

A Model of Employee Well-being for Front-line Employees in Hotel Industry

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Abstract- This paper aims to develop a model of the recently introduced concept of employee well-being for front-line employees in the hotel industry. By introducing the concept of employee well-being for the hotel industry, this article proposes that employee well-being is more likely to be sustainable when employee burnout is low for front-line employees who are supposed to manage their emotions in front of customers. These employees are called as 'emotional labour'. Also the mediating effect of burnout to the relationship between emotional labour and employee well-being is considered in this article. The stress theory and conservation of resources theory are used to justify the relationships between emotional labour and employee well-being, and emotional labour and burnout. Role identification and social sharing of emotions are proposed as moderators when developing this model.

Index Terms- Employee Well-being, Emotional Labour, and Burnout

I. INTRODUCTION

Today's organizations are operating in a highly competitive environment which is prone to change in every second. Organizations have identified that people or the human resource of the organization hold the greatest potential to face this continuously increasing competition. When organizations started achieving competitive advantage through employees, they had to look out of the box for finding ways to gear them towards business success. This recognition for employees can be seen among both researchers and practitioners in the field of human resource management mostly as employees are capable of producing organization-level competencies that create sustainable competitive advantage and this asset is expected to be valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991). Thus, recruiting, maintaining, and developing caliber workforce within the organization has become one of the main objectives of Human Resource Management (HRM). Success of HRM depends on how well they achieve objectives of HRM (De Alwis & Kulasekara, 2015). In order to fulfill these criteria, organizations use different ways and in recent years, employee well-being has become one of the most important topics in the field of Human Resource Management.

Human resource is the most precious resource of all the organizations and the mind and emotions differentiate human beings from other living beings. Nowadays, emotions of the

employees have become an important part of any customer service job because of the developments of service segment and the raise in the level of employee interaction with customers. The effort they made to regulate their emotions consciously while they are in a service encounter is defined as "emotional labour", and the job they perform is defined as "emotional labour job" (Hochschild, 1983).

This article focuses the relationship between two different constructs, 'Emotional Labour' and 'Employee Well-being' and also the mediating effect of burnout of employees. Further, it will look at the moderating effect of role identification and social sharing of emotions on the relationship between emotional labour and burnout and on the relationship between emotional labour and employee well-being respectively.

II. EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

The well-being of employees is highly concerned by different social groups and organizations at the present time. The workplace has become a significant part of any individual's life, since it affects his or her both work and personal life and well-being of the society. The average adult spends much of his or her life working, probably two third of his or her life in work.

The ultimate objective of any organization is profit maximization for their owners and customer value proposition (Thompson et al., 2011). Employers who spend a considerable amount of resources in hiring employees and trying to produce quality products and services, maintain loyal customer, and maximizing profit through employees are very much keen about employee well-being (Harter, Schmidt, & Heyes, 2002). Tangible benefits must be provided to succeed in hiring caliber employees. However, studies of modern and future generations of employees reveal that majority of employees prefer to achieve greater meaning and personal development from their job and those studies propose many employees observe their job as a enjoyable, satisfying, and socially useful one (Avolio & Sosik, 1999; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, & Schwartz, 1997). Both employees in the society and employers can be substantially benefitted by promoting well-being among workers than creating strains and mental illness.

According to the service literature satisfied employees create happy and loyal customers to the organizations. But, it is difficult to enhance the level of employee well-being, specially psychological and emotional well-being of employees. The researcher conducted a pilot survey to identify whether this

difficulty exists in Sri Lankan organizations as well. That study was done for the hotel industry, selecting a sample from frontline employees of five-star hotels in Sri Lanka. As per the results of the pilot study, 72% of employees in the Sri Lankan hotel industry showed an impaired well-being while 15% are having an average level of well-being. Only 13% of employee well-being was at a satisfactory level. Hence, it can be said that there is an issue with employee well-being among hotel employees in Sri Lanka. The current study will focus on to fill the identified gap by developing a model of employee well-being for the employees in the hotel industry.

