

The Effects of Emotional Dissonance and Employee's Empowerment on Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction Perception: Customer Level Analysis

*YUHANIS AB. AZIZ

Department of Hospitality and Recreation Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Putra Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The performance of customer contact employees is essential in ensuring the success or failure of the service exchange. Employees' personal conduct and attitude play an important role in affecting customer's awareness of the quality of service delivered. This study contributes to the current body of work in the service marketing area by investigating four major constructs; Empowerment, Emotional Dissonance, Service quality and Customer satisfaction and their relationships. The sample comprises of hotel customers. The data was collected using a qualitative interview technique. Findings indicate that empowerment has a relationship with emotional dissonance and empowerment may also have significant influence in managing employees' emotions at a workplace. Results also reveal that there is a positive relationship between empowerment, service quality and customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Empowerment; Emotional Dissonance, Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Currently, overwhelming researches have been dedicated to the study of service quality and customer satisfaction in various areas of the services industry. The hotel industry has become one of the most popular industries to study service quality due to the dynamic nature of the industry and the constant demanding

*Corresponding author. Email: anis@econ.upm.edu.my

Any remaining errors or omissions rest solely with the author(s) of this paper.

nature of its customers. Obviously, service encounters between the service providers and customers demand that the service provider meets the needs of the customers in order to satisfy their needs and make them happy with the transaction. This has required service providers to perform at their best level as their performances are evaluated by the customers and would determine whether or not they were happy with the service delivered. Indeed, the performance of the service provider or employees will be a key factor in customer evaluation and comparison with expectations in deciding whether or not they are satisfied with the service.

Accordingly, it is vital that the service provider ensure that whatever is delivered can delight and make the customers happy. However, that would not be an easy task for every service provider. There are many issues that may limit them from performing as required and the best they can. They may not be able to perform well if the power that is given to them is restricted, or if they are not allowed to make simple decisions or if they only have restricted flexibility in their jobs. On the other hand, the levels of their service may also be affected if they are not in a positive mood to do their job. These conditions may have some impact on the value of quality that they deliver which may well have some influence on the customer's evaluation and possible dissatisfaction.

Previous researches have provided evidence and proposed that empowerment of employees may benefit their performances in various ways; such as motivating the employees, enhancing job satisfaction, increasing organisational commitment and being more responsive to customers' needs. All of this could have a direct influence on their performance which can be directly linked to the levels of service quality in service delivery to customers. In addition, employees who are in a positive state of mind may contribute a positive impact to the service outcome. And this may create further positive conditions for the employees to perform better as they are in a better mood to serve the customers. However, direct linkages between empowerment, emotions, service quality and customer satisfaction have not been empirically tested. There is a dearth of research on this issue from the perspective of customers. It is crucial to look at this issue from a customer's point of view as they are the ones who evaluate the performance of the employee and judge the quality delivered. Such research is important for hotel managers and practitioners alike, as they would be able to determine the importance of empowerment and the impact that it may have on service quality, more importantly on customer satisfaction based on the customer's perspective, which is valuable.

Literature Review

The performance of customer contact employees is essential in ensuring the success or failure of the service exchange (Bowen, 1990; Levitt, 1981) and employees' personal conduct and attitude plays an important role in affecting customer's awareness of the quality of service delivered (Bowen and Schneider, 1985, Brady

and Cronin, 2001). The significance of service quality and customer satisfaction is widely debated in marketing literature. These two constructs are central to service marketing literature and to the success of any organisation because both are key to customer loyalty, customer retention and ultimately improved organisational performance (Anderson *et al.*, 1994; Heskett, 1997; Heskett *et al.*, 1994). Further, though there is substantial literature discussing the impact of managing employees on service quality and customer satisfaction there is less known about the impact of management initiatives such as empowerment on service quality and customer satisfaction from the customer's perspective. In addition to this, it is assumed that competitive advantage and continuing survival can only be accomplished by establishing an emotional bond with the customers (Jain and Jain, 2005). In relation to service marketing, service employees are regularly required to express certain emotions as part of their job (Grayson, 1998). Yet, not much research has been done to investigate the relationships between employee's emotions and its impact on the customers. It could then be argued that customer contact employees should possess and deliver this emotional bond by displaying the right emotions to ensure that customers remain happy and satisfied with the service provided.

Emotional Labour and Emotional Dissonance

Emotional labour is a relatively new concept that has been given attention only in recent years. Employers' efforts to shape workers' emotions and emotional displays have become an important focus of organizational research (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987; Sutton, 1991; Sutton and Rafaeli, 1988; Van Maanen and Kunda, 1989). Arlie Hochschild introduced the notion of emotional labour in her book, *The Managed Heart*, as the act of expressing socially desired emotions during service transactions (Hochschild, 1983). Emotional labour occurs when; expressed emotions satisfy display rules, but clash with inner feelings. Emotional labour also refers to the labour that goes beyond the physical or mental skills needed to deliver quality service. According to Zeithaml and Bitner (1996), emotional labour needs the person involved to deliver smiles, make eye contact, show sincere interest and engage in friendly conversation with people who are essentially strangers and who may or may not ever be seen again. They involve human elements such as personal demeanour, courtesy, empathy (Lovelock, 2001), friendliness and responsiveness (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996). These elements are directed towards customers who require huge amounts of emotional labour from frontline employees who are responsible for the organization. This is true since service encounters entail more than just correct technical execution of a task (Lovelock, 2001).

The most popular conceptualization of emotional labour was introduced by Hochschild (1983). It was followed by three other highly influential organizational theorists namely Ashforth and Humphrey (1993), Morris and Feldman (1996a) and Grandey (2000). Their conceptualisation has added to the confusing nature of

defining emotional labour. Recent efforts in renewing and redeveloping the conceptualization were made by other authors like Zapf (2002) and Glomb and Tews (2004).

