

Restoring Job Satisfaction Through Subjective Well-Being – Interaction Between Organizational Stress and Subjective Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the hypothesis that customer service-oriented employees' positive subjective well-being moderates the decreasing propensity of job satisfaction in circumstances where the organizational stress is perceived. A questionnaire survey was administered to 200 Japanese customer service-oriented employees. The research findings, mean, S.D., Cronbach's alpha, and correlations for variables used in this study are shown. Then, multiple hierarchical regression is used to test the hypotheses. The results show that positive subjective well-being significantly mediates the decrease in job satisfaction propensity in stressful circumstances where employees perceive role ambiguity and role conflict.

Keywords: Job satisfaction, Job performance, Subjective well-being, Customer service-oriented employees, Role ambiguity, Role conflict

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, researchers have focused on the emotions of service-oriented workers (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Wharton, 2009). In service organizations and companies, corporate missions, sales goals, and marketing strategies are realized through the interactions between individual service workers and customers (Donovan et al., 2004; Bettencourt et al., 2001). This study investigated whether service-oriented workers' positive emotions, particularly their "subjective well-being," can mitigate the tendency toward declining job satisfaction and performance in the workplace.

Previous research has demonstrated that service-oriented workers undertake a substantial amount of emotional work when interacting with customers (Hochschild, 1983; Brotheridge & Lee, 2003). Hochschild (1983) referred to this type of work as "emotional labor." For example, emotional labor involves controlling emotions such as anger or sadness; instead, the service-oriented employees smile and respond nicely to customers (Grandey, 2003). Interpersonal service professions require this kind of "emotion regulation," implicitly and explicitly. Gross (1998) defined emotion regulation as the process that influences what emotions individuals feel, when, and how they express those emotions. For example, service-oriented

employees sometimes experience stress controlling their emotions to respond to customers and put themselves at risk of job burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1984; Zapf et al., 1999) and mental health issues.

Hochschild (1983) identified two types of emotional labor: surface acting and deep acting. **Surface acting** means altering one's outward expressions without changing the underlying feelings. Service-oriented employees using surface acting might force themselves to smile or suppress frustration to meet workplace expectations. Conversely, **deep acting** means trying to change one's internal feeling to align with the expected emotional display. For example, a flight attendant might try to genuinely feel calm and friendly rather than just pretending to be so. Both types of emotional labor require significant emotional regulation and can have various psychological and social consequences.

This study proposes that in today's rapidly changing and complex work environment, service-oriented employees who perceive stress in their organizations can mitigate declining job satisfaction with positive emotions. Specifically, service-oriented workers can use "subjective well-being (SWB)" to mitigate or recover from a decline in satisfaction and avoid stressful situations in the workplace.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES CONSTRUCTION

Organizational Stress

There are two leading causes of organizational stress: one is "role conflict" and the other is "role ambiguity" (Kahn et al., 1964). Classical organizational theory considered that organizational stress occurs when these two factors, "role conflict" and "role ambiguity", are violated. Later, the researchers began to include correlations with job satisfaction, job performance, organizational commitment, and other variables.

In role theory, a role is defined as a pattern of behavior that is expected of an individual in a particular social context. "Role conflict" refers to the incompatibility and contradiction of the demands facing the focal person (Rizzo et al., 1970; Ilgen & Hollenback, 1991). For example, there may be conflicts about how a particular employee's role should be among co-workers, supervisors, and customers. Conversely, "role ambiguity" refers to the level of uncertainty or a lack of clarity and information necessary to perform specific organizational tasks (Kahn et al., 1964). For example, the expected behaviors required in the role may be unclear (Ilgen & Hollenback, 1991).

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is understood as an individual's emotional connection to their job (Rousseau, 1989). It can be overall satisfaction or satisfaction with a specific aspect of their job (e.g., supervisory role). Previous researchers have indicated that job satisfaction is related to organizational citizenship and in-role behavior (Williams & Anderson, 1991). In this study, the author proposes the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: “Role ambiguity” is negatively correlated with “job satisfaction” of service-oriented employees.

