a significant challenge, causing direct harm to employees and service delivery (Cheng *et al.*, 2020). This underscores the need for a comprehensive exploration of civility climate's role in enhancing customer civility. Thus, the hypothesis is:

H1. Civility climate has an association with customer civility

Customer civility and employee performance

Customer civility is polite and respectful behavior toward employees, which enhances employee performance by fostering a supportive work environment, which advances the prior study (LaGree *et al.*, 2023). Likewise, respectful interactions reduce stress, boost morale, and improve job satisfaction, enabling employees to engage fully and deliver exceptional service, which extends existing research (Salanova *et al.*, 2005). Employee performance involves effective task execution and goal achievement, which thrives on positive customer feedback and civility. This relationship underscores the reciprocal benefits outlined in SET. Therefore, the hypothesis is:

H2. Customer civility has an association with employee performance.

Moderating role of job coaching

Job coaching is a developmental process that equips employees with skills like delegation and leadership that moderates the relationship between customer civility and employee performance, which advances the previous study notion (Hasan *et al.*, 2024). It enhances resilience and adaptability, enabling employees to navigate challenging customer interactions effectively (McGonagle *et al.*, 2020).

In high civility climates, job coaching amplifies the impact of customer civility by preparing employees for more extraordinary career achievements and fostering a cycle of positive exchanges, advancing prior study (Rabiul *et al.*, 2023). However, evidence for its moderating effects remains limited (Zhao *et al.*, 2023). Hence, the hypothesis is:

H3. Job coaching moderates the association between customer civility and employee performance.

Mediating role of customer civility

Customer civility mediates the relationship between civility climate and employee performance. Proactive strategies foster a civility climate, reducing customer incivility and promoting reciprocal respectful behaviors (Cheng *et al.*, 2023). This aligns with SET, where a respectful environment encourages customers to reciprocate with civility, benefiting employees.

Studies on mitigating incivility often focus on reactive approaches like apologies and compensation (Yue *et al.*, 2021). In contrast, this study emphasizes proactive prevention through a civility climate, creating a virtuous cycle of positive exchanges that enhance employee performance. Therefore, the hypothesis is:

H4. Customer civility mediates the association between civility climate and employee performance.

This study addresses gaps in understanding reciprocal interactions in hospitality, particularly in developing contexts. Integrating SET explores how civility climates enhance customer civility and improve employee performance. Additionally, it highlights the moderating role of

job coaching, which offers actionable insights for service management (see [Figure 1](#)). This research advances existing literature by emphasizing proactive strategies for fostering customer civility, reducing incivility, and enhancing employee performance. It underscores the importance of cultivating a respectful and supportive work environment for positive interactions.

Methodology

Data collection and sampling

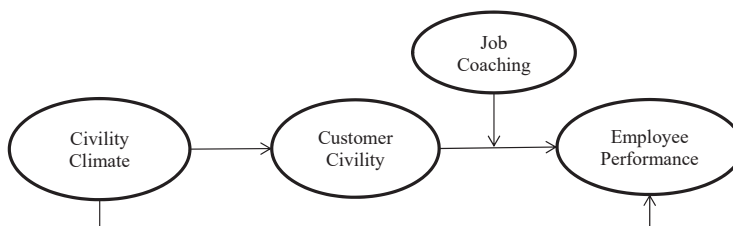
The study employed systematic random sampling and multilevel analysis to ensure diverse representation across Pakistan's hospitality industry ([Grimm et al., 2016](#)). Out of 583 hotels ranging from one to five stars (based on the Pakistan Hospitality Association, indexing websites, and government data), 116 were selected by randomly picking every fifth hotel after alphabetically sorting names. Consent forms were distributed, collecting optional data on employees, supervisors, and customer interactions. Of these, 36 hotels shared optional data, while 59 permitted research without sharing details. Eight hotels declined due to lack of interest, and ten cited privacy concerns.

From compliant hotels, projected data included 2,185 employees under 238 supervisors serving 62,700 monthly customers across 95 hotels. The sampling targeted 856 front desk employees, randomly selecting every second employee (428 totals). Supervisors of these employees and a subset of 380 customers (selected every fifth customer and at least two per hotel) were also included. Third-party collectors ensured unbiased data collection across three stages ([Kappelhof, 2017](#)) in the recent year.

- (1) Employees: Questionnaires on demographics, customer civility, and job coaching were distributed face-to-face to 428 employees, yielding 379 valid responses. Invalid responses (e.g. uniform answers to consecutive direct and reverse-coded questions) were excluded.
- (2) Supervisors: Data on employee performance for these 379 employees were collected from 69 supervisors.
- (3) Customers: Civility climate and demographic data were gathered from 380 customers at checkout, with 304 valid responses ensuring sample adequacy ([Sarstedt et al., 2022](#)).

