

Emotional Labour and Burnout as Predictors of Customer Service Employees Interpersonal Relationships in Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examined Emotional-Labour and Burn out as Predictors of Customer Service Employee's Interpersonal Relationship in Ogun State. Three instruments were administered to two (200) hundred workers that were randomly selected from some customer service industries in the four geo-political zones in Ogun States. Multiple Regression Analysis method was used to test the research questions raised. Two hypotheses were tested at 0.5 level of significance and it was found that emotional labour and born-out would not have effect on the interpersonal relationship among customers and no relative contribution of emotional labour and burnout in the prediction of interpersonal relationship among customer service employees, even though, burnout was a more potent factor. It was therefore recommended that organizational managers must ensure good interpersonal relationship in the workplace, as this will enhance customer's service and employees productivity.

Introduction

Evidences abound globally (Hammed, A. (1999), Maslach, Leiters & Jackson (1997) that workers in organizations, especially where customers are attended to, such as government, organizations, ministries, petrol stations, manufacturing industries, hotels and banks; have demonstrated little interpersonal skills while relating to their clients/customers. Hammed (1999) says that there are occasions when customers are shouted at, ignored, insulted and/or frustrated out of their offices because of the behavioural manifestations of customer service employees such as receptionists, attendants, customer relation officers, paying cashiers or officers attending to visitors/customers. Some of these officers at times, shout at customers or use foul languages without any caution, particularly when their superior officers are not within the hearing distance. They often show rudeness and marked indifference to the need of the customers, which does not augur well for the organizational growth and development.

It is also established by Abraham (1998), that interpersonal relationships have both positive and negative effects on workers of the same level, or different levels, and between workers and management. It may also increase goodwill of such organization and invariably more patronage by customers.

Interestingly, emotion has a lot to do with interpersonal relationship. In fact, emotions are acquiring an overwhelming importance, as service quality becomes a competitive differentiator. Emotional labour could be defined as the efforts, planning and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transaction (Morris and Feldman, 1996).

It has been defined by Maslach and Leiter's (1997) as systematic disconnection between a person's true self and their expectations about their work as opposed to what they actually found themselves experiencing at work. It has been discovered that individuals' suffering from burnout vary largely in their emotional reaction to certain threat.

Interpersonal relationship is the relationship between employee and employer; and employee and customer. It is the relationship between and within the units or group in a workplace. Rafael (1998) stated that, interpersonal relationship therefore involves skills of better listening, effective human relations and communication with customers and co-workers.

Rafael and Sultton (1991) believed that emotions have a lot to do with interpersonal relationship, since they expressed the feelings that emotions are acquiring an overwhelming importance, as service quality becomes a competitive differentiator in the work place and in any human endeavours. Workers are therefore expected to display certain emotions during service encounter/delivery.

Emotional labour according to Moris and Feldman (1996) could also be the efforts, planning and control needed to express during interpersonal transactions. They believed that this definition would be more accurately described as the management of the feelings one displays to other in the course of doing one's job. Zapf (2002) states that jobs involving emotional labour are those that require face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact with the public or customer. This requires the worker to produce an emotional state in another person. For instance, hotel attendants are encouraged to create good rapport and cheer in lodger. He believed that most times, this emotional labour involves surface acting in which workers suppress their real feelings and instead, present emotions on the surface that they do not actually feel but put on a façade as if they feel them. This according to Brotheridge & Grandy (2002), result into burnout and emotional exhaustion.

Despite these recent theoretical advances, few attempts have been made in Nigeria to empirically measure these variables. In any organization today, either small or big, more importantly where customers are served, service delivery is affected by the degree of interpersonal relationship that exist in the work place among workers of different cadre or between units.