III. EMOTIONAL LABOUR

The concept 'Emotional labour' can be defined as "the effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions" (Morris & Feldman, 1996, p.987). Organizations manage emotions by imposing structures on their workforce (Cropanzano, Weiss, & Elias, 2004). Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) referred to these as display rules. A service provider performs emotional labour, complying with display rules through surface acting and deep acting (Hochschild, 1983). Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) claimed that, there is a third form of emotional labor besides deep acting and surface acting. That is spontaneous or genuine emotional labor. According to Hochschild (1979, 1983) service encounters have to perform an emotional role during service transactions. Front-line employees of hotels are more expected to be emotional labour comparing to other service employees, because customers are going to a hotel to buy happiness. Happiness is something intangible and unlimited and also varies from customer to customer. Therefore, the emotional involvement is high for front-line employees working for hotels. This study will mainly focus on the impact of emotional labour on employee well-being.

IV. EMOTIONAL LABOUR AND EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING.

Employee health and well-being at work have become enormous problem during the past few years and the understanding and knowledge about employee well-being and occupational health stemming through all types research has been disseminated speedily throughout the world. As Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory explains (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011) employee well-being is a function of the work environment, which has steady but also flexible elements. Most of the studies on employee well-being have focused on physical well-being and psychological well-being of employees. But this study will focus on psychological, physical, emotional, and social well-being of employees.

Hochschild (1979, 1983) introduced three mechanisms by which emotional labour harms employee well-being. Those mechanisms are first, emotional labour may lead to worker alienation; second, emotional regulation takes energy, and third, display rules could produce a conflict of discourse such that individuals have no suitable guide for their actions. Mann (1999) suggested that the level of emotional labour performed by service employees may have negative impacts for their well-being that

extends beyond the work context. Humphrey, Ashforth, and Diefendorff (2015) acknowledge that surface acting frequently has negative outcomes for the personal well-being of employees. Some scholars have found that there is an association between surface acting and stress and impaired well-being (Bono & Vey, 2005; Wang, Seibert, & Boles, 2011). Gross (1998) has found that deep acting is positively associated with well-being outcomes. Predict

Conservation of Resources Theory. Conservation of Resources (COR) theory envisages that the primary feature in the stress process is the resource loss (Hobfoll, 2001). COR theory is being successfully employed in foreseeing a series of stress consequences in various organizational situations. According to Hobfoll (2001), set of theories and principals are followed by the COR theory. The basic principal of this theory is that individuals struggle to acquire, maintain, protect and foster the things that they value. They do so in a world that they see as inherently aggressive and requiring a collection of their personal strengths, social attachments, and cultural belonging in order to survive (Greenberg, Pyszcznski & Solomon, 1986 as cited in Hobfoll, 2001). These personal strengths, social attachments, and cultural belonging are termed as resources.

According to the first and most important principle of COR theory, resource loss is disproportionately more prominent than resource gain (Hobfoll, 2001) and it leads to psychological stress. According to services management literature service encounters are in a threat of losing their personal resources. Hochschild (1979) argued that customer service employees are expected to experience and convey certain feelings during service encounters, but that effort to conform to those expectations leads to certain destructive psychological effects among the service agents. Employees who are supposed to display organisationally desired emotions are labeled as 'Emotional Labour'. When employers try to regulate employees' emotions during service transactions, employees or emotional labour lose their personal resources such as 'feeling that I have control over my life', 'understanding from my employer', 'feeling that I know who I am', 'positive feeling about myself' and etc. which have been introduced by Hobfoll (2001) as personal resources.

In the current study, on the basis of conservation of resources theory, relationship between emotional labour and employee well-being will be examined and it is expected that this relationship will be important to identify the level of employee well-being. With the support of COR theory and existing empirical evidences, the first hypothesis is derived.

H₁: There is a negative impact of emotional labour on employee well-being.

V. BURNOUT

The concept 'burnout' was introduced by Freudenberger, in 1974. According to him, the symptoms of burnout are decrease in achievement, depersonalization, and the decrease in the interest to the job (Schabracq, Winnubst, & Cooper, 2003). Maslach et al.(2001) defined burnout as "the alienation of the person to the genuine meaning and the purpose of his or her job and being truly not able to attend the people whom he or she delivers service to" (as cited in, Celik et al., 2010. Pg. 49). Maslach et al.

(2001) defined burnout as a three-dimensional concept. The three dimensions are Emotional exhaustion (the stress related fatigue of the individual's physical and emotional power), depersonalization (development of negative and strict attitudes and behaviors against the people in the service interaction), and personal accomplishment (having emotions of failure and incompetence in the jobs when interacting with the people).