Measures

An adaptive questionnaire was designed using validated scales. Face validity assessments and pretests with 15 participants ensured clarity and reliability after adding a reversal statement, minimizing common method bias ([Hulland et al., 2018](#)). Variables measured included: Civility Climate: 14 items (e.g. "The hotel employee adjusts the services to meet my preferences" and "The employee goes out of their way to make me feel comfortable")



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Data analysis and aggregation

Results

Table 1. Sampling profile

Note(s): *FQ*: Frequency and %: Percentage

Source(s): Authors' own work

leadership levels, while the balanced customer base, slightly favoring males (57.24%). A balanced traveler base between business (46.38%) and leisure (53.62%) travelers necessitates diverse offerings, while a focus on domestic customers with (58.22%).

The constructs demonstrated strong reliability and validity. Civility climate (CA = 0.72, AVE = 0.61), customer civility (CA = 0.88, AVE = 0.51), job coaching (CA = 0.89, AVE = 0.50), and employee performance (CA = 0.85, AVE = 0.51) all met acceptable thresholds (see Table 2). Discriminant validity was confirmed, with the square root of AVE for each construct exceeding correlations with other variables (e.g. civility climate = 0.784) (See Table 3).

Structural modeling results showed that civility climate significantly influenced customer civility (H1: $\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.01$), explaining 31% of its variance (see Table 4). Customer civility (H2) positively impacted employee performance ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$), explaining 24% of the variance. Job coaching (H3) also positively influenced employee performance ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$), explaining 20% of the variance. However, the interaction of job coaching and customer civility negatively affected employee performance ($\beta = -0.20$, $p < 0.05$), with customer civility being more impactful under low coaching levels. The graphical representation (see Figure 2) illustrated this moderation effect. Customer civility strongly enhanced performance under low job coaching, as shown by the steep dashed line. Under high job coaching, the impact of customer civility was minimal, represented by the flatter solid line.

Civility climate's direct effect on employee performance was insignificant ($\beta = -0.03$, $p > 0.05$). However, it had a significant indirect effect via customer civility (H4: $\beta = 0.55$, $p < 0.01$), explaining 23% of the variance. The findings emphasize fostering a civility climate and balancing job coaching with customer civility to enhance employee performance and reinforce reciprocal social exchanges in hospitality (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017).

Discussion

This study investigated the impact of civility climate on employee performance, mediated by customer civility and moderated by job coaching, within the framework of social exchange theory (Ahmad *et al.*, 2023). Unlike prior research focusing on reactive approaches to customer incivility, such as strategic complaint resolution or compensation (Yue *et al.*, 2021), this study emphasizes a proactive civility climate. The findings advance the literature by demonstrating the significant positive impact of civility climate on customer civility, a relatively unexplored concept. Customer civility emerged as a critical factor, significantly enhancing employee performance and highlighting its reciprocal benefits. This finding expands prior research on customer satisfaction and behavior intentions (Zhao *et al.*, 2023), emphasizing customer civility's role in improving performance.

Job coaching was shown to positively affect employee performance, consistent with previous studies (Obeng *et al.*, 2021). However, this study provides novel insights by revealing that high customer civility diminishes the incremental benefits of job coaching. This interaction highlights the context-dependent nature of job coaching's effectiveness. Furthermore, the mediation analysis illustrates that civility climate indirectly improves employee performance through customer civility, providing deeper insights into the mechanisms of this relationship. These findings extend the application of social exchange theory (Ahmad *et al.*, 2023), demonstrating how proactive efforts to foster civility can enhance employee outcomes. This study underscores the importance of a civility climate and the nuanced interplay between job coaching and customer civility, offering actionable insights for improving employee performance in the hospitality sector.