In developed countries like Britain and America, interpersonal relationships have affected service delivery and reaction of workers to issues at work. Burnout and emotional labour that workers are subjected to had been used to produce the likely customer service strategies used by employees in interpersonal relationship. Interpersonal relationships have both positive and negative effects on the work as well as on the workers on different levels. It could also create conflictual situation between workers and management. On the other hand, bad interpersonal relationship could result in reduction in productivity, whereas, positive interpersonal relationship could lead to increase in productivity and congenial atmosphere and also increase goodwill of such organization. Things are not different in Nigeria as we experience in the developed country. Customers' service industries in Nigeria also experience both positive and negative effect of interpersonal relationship, which is dependent on the accumulated burnout and the manner in which we manage emotions.

Review of Related Literature

Miller and Smith (2007) said that interpersonal relationship involves social association, connections or affiliations between two or more people or relationship that exist between employers and employees and between customers and employees in the work or in the course of transacting business. Relationship can be regarded in term of the rewards people may potentially receive in alternative relationship; as expression of our human need to love and be loved; an attachment developed from childhood, which will continue, although its always changing.

Interpersonal relationship are of various kinds – partners or co-workers i.e. profession or co-worker, kinship relationship, i.e. blood relation, platonic lover i.e. friendship without sexual affair, formalized relationship i.e. marriage, non-formalized living together without marriage, etc.

Brotheridge and Grandey (2002), believe that behaviours are guided by the invisible hand of norms for appropriate behaviour or expression or expectations that are established by organization. Across a number of occupational roles, the act of expressing socially desirable emotions during service transactions is the basis for emotional labour when they regulate their emotional display in an attempt to meet organizationally based expectations specific to their roles.

Rationalist had the view that people are behaving rationally, they collect and evaluate information systematically and make decisions based on an objective analysis of different alternatives. Ogunniran and Umunnakwe (2001) are of the view that people are ruled primarily by their emotions, some of which are uncontrollable.

In expressing the desired emotion, employees may experience emotional dissonance. This occurs when feelings differ from expressed emotions owing to incompatibility between organizationally based expectations and actual feelings help by the workers. According to Morris and Feldman (1996), emotional labour does not always involve or lead to emotional dissonance. Emotional labour had more to do with managing the appropriate emotions rather than faking. Adelman (1995) posited that there are no "high or low" emotional labour jobs, but there are conditions that influence the extent to which employees engage in emotional labour.

Despite these recent theoretical advances, few attempts have been made to develop measures of emotional labour. Burton (1992), measured employee perceptions of the requirements to express positive emotions and suppress negative emotions as part of one's work role. Diefendoff and Ricahrd (2003) asserted that emotions occur in two ways; the surface acting and deep acting. They further submitted that the two ways affect employees differently. According to them, surface acting involves 'pushing down', one's authentic expression of self in favour of an emotion mask, whereas, deep acting involves 'pumping up', by trying to bring the required and one's true feeling into alignment.

Morris and Feldman (1996) posited that the frequency, intensity, duration and variety of emotional expression would have posited, negative or non-existent relationships with each other. Specifically, frequent emotional displays would limit their duration and intensity. Frequency and verity would be unrelated and variety

would rise as the duration and intensity as emotional display also rise.

Maslack, Scjaufch and Marek (1993) stated that, burnout is the index of the dislocation between what people are and what they have to do. Burnout according to them represents erosion in values, dignity, spirit and will – an erosion of the human soul.

They also defined burnout as the state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by unrealistic high aspirations illusory and impossible goals. They believed that, it is not the fault of the worker that they experience burnout, but rather, that the strong impact of the work environment mitigates either towards promoting it in a particular setting. They gave six systematic sources of burnout which include: work overload, lack of control, insufficient reward, unfairness’ breakdown of a sense of community and value conflict.

James, S. (2001) in his theory of compensation stated that, if a worker is treated unfairly while other colleagues are treated fairly, since the employees live in the world of comparison, the one treated unfairly will develop cognitive dissonance”. If this treatment continues for a long period, such employee’s burnout will increase. According to him, psychologists use the term “cognitive dissonance” to describe a situation in which a person experience something that he or she neither expects nor desire to experience is unpleasant, an individual will behave in some ways expected to reduce the dissonance. A person that is cheated in this way and such cheating is repeated over the years, would in no doubt experience a burnout.

