

## The Effect of Procedural Justice on Emotional Exhaustion of Frontline Hotel Employees as a Reflection of Customer Orientation

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**Abstract:** *This paper aims to explore the association between procedural justice (PJ) of the Performance Appraisal (PA) system and emotional exhaustion (EE). Organizational justice is defined as the concept of fairness within organization and it is often regarded as a two-dimensional construct of procedural and distributive justice. PJ refers to the PA system satisfaction, while distributive justice is related with the satisfaction of outcomes received. PJ is determined by five dimensions (fairness, two-way communication between supervisor and subordinate, trust to the supervisor, clarity of expectations and understanding of PA). Some researchers have claimed that employees, who perceive inequity on the PA processes and outcomes, may be exposed to emotional burnout. EE reflects a lack of energy and a feeling that employees' emotional resources are used up. Drawing from the hospitality marketing research, EE is considered as one of the most crucial factors devastating service provision of frontline employees, as well as the subsequent customer satisfaction. The strong negative relationship between PJ and EE was confirmed in a sample of 224 frontline hotel employees. In particular, understanding of the appraisal process was the most dominant predictor of EE. Regarding situational factors, only resource inadequacy exerted a significant relationship.*

**Keywords:** *Performance Appraisal system, Procedural justice, Emotional exhaustion, Hospitality, Greece*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Given that a recent review of the hospitality marketing research identified emotional labour as one of the newest and most promising fields of inquiry (Linea and Runyan, 2012), emotional exhaustion has emerged as a key factor determining customer orientation as well as the subsequent customer satisfaction and hotel performance.

Also, several scholars have examined employees' perceptions of justice in organizations and more specifically in their Performance Appraisal (PA) system as well as the impact of PA systems on employee attitudes in their work (Whiting, Kline and Sulsky, 2008; Cook and Crossman, 2004; Gabris and Ihrke, 2001; Greenberg, 1987). Moreover, Bretz, Mikovich and Reader's (1992) review of PA research revealed that the most important PA issue which organizations have to deal with is employees' perceptions about the fairness of the performance review and the PA system. It is assumed that employees, who perceive inequity on the PA processes and outcomes, may be exposed to emotional distress. Supporting this argument, Gaines and Ihrke (2001) found that employee' perceptions for both unfair distributions of outcomes and appraisal processes contribute to heightened levels of emotional exhaustion. Extending this argumentation, Gazzoli et al. (2010) provided supporting evidence that employee empowerment and job satisfaction lead to significant improvement in customer perceptions of service quality.

Contributing to the newest and most promising fields of emotional labor and organizational justice, this paper aims to investigate the association between employees' satisfaction of the PA system (procedural justice) and emotional exhaustion.

### 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

#### 2.1 Procedural Justice

Procedural justice (PJ) is the perceived fairness of performance appraisal (PA) processes which are used in order to determine decisions that related with employee outcomes (Folger and Konovsky, 1989; Kreitner, Kinicki and Buelens, 1999). More specifically, perceived fairness processes include the manner by which pay, rewards, evaluations, and promotions are decided within an organization (Greenberg, 1987b; Martin & Bennett, 1996; Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Lambert et al., 2007). Landy, Barnes-Farrell, and Cleveland (1980) concluded that procedural justice for employee evaluation was crucial among employees, regardless of whether their performance appraisals were negative or positive. As Lambert, (2003, p. 157) annotate "distributive justice is concerned with the 'ends', while procedural justice is concerned with the 'means' ". According to Brown and Benson (2003) a PA system should involve two elements in order to be perceived as fair by employees.

First, employees should participate in making decisions about the accomplishment of goals set to them in relation with individual's responsibilities and the available resources which they possess. Employees accept PA process as a useful tool, if they have the opportunity to affect decision making about important work outcomes through appraisal interview (Korsgaard and Roberson, 1995). When employees believe that they don't have the chance to influence the outcome of the interview assessment or the decisions which are related to their rewards as well as the determination of performance objectives, they feel that they can not control work demands followed by a feeling of helplessness or uncertainty (Gabris and Ihrke, 2001; Chernis, 1980; Brown and Benson, 2003).

Second, when employees feel that their supervisor's feedback doesn't provide them with information which is able to improve their career in the organization as well as their performance (Lee and Son, 1998; Brown and Benson, 2003; Gist and Mitchell, 1992), they realize the PA process as unfair and useless (Whiting, Kline and Sulsky, 2008). An appraisal process characterised by bias, and subjectivity, make organizational members to believe that the PA system is unable to offer them the necessary motivation in order to improve their performance and to achieve the goals set (Gabris and Ihrke, 2001). However, Williams (1999) found that providing individuals the voice to participate in appraisal process, it doesn't influence their performance, whereas providing them with explanation why specific outcomes were received then their behaviour was influenced by increasing performance.