Theoretical implications

This study offers significant theoretical implications by addressing gaps in existing research through the lens of social exchange theory. The study demonstrates that a positive civility

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Measurement scale	CA	AVE	Mean	SD	Ske	Kur	FL
<i>Civility climate</i>	0.72	0.61	3.87	0.46	−0.12	−0.61	
The employee responds promptly to requests for a diet preference meal			3.87	1.13	−1.02	−0.32	0.80
The room upgrade is often unavailable when expected			3.89	1.04	−1.30	0.84	0.76
The employee finds alternatives when the in-room bar needs certain items			3.85	1.11	−1.05	−0.23	0.81
I often compliment the hotel's atmosphere			3.89	0.95	−0.81	−0.39	0.63
The employee resolves room issues according to my expectations			3.89	1.05	−1.12	0.36	0.77
I sometimes feel unsatisfied despite timely service			3.88	1.09	−0.95	−0.36	0.77
I appreciate a follow-up phone			3.92	1.00	−1.19	0.72	0.68
I often leave positive feedback after problem resolution			3.85	0.92	−0.46	−0.76	0.85
The hotel employee adjusts the services to meet my preferences			3.79	0.85	−0.57	−0.29	0.82
The employee provides personalized attention to me in this hotel			3.90	0.90	−0.58	−0.65	0.84
The hotel does not go out of its way to tailor services based on my needs			3.80	0.86	−0.31	−0.35	0.82
The employee goes out of their way to make me feel comfortable			3.89	0.91	−0.58	−0.73	0.81
The hotel consistently delivers services beyond what I initially expected			3.82	0.98	−0.49	−0.65	0.77
The employee needs to explain how things function			3.91	0.92	−0.43	−0.82	0.81
<i>Customer civility</i>	0.88	0.51	3.92	1.00	−1.36	0.45	
Customers treat me with respect			3.96	1.23	−1.04	−0.16	0.70
Customers show compassion toward me			3.89	1.30	−0.92	−0.51	0.70
Customers show empathy toward me or they value my dignity			3.96	1.19	−0.98	−0.26	0.72
Customers do not rely on my competency to deal with every situation			3.89	1.27	−0.99	−0.29	0.60
Customers trust my decisions and all the information I provide them			3.93	1.31	−0.98	−0.43	0.78
Customers listen to me attentively and respect my point of view			3.92	1.25	−0.98	−0.31	0.76
<i>Job coaching</i>	0.89	0.50	3.57	1.04	−0.58	−1.14	
My supervisor uses analogies, scenarios, and examples to help me learn			3.62	1.40	−0.61	−1.09	0.73
My supervisor broadens my perspective by helping me to see the big picture			3.55	1.40	−0.61	−1.05	0.65
My supervisor provides constructive feedback to me			3.50	1.49	−0.49	−1.30	0.63
My supervisor ensures that his/her interactions are meaningless to me			3.45	1.47	−0.55	−1.18	0.69
My supervisor asks me to help my colleagues			3.65	1.29	−0.77	−0.66	0.75
My supervisor asks questions rather than provide solutions			3.68	1.33	−0.73	−0.79	0.76
My supervisor helps exceeding my expectations of the organization's broader goals			3.55	1.39	−0.60	−1.04	0.71
My supervisor role-plays with me			3.56	1.32	−0.71	−0.80	0.75
<i>Employee performance</i>	0.85	0.51	3.58	1.11	−0.72	−1.00	
My subordinate adequately completes assigned duties			3.53	1.42	−0.55	−1.17	0.73
My subordinate fulfills the responsibilities specified in the job description			3.63	1.39	−0.63	−1.05	0.59

(continued)

Table 2. Continued

Measurement scale	CA	AVE	Mean	SD	Ske	Kur	FL
My subordinate delays tasks that are expected immediately			3.53	1.41	−0.52	−1.21	0.82
My subordinate meets the formal performance requirements of the job			3.60	1.43	−0.69	−0.97	0.70
My subordinate engages in activities that will directly affect my performance evaluation			3.61	1.38	−0.70	−0.90	0.72

Note(s): FL: Factor loading, SD: Standard Deviation, CA: Cronbach's alpha and AVE: Average Variance Extracted

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 3. Discriminant validity

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Civility climate	0.784			
2. Customer civility	0.558	0.713		
3. Job coaching	0.389	0.461	0.710	
4. Employee performance	0.261	0.484	0.451	0.713