In general, each of these conceptualisations made judgements that emotions are being managed at work so that the display rules could be met as indicated by the outcomes of the emotional labour. For example, Hochschild (1983, p.7) was interested in “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display,” while other authors focused on the expressive behaviour because this they perceived to be organizationally desired and relevant (see Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993 and Morris and Feldman, 1996a). This conceptual ambiguity will still continue although every conceptualization has in general the underlying assumption that emotional labour involves managing emotions and emotional expression. This is consistent with the organizational or occupational display rules.

The above conceptual discussion on emotional labour serves as an explanation of the organizational rules of conduct and general social rules of emotion in organizations that reflect the demand of work itself (handling items) and the culture that surrounds it (Thompson and McHugh, 2002). Mann (1999) however, offered a rather practical approach in understanding emotional labour, where in her discussion she defines what she calls the ‘have a nice day’ (HAND) way of life in the service sector. Essentially, Mann’s concept highlights the fact that it is not always possible for the emotional display to match the individual’s feelings and it is not always possible that this situation coincides with social and organisational expectations. Mann categorized emotional labour into three areas:

- ***Emotional harmony*** - where ‘displayed emotion is the same as expected emotion and felt emotion’.
- ***Emotional dissonance*** - where ‘displayed emotion is the same as expected emotion but different from felt emotion’.
- ***Emotional deviance*** - where ‘displayed emotion is the same as felt emotion but different from expected emotion’.

(Mann, 1999: 68-69)

Of all the three categories, emotional dissonance is seen as the most relevant area where ‘true emotional labour’ is involved (Thompson and McHugh, 2002, p 288). Their statement implies that emotional dissonance is seen as similar to emotional labour. This suggests a simplistic view of the construct of emotional dissonance as opposed to previous researchers.

It appears that emotional dissonance may create problems for individuals. Accordingly, the challenging nature of emotional dissonance has received the most attention in research on emotional labour (Morris and Feldman, 1996a). Even though substantial evidence has shown that emotional dissonance results in giving a more negative rather than positive impact, there are also positive consequences

from experiencing emotional dissonance given the right situation and suitable organization.

Emotional Dissonance and Empowerment

The link between emotional dissonance and empowerment was first envisaged by Lashley (2001a) where he contended that the emotional aspect of empowerment plays a significant role and has/gives impacts on the value of emotion. Lashley theoretically argued that the positive feeling that is possessed by the empowered employee will help in generating positive feelings in employees where this could most likely offer some help to employees, especially before they experience 'emotional dissonance'. Essentially, employees need to engage in a certain degree of emotion in order to generate the appropriate feelings (Conger and Kanungo, 1988, Lashley, 1999) and to follow the required display rules (Hochschild, 1983; Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Morris and Feldman, 1996a; Grandey, 2000). The examples from past research has evidenced that service employees, like air stewardesses involved in the 'commercialization of feeling' (Hochschild, 1983) give the impression of loving the job which requires them to manage appropriate feelings to satisfy customers. In relation to this, Lashley (1999) argued that employees would be able to manage the required emotions if they are given a chance to facilitate and sense their own power and the significance of their role in the service transaction.

The empowerment of employees appears to be capable of generating feelings of commitment to the service encounter (Barbee and Bott, 1991). Therefore, a range of initiatives such as autonomous workgroups, quality circles, suggestion schemes, job enrichment (Lashley, 1997), joint consultation, employee shared ownership and communications programmes (Kelly and Kelly, 1990) could be introduced and implemented for employees as a key to accomplishing organizational strategies. Empowerment is described as working arrangements which engage empowerment at an emotional level (Conger and Kanungo, 1988). Accordingly, various forms of empowerment that are introduced for employees in order to enable them to make some decisions, take control over their jobs and deliver greater enthusiasm will result in increased sense of ownership of the service encounter which leads to smooth generation of the required emotional display (Lashley, 2001b).

Findings from past research support the above practice and suggest that organizations should enrich service jobs to assist the employees to manage their emotions appropriately by allowing more flexibility and providing greater latitude (Morris and Feldman, 1997). Thus, it could be argued that there is a link between empowerment and emotional labour. "Empowerment appears to provide a means of managing people that helps to overcome dissonance and emotional deviance" (Lashley, 2001b, p. 131). He further added that emotional harmony can be attained if

employees are managed using the psychological approach of empowerment. As a result, the more empowered the employees, the less emotional labour will be faced by them. This will then contribute to better organizational effectiveness along with more job satisfaction and more positive impact for the customer.

The nature of emotions in the workplace, plus the benefits and limitations that can be presented to managers attempting to put emotions to work for commercial gain is an important field of study (Lashley, 2001a, 2002, p.255). Furthermore, Thompson, 1998 (in Lashley, 2001a, 2002) advocates that future business success is dependent on the level of 'emotional capital' (at their disposal). It could therefore be argued that emotional labour could be lessened by introducing empowerment to each individual customer contact employee. Thus the foregoing discussion suggests parameters for further research, regarding emotional labour in further detail. While previous research on emotional labour is not advanced both theoretically and empirically, the foregoing discussion suggests parameters for further research worth exploring.

Proposed Model

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between empowerment and emotional dissonance and customer contact employees. The study wants to determine whether these work situations in the hotel sector could assist and enable customer contact employees to provide better work performance in serving their customers.