VI. EMOTIONAL LABOUR AND BURNOUT

Today, many researchers focus on conducting studies about burnout as the negative effects of emotional labour. Burnout is probably attached with the customer service employees as they experience high level of stress when emotionally interacting with customers (Jackson et al, 1986). Zapf (2002) found a positive association of burnout with emotional labour. Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) have determined that there is a correlation between emotional exhaustion (one dimension of burnout) and the need to prevent the negative feelings and also they found that there is a negative correlation between surface acting and the sense of personal accomplishment (another dimension of burnout). Zapf (2002) argued that burnout is a kind of warning that employees are no longer able to adequately manage their emotions during service encounters.

Stress Theory. Stress theory generally holds that as major life events and chronic strains accumulate, the individual's ability to readjust can be overwhelmed, resulting in greater vulnerability to physical or psychological disorders (Brown & Harris, 1978 as cited in Thoits, 1991). According to the proponents of the stress perspective quality of life and performance of workers are hindered by strain or boredom, in other words too much challenge or too little challenge can negatively affect employees (Harter, Schmidh, & Keyes, 2003 as cited in Robertson & Cooper, 2010). Further, they claimed that the existence of positive appraisals and positive emotional states of the worker and his or her relationship within the workplace bring out worker performance and quality of life. Burnout emerges when workers experience stress in the condition of being insufficient in meeting the requirements (Celik et al., 2010).

With the support of stress theory and prevailing empirical evidences, this study argues that customer service employees experience high level of stress as they are supposed to regulate their emotions during service encounters. Thus, the second hypothesis is,

H₂: There is a positive impact of emotional labour on burnout.

VII. BURNOUT AND EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

Burnout can be considered as a long-standing stress reaction of employee that is caused by the continuous exposure to job stress. Since 1996, health and well-being in any employment have become more and more important and well-known issues. Thus, the problems around burnout, fatigue, and stress have received a lot of attention. According to Maslach (1982) the burnout individual's level of frustration tolerance is lessened, oversensitive, he or she is aggressive, and behaves in

an aggressive, unfriendly, and suspicious manner. According to Rossse et al., (1991) burnout employees are having a feeling of failure, insufficiency, and impotence and at the same time low job-related self-esteem. On the organizational level, burnout workers think that they are not appreciated by the respective supervisors and by their colleagues. These arguments prove that burnout can be influenced employee psychological and emotional well-being. Hendrix et al. (1991) found a small but significant association between emotional exhaustion and the frequency of self-reported flu or cold occurrences. Melamed et al. (1999) found high levels of cholesterol in burnt-out workers. Further, they observed lower levels of cortisol in non-burnout employees compared to burnt-out employees. So it is proved that burnout affects employees' physical well-being.

Based on the prevailing theories, arguments, and empirical evidences the third hypothesis is derived.

H₃: There is a negative impact of burnout on employee well-being.

Based on the stress theory and the empirical evidences, a relationship is identified between emotional labour and burnout. The COR theory and prevailing empirical evidences support the argument that there is a relationship between emotional labour and employee well-being. The hypothesis was derived to identify the relationship between burnout and employee well-being based on prevailing arguments and empirical evidences. Therefore, this study tries to identify the mediating role of burnout to the relationship of emotional labour and employee well-being. Hence, based on these arguments the fourth hypothesis of the study is derived.

H₄: Burnout mediates the relationship between emotional labour and employee well-being

VIII. ROLE IDENTIFICATION

Thoits (1986) defines roles as the 'scripts' for performing particular positions. Thus, role identities are helpful to define who one is, and also give directions for an individual that how he or she is supposed to behave within a given position. Therefore, roles and role expectations must give a meaning, purpose, and direction to one's life. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) suggested that emotional labour gives an opportunity to "act out" one's identification, that is, to convey one's loyalty to the valued identity. Emotions are vital to what we experience in the workplace and as well as in self (Elfenbein, 2007) and in a nutshell, are a measure for identity. Humphrey et al. (2015) argue that a valued identity can be upheld and reinforced through surface and, especially, deep acting and thereby surface and deep acting facilitate the sense that one is actually being true to oneself. Individuals usually need to suppose that the work they perform is meaningful and reflect who they are (identity). Humphrey et al. (2015) further argue that employee who identifies with a role is motivated to suddenly feel the expected or required emotions and the more they do, the more their identity is confirmed and employees may willingly engage in surface and deep acting and regard the attendant emotional dissonance and exhaustion as signs of their commitment. Finally, the more that an employee perceives a role as significant and reflecting a valued identity, the more prepared the employee is to

engage in emotional labor in order to accomplish role expectations. Individuals who perceive a poor fit between their employment and themselves, and who do not identify with their jobs, are likely to come across their occupations stressful and do them unsuccessfully (Humphrey et al., 2015).