Subjective Well-Being (SWB)

Previous research has defined subjective well-being as a person’s personal perception and experience of positive or negative emotional responses related to an overall evaluation of their life and emotional experiences, as well as a world-specific cognitive appraisal of life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2002). Subjective well-being is measured from an individual’s perspective (self-report), which distinguishes this field from clinical psychology (Diener et al., 2017). This study proposes the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2: Service-oriented employees’ “subjective well-being (SWB)” will mitigate the negative effect of role ambiguity on job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3: Service-oriented employees’ “subjective well-being (SWB)” will mitigate the negative effect of role conflict on job satisfaction.

METHOD

(1) Survey Methodology

This study was administered via an online live app service provided by a global leader in online surveys. The final sample consisted of 200 Japanese customer service-oriented employees (54.5% female). Respondents’ ages ranged from under 20 to over 60, with an average age of 24. Respondents’ reported employment tenure ranged from less than one year to over 30 years, with an average tenure of eight years. The author used IBM SPSS Statistics version 29 and IBM SPSS Amos version 29 for the analysis of this survey.

(2) Questionnaire

In this study, the author used a 5-point Likert-type questionnaire ranging from 1 (low) to 5 (high).

“Role Conflict” and “Role Ambiguity”

Three role conflict items ($\alpha = .82$) and three role ambiguity items ($\alpha = .76$) were adopted from a previous study by Rizzo et al. (1970).

Job Satisfaction

Based on a previous study by Robinson & Rousseau (1994), the author used the two-item scales ($\alpha = .85$) from the perspectives of both employee job satisfaction and organizational role.

RESULTS

To verify the hypotheses, the author first conducted descriptive statistics and correlation analysis (Table 1). The results of the correlation analysis (Table 1) showed a negative correlation between role ambiguity and job satisfaction ($r = -0.58$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 1, which states that “role ambiguity” has a negative correlation with “job satisfaction” among service-oriented workers.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics, reliability, and intercorrelation.

	Mean	S.D.	α^4	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender ¹	.54	.50	–										
2. Tenure ²	2.78	2.05	–.43***	–									
3. Age ³	2.36	.89	–.36***	.51***	–								
4. Job Satisfaction	3.24	1.10	.85	–.03	–.14***	.04	–						
5. Job Performance	3.54	.93	.58	–.07	–.30***	–.17	.60***	–					
6. Role Conflict	2.81	.88	.76	.03	–.01	–.10	–.06***	–.20***	–				
7. Role Ambiguity	2.39	.91	.82	.08	–.35***	.19***	–.58	–.077***	–.05***	–			
8. Surface Acting	3.69	.95	.89	.03	.28***	.13	.57***	–.77***	.23***	.78***	–		
9. Deep Acting	3.68	.94	.77	–.10	.28***	–.08	–.58***	.77***	.21***	.74***	.83***	–	
10. Subjective Well-Being	3.27	.53	.59	–.04	–.07	–.02	.05	–.10	.26***	–.18***	–.17***	–.22***	–

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .10$, $N = 200$.

¹Gender: coded as Male = 0, Female = 1.

²Job tenure: coded as 1 = 0–5 years, 2 = 6–10 years, 3 = 11–15 years, 4 = 16–20 years, 5 = 21–25 years, 6 = 26–30 years, 7 = more than 30 years.

³Age: coded as 1 = less than 20, 2 = 21–30, 3 = 31–40, 4 = 41–50, 5 = 51–60, 6 = more than 60.

⁴Reliability represents Cronbach's Alpha coefficients.

Table 2 presents the results of the hierarchical regression analysis. In Study 1, the antecedent is “Role Ambiguity” and the outcome is “Job Satisfaction”, and in Study 2, the antecedent is “Role Conflict” and the outcome is “Job Satisfaction”.

Table 2: Summary of hierarchical regression analysis: Examining interactions of RA and SWB as well as RC and SWB on job satisfaction.