This study uses a conceptual framework which is developed by drawing on the work of Morris and Feldman (1996a, figure 1) and using the idea of the service profit chain (SPC). This proposed model of emotional dissonance antecedents and consequences (Figure 2) conceptualizes the relationship between customer contact employees and the customers. As noted, the model adapts and combines two models which are antecedents and consequences of the emotional labour model (Morris and Feldman, 1996a, figure 1) and the service profit chain-SPC (Heskett *et al.*, 1994). The SPC model has particular relevance to this study whereby this study is building and developing a model based on the SPC and Morris and Feldman (1996a) model. In addition, the SPC model provides some insights regarding the significant progress in understanding how employees and customers are linked. Bowen and Lawler (1995) suggested an additional link in the model where they claimed that "empowerment is a necessary link in the chain" (p.76).

By doing so, the model extends Morris and Feldman's model and uses ideas from the Service Profit Chain-SPC (Heskett *et al.*, 1994) in order to explore the impact of emotional dissonance, for frontline staff, on service quality and customer satisfaction. It is important to note that, this study is interested in investigating only part of the emotional labour dimensions, with special attention paid to the dimension of emotional dissonance. Emotional dissonance is considered important

in this study because it is seen as the most problematic facet of emotional labour that may cause emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction. Moreover, evidence from past research into emotional dissonance is inconsistent due to mixed findings. Additionally, previous empirical works have mostly concentrated on the area of emotional display and display rules. In relation to this, using Morris and Feldman's model (see figure 1), this study will therefore only focus and test one dimension of emotional labour, which is emotional dissonance. In addition, this study is only interested in certain constructs of the model as the data is collected from the customers but not the employees.

The set of emotional dissonance antecedents that was proposed by Morris and Feldman (1996a), as depicted in Figure 1 (Appendix 1), are assumed to form a basic structure for experiencing emotional dissonance. Using the Morris and Feldman model, the proposed model is extended by replacing its narrow concept of job autonomy with the broader concept of empowerment. Empowerment of employees is said to be able to help employees to control their emotions during service transactions as required by organization which may eventually reduce negative emotions like experiencing emotional dissonance. Job autonomy refers to the degree to which an employee has freedom, independence and discretion in carrying out the tasks of the job (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). Moreover, previous studies have found evidence that emotional labour is significantly less enduring among employees who have greater job autonomy (Adelmann, 1989 in Morris and Feldman 1996a, p 21; Wharton, 1993). In a similar vein, Morris and Feldman (1997) also found a negative relationship between job autonomy and emotional dissonance. This may mean that employees who have more freedom and control over their work environment report fewer conflicts.

These models, (Morris and Feldman and Heskett *et al*) are therefore modified and developed to suit the objectives of the study. Other dimensions in the Morris and Feldman model, such as frequency of emotional display and display rules, have previously been tested by other researchers in various ways (see for example Brotheridge and Lee, 1998 and 2003). These dimensions are forms of the conceptual framework (see Figure 2 in Appendix 2) but are not tested empirically in the current study. Thus, Figure 2 illustrates a complete model of emotional dissonance antecedents and its outcomes that are expected to lead to employee satisfaction and contribute to both customer satisfaction and service quality if the employees are empowered. It shows a model of linkages between the antecedents of emotional dissonance with the inclusion of empowerment as one of the antecedents.

However, as stated earlier, this study is focussed only on the impact of empowerment on emotional dissonance, service quality and customer satisfaction. Having said this, the model acts as a guideline to conduct the study whereby it serves as a background to test several relationships from the customers' perspective. In other words, a subset of the model is extracted to test relationships studied from customers' samples. Essentially, several relationships that are relevant (see dotted

bold line in Figure 2) are tested in this customer study. Thus, this study adapted and used the idea of those two models to construct the framework that underlines the study.

Research Method

Qualitative interviews were undertaken based on the 12 in-depth interviews with customers in selected hotels. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, the researcher conducted individual and face-to-face interviews. The main reason for this approach was because interviews can provide in-depth information and insight into people's inner thoughts and feelings. Moreover, it is felt that interview responses are more revealing. In addition, face-to-face contact would allow the interviewer to build up a relationship of trust, which would encourage respondents to speak freely about their experiences. Customers who participated were ordinary customers who came and stayed at the hotels for various reasons. They received a complete service transaction from the hotels.

Semi structured in-depth interviews using a critical incident approach were used to encourage respondents to focus on the topics being discussed. A critical incident technique (CIT) was employed so that the respondents could recollect any particular relevant incidents that they encountered during the service transaction. CIT is a tool that is able to evaluate the differences between the disparate viewpoints of two or even more respondents' perspectives. Moreover, according to Borg and Gall (1989, p. 387), CIT involves "an in-depth analytical description of an intact cultural scene". Thus, CIT is a useful qualitative research device which can assist in solving the complexity of job behaviour in the social framework. Accordingly, the interview was conducted based on these incidents and related constructs studied in this research were examined. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to one hour and were undertaken at the hotel sites or in a place chosen by the participants. The respondents were reassured that their responses were confidential and anonymous. In addition to hand written notes, all interviews were, with the approval of the participants, audio-recorded to provide accurate data. All interviews were transcribed manually.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves an examination of raw data which requires some ideas and inspiration in order to make the data meaningful, so that any link between the studied constructs can be examined. The analysis of data was conducted by analyzing and identifying the emerging themes from raw data. Thus, it is based on the consistent themes that emerged from individual interviews with respondents. This process is also referred to as "open coding" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) where the emerging themes related to the studied constructs are identified and a provisional

name or category is allocated into which the phenomena observed are grouped. In other words, words, phrases, expressions, and sayings that appear to be in the same category are gathered together in one class. These groups are then progressively modified or altered along with the subsequent stages of analysis. The next stage of analysis entails a thorough examination of the categories identified so that any possible link between the studied constructs can be examined.

Most of the results presented, will be in the form of quotations drawn from the interviews. This is important because quotations provide a link between the researcher and respondents, the only real insights the researcher has into the experience of the hotel front liners and customers that the researcher wishes to understand better (Mostyn, 1985).