Source(s): Authors' own work

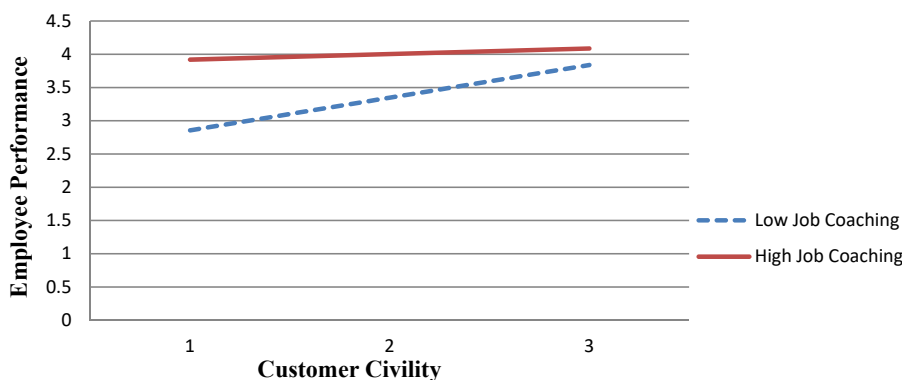
Table 4. Path analysis

Variables	Dependent variable Customer civility			Employee performance			Status
	β	SE	R ²	β	SE	R ²	
H1: Civility climate	0.56**	0.09	0.31				Supported
H2: Customer civility				0.48**	0.05	0.24	Supported
<i>Moderating effect of job coaching</i>							
Step 1: Job coaching				0.45**	0.05	0.20	
Step 2: H3: Job coaching x Customer civility				−0.20*	0.06	0.32	Supported
<i>Mediating effect of customer civility</i>							
	Direct effect			Indirect effect			
H4: Civility climate with customer civility	−0.03	0.13		0.55**	0.06	0.23	Supported
<i>Control variables</i>							
Customer type and civility climate				−0.05	0.09	0.24	
Gender and civility climate				−0.06	0.09	0.24	

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, β = Beta coefficient, SE = Standard error and Hn = Hypothesis Number

Source(s): Authors' own work

climate significantly enhances customer civility. In turn, it boosts employee performance. Previous studies have insufficiently investigated the impact of civility climate on workplace dynamics (Obeng *et al.*, 2021; Zhao *et al.*, 2023). This study underscores the critical role of customer civility in enhancing employee performance. Additionally, the research reveals the nuanced interaction of job coaching with customer civility, advancing prior research (Obeng *et al.*, 2021). While job coaching generally improves performance, its combined effect with high customer civility diminishes this impact. This insight adds depth to understanding job coaching's effectiveness based on customer civility levels. The study introduces the mediation role of customer civility. This mediating role explains how civility climate indirectly affects



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 2. Moderating graph

employee performance through customer civility. It provides a deeper understanding of the pathways influencing employee performance. These findings advance the literature by illustrating the importance of fostering a civility climate to promote positive social exchanges with customer civility and enhance employee performance, which extends the prior studies (Hsiao *et al.*, 2023; Zhao *et al.*, 2023).

Practical implications

Customer incivility leads to employee stress and burnout, which influences emotional exhaustion, negatively affecting service performance and even turnover (Al-Hawari *et al.*, 2020; Yang *et al.*, 2023). Organizations should foster a proposed civility climate to implement and enhance customer civility effectively. This civility climate encourages customers to reciprocate with positive gestures; as a result, it prevents employees from incivility and improves performance, which was insufficiently explored in prior studies (Al-Hawari *et al.*, 2020). By implementing the current study's findings, employees will experience fewer incidents of customer incivility. This reduction in customer incivility will lower employee stress and burnout. Consequently, this will improve employee performance, which was previously damaged (Baker and Kim, 2020). Job coaching programs should be tailored to align with customer civility. These programs should focus on improving and exceeding performance expectations by delegating and team-leading tasks. It ultimately enhances employee performance with customer civility interaction, which was previously overlooked (Zhao *et al.*, 2023).

Limitations and future research directions

This study's findings may lack generalizability across industries. The cross-sectional design limits causal inferences, and socially desirable responses may have biased the results, as reflected by an existing study (Hulland *et al.*, 2018). Longitudinal studies could provide a deeper understanding of how civility climate, customer civility, and employee performance evolve over time, clarifying causal relationships. Future research should employ mixed methods to capture richer insights into civility climate and customer civility dynamics. Examine how cultural differences shape the impact of civility climate on employee performance, extending SET across diverse workplace contexts. Explore organizational culture as a moderator to understand how collaborative or hierarchical structures influence the effects of civility climate and job coaching. Analyze personality traits, like emotional

intelligence or resilience, as moderators to tailor interventions based on diverse employee profiles. Combine SET with frameworks like the conservation of resources theory to explore how resource gains from customer civility mitigate the impact of incivility.

Conclusion

The study advances the understanding and response to the prevalence of customer incivility through social exchange theory. It demonstrates that mutual respect and positive exchanges between employees and customers mitigate customer incivility and improve employee performance. This research fills the gaps in prior literature by comprehensively analyzing the civility climate. It examines the concept of proactive civility climate links to customer civility, leading to employee performance. This study investigates the effects of job coaching on employee performance in interaction with customer civility. It also highlights the indirect ways civility climate affects employee performance through customer civility. These contributions enhance the understanding of handling customer incivility within the hospitality industry.

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