## **2.2 Emotional Exhaustion**

Recently, 'quality of work life' has been put in the centre of organizational behaviour research as key individuals of contemporary organisations have been assigned with strategic but stressful and emotional demanding tasks leading to fluctuating performance. Research on burnout began as a result of work related to emotion, arousal and the way in which employees cope with, or manage the arousal (Maslach and Jackson, 1984). Burnout is considered as a three-dimensional construct: (a) emotional exhaustion, (b) depersonalisation and (c) reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Job burnout is "a chronic effective response to the very extreme demands from the work environment, especially pressures and conflicts arising from direct contact with and care of other people" (Kreitner, Kinicki and Buelens, 1999, p.511). In other words, burnout is a disharmony between the nature of duties of one's job and how this person wants to do the job (Maslach and Leiter, 2005). It is a condition that occurs mainly on people who work in human services like hospital, tourism attractions and education and whose job demands continually face-to-face interaction with people (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993; Maslach and Leiter, 1997). Especially, emotional exhaustion is characterised by a lack of energy and a feeling that employee's emotional resources are used up (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993).

According to Cordes and Dougherty (1993), emotional exhaustion occurs when personal stressors (high personal and organisational expectations for achievement, level of job involvement) are combined with job and organisational stressors (role overload, role conflict, and frequency and intensity of interpersonal interactions). When employees expect too much to do from themselves as well as their workplace tend to contribute to increase the level of stress, then employees tend to feel emotionally exhausted while this feeling come to be strengthened by the high work demands, by conflicts, and by the interpersonal interactions between staff and clients. Emotional exhaustion is the first stage of burnout which is followed by depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Depersonalization is the second stage of burnout in which individuals who express negative behaviour and attitudes are withdrawn by their work. In that case, they face customers as objectives rather than people, because they feel unrecognised and ineffective. Last, employees feel reduced personal accomplishment when they tend to evaluate themselves negatively due to employees' failure to succeed their goals and cope with stressors (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993; Maslach and Leiter, 2005). Therefore, emotional exhaustion is the basis for the development of work stress and for this reason emotional exhaustion has attracted research interest (Gaines and Jermier, 1983).

## **2.4 Emotional labor, customer orientation and internal marketing**

A recent review of the hospitality marketing research published in four top hospitality journals from 2008 to 2010 identified emotional labour as one of the most significant trends and gaps in the relevant literature recommending specific dimensions of future research (Linea and Runyan, 2012). They revealed that researchers investigating the role that quality service plays in the customer experience, has shifted their focus more on employee interactions with customers and the delivery of emotional labor. Gazzoli et al. (2010) provided supporting evidence that employee empowerment and job satisfaction lead to significant improvement in customer perceptions of service quality. Extending this rationale, Kim and Ok (2010) explicitly focused on the customer orientation of service employees (COSE) in order to shed light on the customer-related outcome variables associated with employee satisfaction. The impact of emotional labor on employee engagement and burnout, reflecting "the effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions" (Morris and Feldman, 1996), is at the cadre of the internal marketing field of hospitality literature where frontline employees are supposed to deliver "service with a smile" (e.g., Karatepe and Aleshinloye, 2009; Kim, 2008). Given that emotional labour has been recognised as one of the newest fields of inquiry within hospitality industry (Kim, 2008), emotional exhaustion has emerged as a key variable determining customer orientation as well as the subsequent customer satisfaction and hotel performance.

## **2.5 Research hypotheses**

The aim of this study is to explore the performance appraisal system's procedural justice impact on emotional exhaustion of frontline hotel employees. The study focuses on identifying relationships among the five aspects of procedural justice and emotional exhaustion, controlling for situational factors and demographics. The research model guiding the present study is shown in Figure 1.

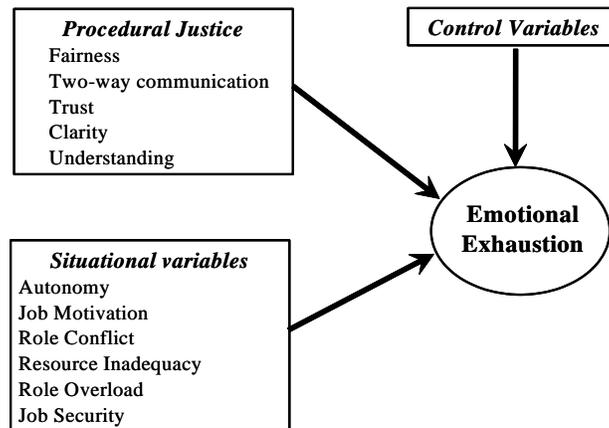


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Regarding the PA system, procedural justice reflects the employees' perceptions for fairness in appraisal processes in order to arrive in some decisions related with the employees' performance, while distributive justice refers to fairness of these decisions which related with the performance outcomes (promotion, pay, etc.) (Folger and Konovsky, 1989; Greenberg, 1990). When employees perceive inequity on the PA processes and outcomes, they are vulnerable to emotional distress. Past researches have examined what impact has PA systems on employee attitudes in their work. Gaines and Ihrke (2001) found that employee' perceptions for both unfair distributions of outcomes and appraisal processes contribute to heightened levels of emotional exhaustion. In a similar vein, Brown and Benson (2003) found that there is negative relationship between perceptions for distributive justice, procedural justice and high performance ratings with the levels of emotional exhaustion that are experienced by employees. In a similar vein, Howard and Cordes (2010) provided supporting evidence for the direct and indirect effects of procedural justice on emotional exhaustion. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H1: The perceived justice of PA processes (Procedural Justice) is negatively related to emotional exhaustion.*

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Questionnaire design

The field research was based on a structured questionnaire. It was built by adapting existing scales in HRM literature measuring procedural justice, emotional exhaustion, situational and control variables. Age, educational level, gender, work position, tenure, monthly income served as control variables.