Findings

This study offers several important contributions to the theory and practice of service marketing as well as service management. The findings, have presented some interesting outcomes to this study as well as support for several proposed frameworks. The research findings of this study are discussed and presented according to topical themes

Perceived Employees' Empowerment with Emotional Dissonance

The interviews with the customers provided some confirmation of the existence of empowerment in the Malaysian hotel industry. The customers displayed an awareness of the significance of empowerment.

The employees are fairly committed to their work. They are also very flexible. I think maybe because they are empowered at work and have long experience. However, there was one time during my visit where one new girl was not really able to make suggestions to me during service breakdown. Maybe she has rules that she can't break.

Another customer reported that the employees in the hotel seem to have control over their job. The employees were able to provide whatever the customer required during his stay.

The above statements further suggested that employees are empowered to do things during service delivery. In terms of performance, the customer thought that hotel employees were also very kind and serviceable. This statement suggests that there is a possible association between empowerment of employees and emotional dissonance. Employees appeared to be able to display their emotions appropriately due to the high levels of empowerment that they have, which assisted them in managing emotion that helped to reduce emotional dissonance.

The customers found it hard to judge the emotional state of the employees simply because they were aware that internal feelings are not visible. However, customers admitted that the emotional level of employees is reflected in their displayed emotions. One of the customers explained that he knows that the hotel staff are required to show their enthusiasm, courtesy and hospitality towards their service. So far, he confirms that he has had no problems with them. They seem genuinely willing to serve him and give the impression of being faithful to him.

Another customer also shared the same perception where he said:

These people have very kind personality and very friendly manners. I don't think they purposely do it because of being forced by the organisation. Because service with a smile is something that is naturally embedded in any service provider. So I think they are honest to the customers. Otherwise their face will somehow reflect their untrue feeling. Furthermore, nobody can really smile and show a positive attitude for 12 hours long!

The above two statements have provided stronger evidence that employees exercised 'emotion management' when dealing with customers. The customers believed that employees' displayed emotions are genuine and naturally embedded in any service provider. Customers were, apparently, aware that employees manage their emotions well when serving them. Although the above two responses appear to suggest that customers recognised it, emotions displayed by the employees were genuine, due to the employees' personality and positive attitude. However, it may not be sufficient to suggest a link between the two.

Essentially, more evidence from various transactions encountered by customers is required in order to provide stronger evidence for this link. Nevertheless, this suggests that employee's positive emotions have instilled some confidence in the customers where they strongly felt that this situation has enabled the employees to be motivated and committed to work. This also suggested that these types of employees genuinely cared for their guests because they are empowered as described by the same customers earlier. Thus, this advocates that empowered employees seem to impart positive emotions that are required by any service provider and in general by the organisations.

While the extent of dissonance is difficult to assess as one customer noted:

Employees in this hotel are very friendly and very helpful. It really is a pleasure for me to stay in this hotel because their staff are always, as I said earlier, in high spirits and always cheerful when serving me.

This suggests that the absence of obvious dissonance can have positive effects on service evaluations. When asked further why she thought this, she said:

I think these employees are happy to work in this hotel because, from my observation, the work is flexible and they are free to perform their work. Even the receptionist can make decisions without having to refer to the supervisor, unlike in the previous hotel that I stayed. So I think this working environment has encouraged them to be positive, motivated and happier.

Another customer said that the employees are flexible and seem genuine in helping by being flexible.

This statement offered further proof that empowerment of employees can indeed be an essential management tool that could help in shaping employees' emotions. From this story we learnt that employees who are empowered are more willing to serve the customers in a happy spirit and are capable of maintaining positive emotions. Hence, empowerment appears to have a direct link with positive emotions and therefore this could further recommend that positive emotions could reduce the effect of emotional dissonance.

Nevertheless, there is a customer who felt that an employee was not genuine in displaying his/her emotions simply because they felt that their attitude and behaviour reflected the real emotions. One of the customers contends:

I still remember when there was one occasion where this employee was busy talking to another employee when I asked for room upgrading. I waited for few minutes and she finally came to me with a smile. It was not an honest smile. At that time she was not able to upgrade my room because her supervisor was not around. She was not very helpful or friendly at all. Her service was only a smile not more than that and at the same time she made herself look busy when she pretended to look for missing stuff. I think she purposely smiled at me because at least it can make me happy even if she couldn't help me. So it seems like her smile was a perfect excuse and just a package in her work! She was smiling at me but I think at that time she did not like me as well.

Obviously, this customer was not happy with the service that was provided by this employee. She felt strongly that the employee was not being honest with her and not willing to help her at all. She claimed that, the employee showed her fake emotions simply because she was requested to do so and a smile was just part of her service. This account suggests that the customer perceived this type of employee to be not genuinely happy serving them and tending to perform just the basic service.

She further claimed:

"As I mentioned to you, their service was very slow and they were snobbish too. They looked very unwilling to serve me. I could really see it from her facial expression"

As described in her story, this customer found that employees were not motivated and not willing to serve her. However, she agreed that the employee's behaviour was perhaps because of lack of authority and decision making. She also added that the employee was insincere and provided service because she was paid to. Her statement seems to argue that less empowered employees lack motivation at work. This suggests that underpowered employees are normally not motivated and thus this affects their performance at work. Therefore, both empowerment and emotional dissonance appears to have the potential to influence evaluations of service encounters.