Based on the foregoing, the following research questions are generated for the purpose of this research work.

Objectives

This study therefore, is set out to empirically investigate how emotional labour and burnout can influence positively the interpersonal relationships of employee and their employer. The study will be useful for organizational managers and employers in the area of reduction of incidence of conflict in the work place, while reference could also be drawn for future research work in this area.

Research Questions

1. What are the combined effects of emotional labour and burnout on customer service employees’ interpersonal relationship?
2. What is in relative contribution of emotional labour and burnout to customer service employees’ interpersonal relationship?

Methodology

Participants: The participants used for this study were 200 customer service employees drawn from Gateway Hotels, Dusmar residential Hotel, Continental Suite, Power Holding Company Nigeria and The Federal Medical Centre all in Abeokuta metropolis of Ogun State.

Instrument: The instruments used for this study were:

- i) Interpersonal Relationship Scale (IRS) developed by the researcher and validated via test-retest technique.
- ii) Burnout scale by Maslach (1984) which was adopted for use; and
- iii) Emotional Labour Scale by Pratti (2204) which was also adopted for use.

Procedure for Data Collection

The instruments were personally administered to the participants in their different places of work within a period of five weeks, though, there was no time limit given but an average of fifteen (15) minutes was spent with each participant this way, a hundred percent of it were returned.

Method of Data Analysis

The responses were subjected to statistical analysis using Multiple Regression Analysis with all the variables entered into the model the same time.

Table 1: Description of General Data of the Study Variables

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpersonal Relations	Emotional Labour	Burnout
Interpersonal Relations	200	31.1750	3.41212	1.00	-.339	-.010
Emotional Labour	200	39.6900	7.45397	-.039	1.000	-.014
Burnout	200	24.2950	9.89076	-.10	-.014	1.000

Table 1 above indicated that there is a negative relationship between interpersonal relations and emotional labour, although not too significant ($r = -.039$; $p > .05$), also a negative but insignificant relationship was also observed for interpersonal relations and burnout ($r = -.010$; $p > .05$). Emotional labour and burnout are also negatively related ($r = -.014$; $p > .05$).

Hypothesis One

There is no significant combined contribution of emotional labour and burnout on customer-service employees' interpersonal relationship.

Data were subjected to analysis using the Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) with all the variables entered into the model at the same time. Results of the multiple regression analysis that have been tested for significance are presented in Table 2 which indicates the regression the regression coefficients and the analysis of variance.

Table 2: Model summary of the combined contributions of emotional labour and burnout on interpersonal relations.

A one way analysis of variance for emotional labour, burnout and interpersonal relations.

	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sign
Regression	3.724	2	1.862	159	.853(a)
Residual	2313.151	197	11.742		
Total	2316.875	199			

R = .040

R² = .002

R² (adj) = -.009

(a) Predictors: (Constant), Burnout, emotional labour

(b) Dependent variable interpersonal relations

The results in table 2 revealed that there is no significant combined contribution of emotional labour and burnout on customer service employees interpersonal relationships ($r = .040$; $R^2 = .002$; $R^2_{(adj)} = -.009$; $F_{(2,197)} = .159$; $p > .05$). The null hypothesis of no significant combined contribution of emotional labour and burnout on customer service employees' interpersonal relationship was accepted by the findings of this study. This implies that emotional labour and burnout would not combine to predict interpersonal relationship among customer service employees as only 0.2 per cent of the variance in interpersonal relationship among customer service employees are accounted for by the combination of emotional labour and burnout.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relative contribution of emotional labour and burnout on customer service employees' interpersonal relations.

Data were subjected to analysis using Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) with all the variables entered into the model at the same time. Results of the multiple regression analysis that have been tested for significance at .05 level indicating the Beta Coefficient and t-ratio are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Beta coefficient is the relative contribution of emotional labour and burnout on interpersonal relationship of Customer Service Employees

	Unstandardized Coefficient			Standardized	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	31.968	1.452		22.011	.000
Emotional	-.018	.033	-.39	-.546	.585
Burnout	-.004	.025	-.010	-.144	.886

Dependent Variable; Interpersonal relations

Predictor – emotional labour and interpersonal relationship of customer service employee.