Based on these arguments the fifth hypothesis is derived

H₅: Role identification will moderate the positive impact of emotional labour on burnout such that the positive impact will be lower when role identification is high

IX. SOCIAL SHARING OF EMOTIONS

Customer service employees who perform emotional labour role regulate their emotions during service encounters. As discussed earlier, regulation of emotions as a part of their job everyday affects the level of well-being of these employees. But as Rime et al. (1998) pointed out these employees can communicate the personal experience of emotional event with others and they coined it as ‘social sharing of emotions’. According to the findings of Rimé et al. (1998) and Gable et al. (2004), spouses, other family members and friends were usually the targets of emotion sharing incidents in the personal domain. Similarly, coworkers or peers are the targets for the sharing of emotions at work (Beehr et al., 2003; Daniels et al., 2008). Thoits (1984) also claims that human beings need others who are socially parallel to themselves in dealing with peak emotions, those who can support by providing ‘empathetic understanding’ by having experienced the similar types of situations and responses. Therefore, it is clear that employees who perform

emotional labour role can reduce the negative impacts of emotional labour through sharing of emotions with others. Thus, the sixth hypothesis of the study can be derived as follows.

H₆: Social sharing of emotions will moderate the negative relationship between emotional labour and employee well-being, such that the relationship will be weaker when social sharing of emotions is high

X. OVERALL MODEL OF EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING FOR FRONT-LINE EMPLOYEES IN HOTEL INDUSTRY

The previous studies regarding antecedents of employee well-being, and the facts available in the service management literature can be used in an overall model of employee well-being. In the current study, one relationship has been developed, between emotional labour and employee well-being based on conservation of resources theory. The relationship between emotional labour and well-being is moderated with social sharing of emotions and it is expected that employee well-being can be uplifted when they share their emotions with family members and co-workers. The second relationship has been developed between emotional labour and burnout based on stress theory. That relationship is expected to be modified with the moderating effect of role identification in order to have minimized level of burnout when the front-line employees are continuously performing as emotional labour. Based on the first and second relationships, burnout has been identified as a mediator to the relationship between emotional labour and employee well-being.

Figure 1 shows the overall model of employee well-being which has been developed for front-line.

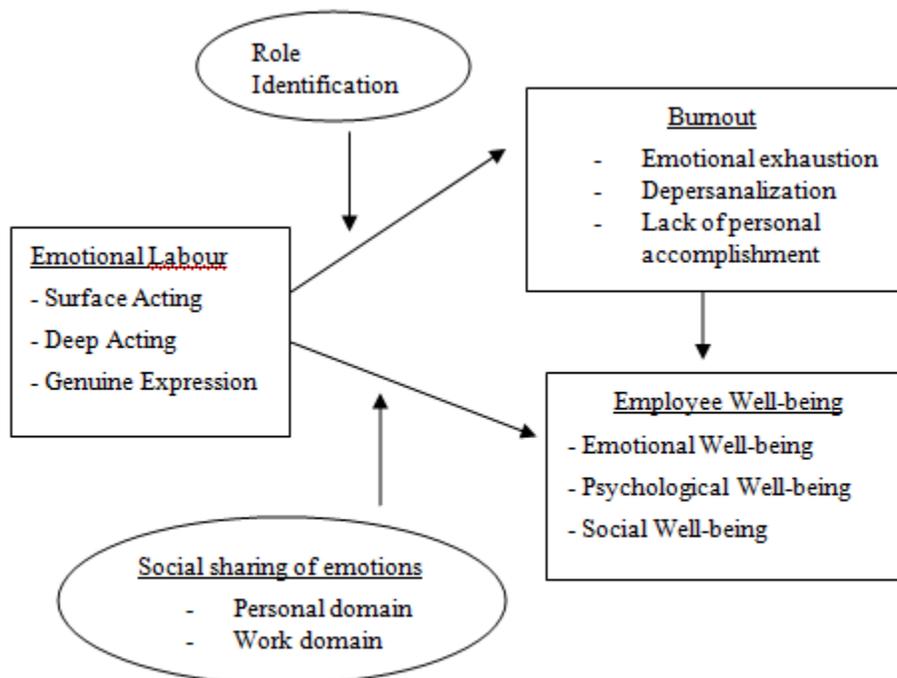


Figure 1: A model for Employee Well-being

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