Another respondent shared a slightly similar story but with mixed perceptions. She found that an employee was nice and friendly most of the time. She experienced this when the service transaction was smooth. But the employees' attitude was reversed when she lodged some complaints. She reported:

These employees are very friendly and pleasant people if you don't give any problem for them to solve. They will greet you and smile at you all the time. If you ask any questions or need any direction, they respond to you immediately. They are happy to guide and tell you until you understand. But this situation changes when you complain or report any problem to them. I just don't get it! Why do they have to do this? They are there to serve us. Their service is not only a smile and guidance in the right direction, their service is to provide whatever that we need. They are not flexible at all.

The above situation suggested that the employees felt that complaints or requests from customers are a burden to them because of maybe, their limited power at work. They possibly were not given independence and decision-making authority at work. When the above situation happens, they regard it as a burden because they are not able to make their own evaluations and judgements. This situation is forcing them to get approval from management which causes them to react in a different way.

Basically, responses from customers in relation to the relationship between empowerment and emotional dissonance have offered some support that empowerment appears to help employees to manage their emotions well in the service transaction, as perceived by customers. A direct association between empowerment and emotional dissonance is however less apparent.

Perceived Employee Empowerment with Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Most of the customers viewed the service that was provided by the employees positively. Due to the interest of this research, more focus was given to the provision

of service quality by the service provider, compared to the tangible aspects of the service. Evidence of provision of good quality of service is revealed below:

I was very pleased with the service that was provided by the hotel staff. As I mentioned earlier, the staff are very helpful and friendly. They are more than willing to help my family and me.

Another customer also disclosed a much similar experience:

They provide very good and efficient service. They are also very prompt and professional in delivering their service. When I had problem, they showed sincerity in solving it. I am happy with them

Obviously customers were happy and pleased with the service that was provided by the employees. In a similar vein, another customer experienced what she called "high spirit team" where she found that the majority of the employees in the hotel were very motivated and in high spirits where they seemed to be very helpful and willing to help all the guests at all times. For example she said:

Staff in this hotel are extremely helpful and flexible. They always try their best to satisfy the customer. I had a series of good experiences from checking in until checking out. During my second night at this hotel I had problems where my baby was very sick and I was so worried because my husband was not there. One of the supervisors rang the local clinic and called the doctor to come. I was so shocked. All I wanted to know was just the clinic opening hours and the address. But they went further to really provide excellent service. I was really pleased with them! Their spirit is overwhelming.

The above example obviously suggests to us that highly motivated staff, with a high degree of empowerment, could exceed the customer's expectations where this situation strongly proved to be efficient in satisfying the customers. "Delighting, rather than just satisfying the customer is seen to be a positive surprise to the customer" (Williams and Buswell, 2003, p 62). Her experience provided evidence that customers perceived a link between empowerment and the quality of service received. Thus, it is clear that not everyone in the frontline is capable of doing this unless they are empowered in their jobs and they are in an empowerment culture. This example is clear evidence that provides the link between empowerment of employees with the provision of service quality which contributes to customer satisfaction.

Evidently as discussed earlier, empowered employees appeared to deliver good quality service. From the stories above, it is possible to establish a link between

empowerment, positive emotions and service quality. It seems that these elements have strong relationships with each other.

Accordingly, it is expected that when customers stayed, they would obviously experience the service. The following description verifies that empowered employees are undeniably competent in meeting the needs and requirements of the hotel customers and ultimately play a role in the customer's satisfaction.

As one customer admitted earlier, she was very happy and pleased with both the employees and the services provided to her. Her expression throughout the interview highlighted to us that she was very satisfied with the service and very impressed with the extra services that were supplied to her. This account suggests that the customer felt that positive emotions that overwhelmed them appeared to be more important than the service that she received or even the tangible aspects of the hotel. The whole illustration of employee's high spirits, enthusiasm and cheerfulness seems to be the main elements that had long term effects on the customer. This situation could perhaps create a sense of loyalty in the customers where they will come back to the organisation as they have memories of the personal touch delivered by the empowered employees in their minds. Consequently, emotionally satisfied customers may develop a strong feeling of association and ownership (Jain and Jain, 2005) which eventually give benefits to the organisations.

Another customer has also strongly stated his satisfaction with the whole service in the hotel. He revealed that during his first visit to that hotel he was treated very well and since then he has stayed loyal to it. He admitted that the employees were very concerned about everything.

"They still remember my preferences each time I come and stay. I don't have to specify and explain to them what I like or prefer because they get it done in advance. My long journey is worth it when you receive this kind of welcome. There was one time when I checked in, I was surprised by them when they sent in a cream cake to my room at 12 midnight because of my birthday. I was so thrilled to learn all this. So I am very satisfied with this hotel, especially with their people"

Added evidence of customer satisfaction is clearly explained by this customer. Again, the warmth and concern of the employees become central to the customer. It is every individual touch that the customer received that made him value the employees very much. This provides a clear picture that employees should manage their emotions and be sincere when facing the customers because this feature is essential in ensuring customer satisfaction. In addition to this, this account demonstrated that the high quality service provided to him by the hotel has made him stay loyal to it. Thus, service quality has evidently been confirmed to be an important factor in retaining customers which leads to the increase of the organisational performance (Ennew and Binks, 1996).

Another customer also expressed her overall satisfaction towards the hotel but she at the same time was also disappointed with the level of service and certain features that were provided by the employees. She argued;

“Overall, this hotel is alright, I have a good time here. This is my fourth visit in the last three years. So I would expect them to recognise me and know my preferences when I check-in. I mean, I'm not their VIP but I pay for the service. No doubt they seem to acknowledge certain things but not everything. I especially felt very disappointed with the incident that happened at the counter during the checking-in. I didn't blame the front desk staff because he just did his task. I just wonder why higher level staff didn't give some authority to the front-desk staff to do their job. Because this situation is really annoying the guest. Anyway, overall I am quite satisfied with other services because their staff are very friendly and helpful.”