The results in table 3 above showed that there is no significant relative contribution of emotional labour and burnout on customer service employees' interpersonal relationship. However, burnout was more potent ($B = -.004$; $t = -.144$; $p > .05$) in the prediction of interpersonal relationship than emotional labour ($B = -.018$; $t = -.546$; $p > .05$).

The null hypothesis is no significant relative contribution of emotional labour and burnout was accepted by this finding.

DISCUSSION

The result of table 2 which provides answer to research question 1 indicated that 0.2 percent of the variance in interpersonal relationship among customers service employees' are accounted for by the combination of emotional labour and burnout ($R = 0.40$). Thus, emotional labour and burnout would not combine to predict interpersonal relationship among customer service employees. These findings are at variance with theoretical proposition that emotional labour and burnout will affect employees' interpersonal relationship (Marshall and Leiters, 1997; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). This might be as a result of the diverse respondents who work in customer service units but in different settings (hotels, fuel stations, ministries, et al). It is likely that the result would have been otherwise that is, significant and tally with theoretical positions if all respondents were to be working as customer service employees' in the setting.

More importantly, the settings and conduciveness of organizational environment could also serve as a major determinant in shaping the workers' attitude, disposition and dedication to work. Workers in a more conducive and fulfilling environment might be emotionally stable and plan very well than those in an environment that are not conducive and customer friendly.

The result of table 3 showed that burnout was more potent in the prediction of interpersonal relationship than emotional labour which was quite revealing. This is because literature (Brotheridge, et al 2002) argued that burnout is an offshoot of emotional labour, so ordinarily one would have thought that emotional labour would have predicted interpersonal relationship more than burnout. However, this result corroborates previous studies of Adelman (1995), Brotheridge & Grandey, (2002) that burnout and emotional labour will affect interpersonal relationship though one may predict it more than the other.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study have revealed that the independent variables have a negative correlation and do not regress with the criterion measure of interpersonal relationship. It clearly revealed that positive interpersonal relationship is a determinant favor in any business enterprises and in every human endeavours. It determines the success and otherwise of any business outfit globally.

Based on the above, business executives should always strive to make business environment conducive and challenging so that workers could be creative and innovative in their relationship with both the customers and the employers of labour.

Organisational managers must also see their staff as partners in the course of discharging the organizational services to the customers and therefore enhance in them the spirit of belongingness.

Every organization chief executive must see training in human and public relations as part and parcel of the organizational responsibilities to their staff.

Wages and salaries administration should be commensurable to the services provided by the staff so that their motivational drives could be sustained while their commitment to the organization could be enhanced.

Organizational managers should therefore ensure good interpersonal relationship in the workplace, as this will enhance customer service employees' productivity.

In teaching / learning environment interpersonal relationship is also very essential. It is believed that student's academic performance or behaviours are the function of the beliefs they make about themselves and about their academic potentialities. As a result, students difficulties in basic academic skills are often directly related to their failures, this may not be true always. Teachers/student relationship plays a big role in the academic achievement of a child. Teachers should elevate and enlighten students under learning processing because they possess the power to help and influence them towards their academic performances, abilities and disabilities, strength and weakness of every learning processes. Teachers should also be able to assist students in identifying and understanding themselves even from their earlier stages in life, whereby increasing the productivity of manpower in the society and also contributing to the development of a nation.

This can only happen if teachers cultivate a positive interpersonal relationship towards his/her students. This they can do, by taking on a role of a friend, a motivator, a counsellor, a surrogate parent, a confidant, a pleasant personality, someone who is creative with a lot of innovation and who can create a conducive and challenging environment for the enhancement of productive learning to take place.

Research in the field of industrial relations should extend this study further by looking at the variables in a single setting and perhaps adding another independent variable to see its influence on the criterion measure.

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