		Study 1 Predictor: Role Ambiguity(RA) Outcome: Job Satisfaction (Step 1) (Step 2)		Study 2 Predictor: Role Conflict(RC) Outcome: Job Satisfaction (Step 1) (Step 2)	
Step 1 (Control Variables)	Gender	–.03	–.03	–.03	–.03
	Tenure	–.06	–.08	–.06	–.05
	Age	–.08	–.06	–.08***	–.07***
	Role Ambiguity (RA)	–.30***	–	–.30***	–.27***
	Role Conflict (RC)	–.14	–.17	–.15	–.12
	Job Performance	.44***	.42***	.45***	.43***
	Subjective Well-Being (SWB)	.10**	–.39**	.12**	–.22**
Step 2: Study 1 (Interaction)	Role Ambiguity (RA) $\times$ SWB		–.83**		
	F	21.992***	20.047***		
	R^2	.425	.434		
	ΔR^2		.009		
Step 2: Study 2 (Interaction)	Role Conflict (RC) $\times$ SWB				–.75**
	F			19.274***	16.576***
	R^2			.444	.437
	ΔR^2				.007

Standardized regression coefficients are reported. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Step 1 of the hierarchical regression analysis involved adding the control variables of gender, years of employment, and age to the regression equation, along with variables related to the organizational stress context: role ambiguity and role conflict, a variable related to organizational goal such

as job performance, as well as emotional and cognitive positive aspect of employees, such as subjective well-being.

Next, in Step 2 (Study 1), the interaction between “role ambiguity (RA)” and “subjective well-being (SWB)” was added to the regression equation. The interaction (RA $\times$ SWB) was significant when added to the regression equation [$F(8, 191) = 20.047, p < .001$].

Then, in Step 2 (Study 2), the interaction between “role conflict (RC)” and “subjective well-being (SWB)” was significant when added to the regression equation. The interaction (RC $\times$ SWB) was significant when added to the regression equation [$F(11, 188) = 16.576, p < .001$].

Figure 1 shows the plot graph of the interaction between role ambiguity (RA) and subjective well-being (SWB) significantly predicting higher job satisfaction when the level of role ambiguity is low, supporting partially H2 when role ambiguity is low.

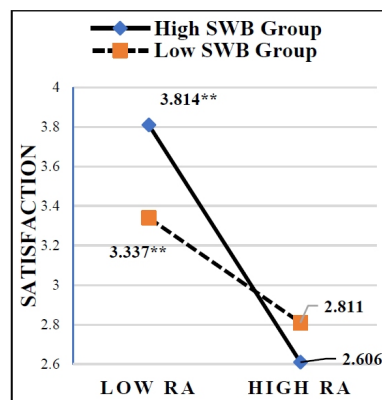


Figure 1: Interaction between RA and SWB.

Figure 2 shows the plot graph of the interaction between role conflict (RC) and subjective well-being (SWB) significantly predicting higher job satisfaction when the level of role conflict is high, supporting partially H3 when role conflict is high.

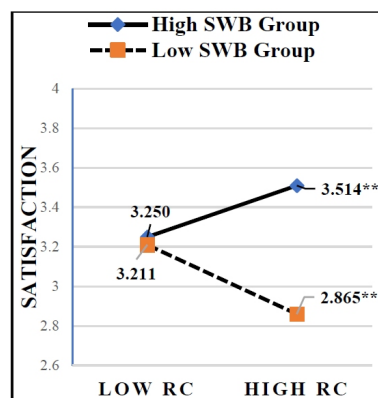


Figure 2: Interaction between RC and SWB.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

In recent years, competition has intensified across a wide range of industries. It is common for automated machines and AI to replace tasks previously performed by employees in business environments. Furthermore, as the workforce shifts, the working environment for customer service-oriented employees changes frequently, making it more likely that modern workers experience stress in their organizations.

It has often been presumed that jobs involving “people work” (e.g., service workers, nurses, teachers) are emotionally taxing (Maslach & Jackson, 1984). However, this problem has seldom been explicitly studied in terms of their emotional and cognitive components. The contribution of this study shows that positive subjective well-being more and less mitigates the decreasing propensity for job satisfaction in stressful circumstances where the employees perceive role ambiguity as well as role conflict.

In conclusion, subjective well-being (SWB) enables employees to cope with today’s stressful work environments and interpersonal relationships, thereby reducing the likelihood of burnout. It is speculated that employees with high emotional and cognitive competence work harmoniously and integrate with their organizations, understand corporate strategies, and work efficiently, thereby enhancing a company’s competitiveness and contributing to its long-term growth.

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