The evidence from this customer showed that the inefficiency of service, that is the delay in getting approval from higher ranking employees, can be a source of dissatisfaction to the customer. When compared to the previous two stories, where customers were clearly satisfied with the levels of service and the warmth of the employees, this account suggests that this feature is not sufficient because the basic service is still important to them. This situation could be improved if the front liners were given more freedom and are empowered at work. The waiting time could be avoided because the employee could make their own judgement and use the given authority to solve any problems that are encountered by them.

However, there were some customers who were not satisfied with their stay especially with the service provider. One claimed that the employees were not sincere in solving her problem and showed no interest at all in her. She alleged:

“I think these people are simply ignorant towards us guests. They didn't realise that we can read their mind. From the incident that I told you, I'm sure they are not sincere with me. They thought that their fake smile can really make me satisfied with their explanation. I would say that the service that was provided is poor, and they shouldn't call themselves a four star hotel.”

The above excerpt suggested that displays of emotions are indeed apparent and thus observed by the customers. This has caused customer dissatisfaction due to the negative emotions displayed which then leads to bad service. Accordingly, customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction is largely dependent on the emotional climate of the service transaction. Her statement confirmed that employees who are not empowered at work showed very little interest in the customers.

Discussion and Implication for Practitioners

One of the primary objectives of this study is to examine the relationship between empowerment and emotional dissonance. The findings suggest that empowered employees are able to reduce their emotional dissonance. As such empowerment is seen as a way of managing emotions. Thus, from this scenario, it is argued that empowerment of employees could help employees in managing the right emotions at work; specifically in reducing their emotional dissonance.

Thus, based on this finding, it could be argued that customers perceived empowered employees to be able to control their emotions properly which helps them to reduce their level of emotional dissonance. Clearly, empowerment of employees is an important element for maintaining a positive workplace environment. This finding appears to lend support to Bowen and Lawler's (1992) argument where they claimed that empowerment should be added to the service profit chain link (Heskett *et al.*, 1994) in order to maximise benefits from the link. Additionally, this also provides some support to Lashley's (2001a) assertion where he believes that empowerment is an important tool in the organisation that could help the employees to manage their emotions appropriately and efficiently.

In a similar vein the notion of empowerment highlights the fact that previous researchers have claimed that a degree of autonomy or greater control could alleviate the feeling of emotional labour, more specifically emotional dissonance (Hochschild, 1993; Wharton, 1993; Korczynski, 2002). Job autonomy is part of the empowerment because autonomy describes the level of independence and discretion available to the employees (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). In other words, job autonomy leads to greater perceived control and greater empowerment.

The findings of the study have provided strategic implications for hotel managers in relation to the management of frontline employees within the service encounter context. The result of the study implies that managers need to pay serious attention to managing employees, particularly frontline employees, in order to meet organizational requirements. As hotels are searching for better ways to manage employees effectively, many are realizing that empowering the employees may provide significant value that can be created through involvement and participation at work. But what managers do not realize is that the levels of empowerment given to the employees are not sufficient in effectively assisting the employees' performance at work. Consequently, the findings confirmed that empowerment of employees as perceived by customers has significant impact on the employees' emotions; in particular, in reducing the negative impact that is emotional dissonance.

This has, therefore, provided evidence that it is important for managers to sufficiently and appropriately empower their employees so that the benefits of empowerment can be achieved and, more importantly, the empowerment can act as a strategy for managers in managing employees' emotions effectively. Several initiatives can be introduced in order to achieve and establish an empowerment

culture in the organisation. These would include employing several management initiatives such as using different forms of empowerment through participation, involvement, commitment and delayering (Lashley, 2001a); and, establishing more positive attitudes towards empowering employees such as granting more support and trust to lower ranking staff, and encouraging them to be more open and active in the organisation.

The study also evidenced the important role of empowerment on service quality and customer satisfaction. The foregoing examples obviously suggest to us that highly motivated staff, with a high degree of empowerment, could exceed the customer's expectations where this situation strongly proved to be efficient in satisfying the customers. It appears that empowerment plays a vital role in promoting service quality and customer satisfaction. Evidently as discussed in the previous section, empowered employees appeared to deliver good quality service. From the stories above, it is possible to establish a link between empowerment, positive emotions and service quality as well as customer satisfaction. It seems that these elements have a strong inter-relationship.

One of the essences of the above discussion is, therefore, that this research has added to the body of knowledge and lands some support to Bowen and Lawler's (1995, p.75) argument that empowerment should be included in the service-profit chain line (Heskett *et al.*, 1997). Evidently, there is indeed a relationship between employees' and customers' satisfaction, as what they term as "satisfaction mirror", lucidly asserts that the success of the business in the organisation is related to employees' satisfaction that is reflected in customers' satisfaction.

Limitations and Future Research

First, greater knowledge on various levels or various involvements of empowerment can be further included. For example, we can apply a research method that enables research in investigating various involvements of empowerment as suggested by Spreitzer (1995, 1996). This psychological empowerment of employees may be viewed from these four dimensions which include meaning, competence, self determination and impact.

Second, longitudinal research would further confirm the study's finding where we would be able to see the differences throughout certain durations as the hotel industry is a very dynamic industry that may change in a considerably short period of time. Furthermore, it would greatly contribute to our understanding of its impact on service quality and customer satisfaction as customers' expectations change from time to time.

Finally, this study only provides a sample from a single industry whereby it limits the scope of the findings. Thus, more research should be conducted on other industries so that comparison of the results would be even more worthwhile.

Conclusions

The paper has reported on a study into the empowerment of front-line employees and its impact on employees' emotion practices in hotels organisations in Malaysia. It also investigated the influence of empowerment on other outputs such as service quality and customer satisfaction.

