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When and Why Does Professionalism Backfire? The Dual Effect of Professionalism on Service Performance

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Abstract

Professionalism is widely acknowledged as a fundamental element in enhancing service performance within interfirm relationships. Traditional views suggest that professionalism, cooperation, and opportunism have opposing effects on the performance of service firms. Nevertheless, the actual impacts of these factors, particularly their interactive effects, have not been corroborated by empirical studies in authentic business settings. Utilizing data gathered from professional service firms, this research comprehensively examines the direct influences of professionalism, cooperation, and opportunism, along with their interactive effects, on firms' overall service performance. Our results reveal that professionalism can have a dual effect on firms' service performance, contingent upon the level of firms' opportunism. In addition, our confirmation of the contingent effect of opportunism on the positive impacts of cooperation on service performance indicates potential risks of corporate complicity in real-world business scenarios. Our study offers important theoretical and managerial insights by paving a new path in business-to-business relationship research through the recognition of the potential deteriorated effects of professionalism. Moreover, it provides a novel perspective for organizational behavior studies by demonstrating the coexistence and interaction of these three factors, which are often perceived as mutually exclusive.

Keywords: Business-to-business relationships; Cooperation; Dual effect; Opportunism; Professionalism; Service performance