Evidently, data provided by customers have in some ways added to the understanding of the importance of empowerment and managing emotions in the organisation, particularly their effects on customers. More specifically, the data confirmed that empowerment has facilitated employees' management of emotions as perceived by customers. Even though the direct relationship between empowerment and emotional dissonance is rather less clear, the customers' perceptions have however, provided strong evidence that empowerment is indeed an important tool in enabling employees to perform well in the organisations. Equally important is the existence of positive links between empowerment and service quality and customer satisfaction. Similarly, the positive association between perceived service quality and customer satisfaction is also confirmed.

It is evident now that the empowerment of employees is an important management tool in influencing the state of emotions of the employees. This situation is very important in ensuring satisfaction of the employees which in turn supplies high quality of service which contributes to customer satisfaction. It appears now that empowerment has some correlation with reducing the effect of experiencing emotional dissonance and this relationship has had a positive effect on service quality and customer satisfaction.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, E. W., Fornell, C. and Lehmann, D. R. (1994), Customer Satisfaction, Market Share and Profitability, *Journal of Marketing*, **58** (3), 53-66.
- Ashforth, B. E. and Humphrey, R. H. (1993), Emotional Labour in Service Roles: The Influence of Identity, *Academy of Management Review*, **18** (1), 88-115.
- Barbee, C. and Bott, V. (1991), Customer Treatment as a Mirror of Employee Treatment, *Advanced Management Journal*, **5**, 27-31.
- Borg, W. R and Gall, M. D. (1989), *Educational Research: An Introduction* (5th ed). New York: Long Man.
- Bowen, D. E and Schneider, B. (1985), Boundary Spanning Role Employees and the Service Encounter: Some Guidelines for Management and Research in Service Encounter: Managing Employee Customer Interaction in Service Businesses Michael R. Solomon John A. Czepiel, and Carol F. Surprenant, Ed. Lexington, MA: Heath and Company.
- Bowen, D. E. (1990), Interdisciplinary Study of Service: Some Progress, Some Prospects, *Journal of Business Research*, **20** (1), 71-79.

- Brady, M. K. and Cronin, J. J. Jr. (2001), Some New Thoughts on Conceptualising Perceived Quality: A Hierarchical Approach *Journal of Marketing*, **65** (3), 34-49.
- Conger, J. A. and Kanungo, R. B. (1988), The Empowerment Process: Integrating Theory and Practice, *Academy of Management Review*, **13**, 471-82.
- Ennew, C. T. and Binks, M. R. (1996), The Impact of service Quality and Service Characteristics on Customer Retention: Small Businesses and Their Banks in the UK, *British Journal of Management*, **7**, 219-230.
- Grandey, A. A. (2000), Emotion Regulation in the Workplace: A New Way to Conceptualize Emotional Labour, *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, **5**, 95-100.
- Grayson, K. (1998), Customer Responses to Emotional Labour in Discrete and Relational Service Exchange, *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, **9** (2), 126-54.
- Heskett, J. L. (1997), *Service Breakthroughs: Changing the Rules of the GAME*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Heskett, J. L., Jones, T. O., Loveman, G. W., Sasser, W.E. and Schlesinger, L.A. (1994), Putting the Service Profit Chain to Work, *Harvard Business Review*.
- Hochschild, A. R. (1983), *The Managed Heart: Commercialisation of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Jain, R. and Jain, S. (2005), Towards Relational Exchange in Services Marketing: Insight from Hospitality Industry, *Journal of Services Research*, **5** (2), 139-50.
- Kelly, J. and Kelly, C. (1990), Them and Us: Social Psychology and the New Industrial Relations, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, **29** (1), 345-360.
- Lashley, C. (1997), *Empowering Service Excellence: Beyond the Quick Fix*. London: Cassell.
- Lashley, C. (1999), Employee Empowerment in Services: A Framework for Analysis, *Personnel Review*, **28** (3), 169-91.
- Lashley, C. (2001a), *Empowerment: HR Strategies for Service Excellence*, Butterworth Heinemann.
- Lashley, C. (2001b), Feeling Empowered: Emotional Labour or Just a Nice Job? *International Journal of Customer Relationship Management* (September/October), 121-33.
- Levitt, T. (1981), Marketing Intangible Products and Product Intangibles, *Harvard Business Review*, **59**, 256-267.
- Mann, S. (1999), *Hiding What We Feel, Faking What We Don't: Understanding the Role of Emotions at Work*. Dorset, UK: Element Books Limited.
- Morris, A. J. and Feldman, D. C. (1996b), The Impact of Emotional Dissonance on Psychological Well-Being: The Importance of Role Internalization as a Mediating Variable, *Management Research News*, **19** (8), 19-28.
- Morris, A. J. and Feldman, D. C. (1996a), The Dimensions, Antecedents, and Consequences of Emotional Labour, *Academy of Management Journal*, **21** (4), 986-1010.

- Morris, A. J. and Feldman, D. C. (1997), Managing Emotions in the Workplace, *Journal of Managerial Issues*, **9 (3)**, 257-74.
- Mostyn, B. (1985), The Content Analysis of Qualitative Research Data: A Dynamic Approach, In AL (Ed) *The Research Interview: Uses and Approaches*, London: Academic Press.
- Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1990), *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*, Newbury Parks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Thompson, K. (1998), *Emotional Capital*. Oxford: Capstone.

Appendix 1

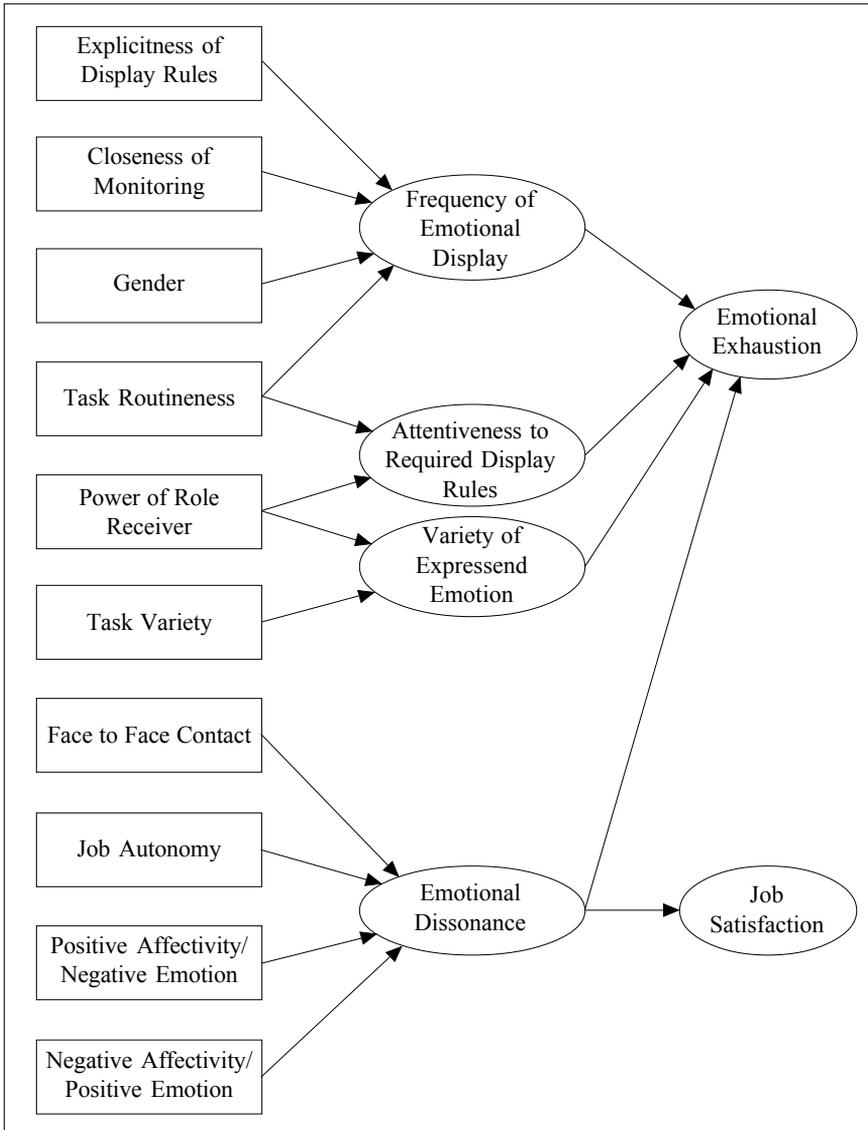


Figure 1: Antecedents and Consequences of Emotional Labour Morris and Feldman (1996a)

Appendix 2

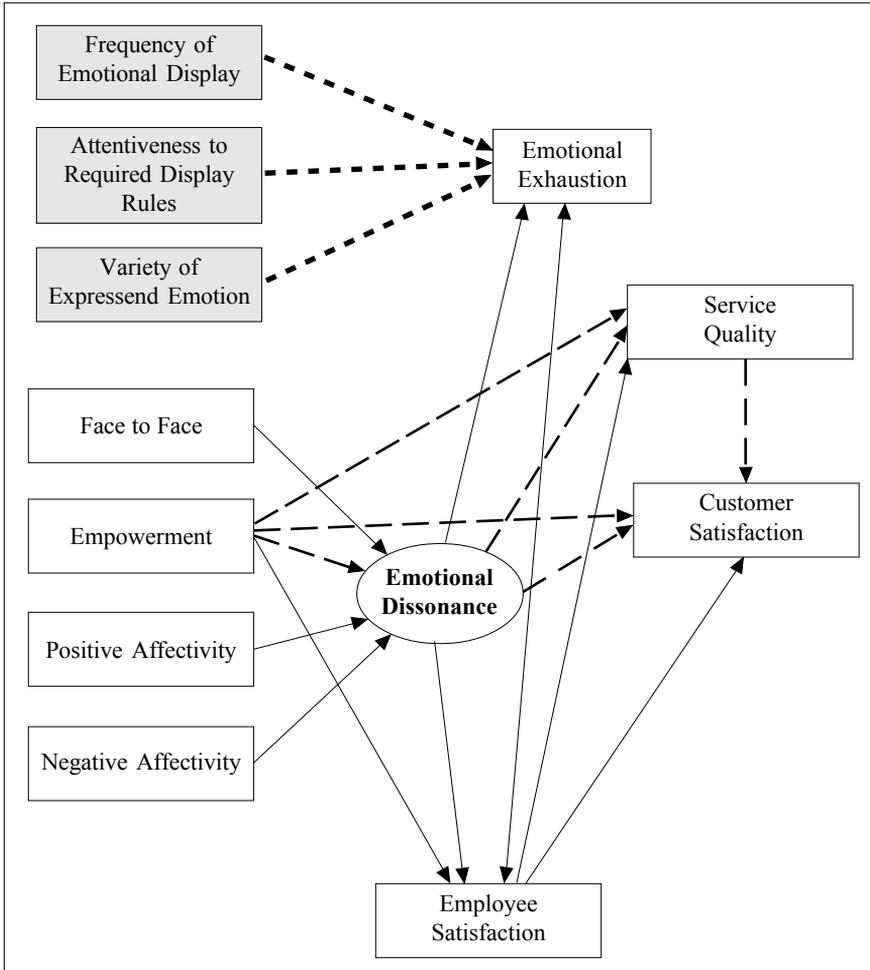


Figure 2 Proposed Conceptual Model