Six **situational variables** related to work included at the questionnaire. Job autonomy at work was measured with the four items scale proposed by Tetrick and La Rocco (1987). The Kanungo's (1982) scale consisted of seven items was adopted for job motivation. Role conflict was measured using three items following Kahn et al's (1964) suggestions.

Resources inadequacy and the extent of work overload were operationalised after Iverson's (1992) (3 items) and Iverson et al's (1995) (3 items) measures respectively. Finally, perceptions of job security assessed by the three items Oldham et al's (1986) scale. **Procedural justice** (PJ) associated with the performance appraisal system was measured by the 22-items scale developed by Tang and Sarsfield-Baldwin (1996). It consists of five aspects of procedural justice: (a) fairness of performance evaluations (6-items), (b) two-way communication between the supervisor and the subordinate during the performance appraisal process (6-items), (c) trust in supervisor (4-items), (d) clarity of performance appraisal process (3-items), (e) understanding of the performance appraisal process (3-items).

**Emotional exhaustion** (EE) measure was based on Iverson et al's (1998) three items scale. Consequently, all instruments rest on a solid foundation of academic research in the field. The answers to the aforementioned constructs were specified in a five-point Likert scale.

#### 3.2 Sample

The questionnaire was carefully translated into Greek language and adapted in the hotels environment. To ensure the validity of the item translation, a (English/Greek) translate/back translate procedure (Brislin, 1970; Laroche et al., 2003) was used. The measurement instruments were checked twice before it was released. Firstly, it was examined by five permanent and five seasonal employees) from different hotel departments. Secondly, it was submitted to academics for in depth discussions. This process was fruitful, since after minor adaptations, they confirmed the cognitive relevance of the questionnaire to the banking sector.

This research is focused on frontline employees of this hotel, at the region of Chalkidiki (Northern Greece). A total of 600 questionnaires were delivered. The final sample comprises 224 valid questionnaires (stratified random sampling, 113 permanent and 111 seasonal staff), resulting to an adequate response rate of 37,3%. The 44% of the respondents were male. The majority of the respondents (59.4%) were between 29 and 31 years old. Also, the vast majority (75,1%) had from three to six years of work experience. The employees in the sample were allocated to a variety of departments.

Due to the fact that many employees were foreign, (most of them seasonal), a version of the questionnaire in English was also distributed. For confidentiality reasons, after filling the questionnaires, the participants put the questionnaire into the envelope and then into a poll.

## 4. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### 4.1 Principal Component Analysis

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with normalized varimax rotation was performed for the situational factors, procedural justice and emotional exhaustion scales. The unidimensionality of emotional exhaustion scale was verified, since one factor was extracted, accounting for approximately 72.7% of the total variance. On the contrary, five principal components were confirmed for procedural justice, explaining approximately 75.2% of the total variance (Kaizer criterion). Regarding situational variables, six factors were extracted with eigenvalues greater than one (Kaizer criterion), accounting for 64.2% of the total variance.

Preceding PCA, the Bartlett sphericity testing on the degree of correlation between the variables ( $p < 0.001$ ) and the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) index verified the appropriateness of the sample. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was calculated to test internal reliability of each scale, as recommended by Flynn et al. (1990), ranging approximately from 0.71 to 0.82. Thus, all sub-scales exhibited well over the minimum acceptable reliability level of 0.7. Table I presents descriptive statistics, number of items and reliability analysis indices of all scales.

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics and reliability analysis

	mean	S.D.	Cronbach's alpha <sup>a</sup>	Items
<b>Situational Variables</b>				
Job Autonomy	3.30	0.984	0.921	4
Job Motivation	2.61	1.017	0.738	7
Role Conflict	2.76	0.958	0.842	3
Resource Inadequacy	2.21	0.884	0.719	3
Work Overload	3.59	0.998	0.729	3
Job Security	3.24	1.070	0.714	3
<b>Procedural Justice</b>				
Fairness	3.24	1.02	0.923	6
Two-way communication	3.20	0.969	0.868	6
Trust	3.72	1.009	0.887	6
Clarity	2.78	1.126	0.865	4
Understanding	3.17	1.252	0.878	3
<b>Emotional Exhaustion</b>	3.13	0.960	0.812	3

<sup>a</sup> The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) indicator was calculated to assess sample size adequacy. The minimum acceptable level is 0.5. Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant at  $p < 0.001$  for all scales. Valid N=224.

### 3.2 Multiple regression analysis

To test the hypotheses multiple regression analyses were conducted. Demographic data (gender, age, work tenure, educational level, income and work status) were treated as control variables. The reciprocal of the tolerance known as the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) has been used to ensure that multicollinearity among independent variables is not an issue during regression analysis. VIF coefficients of above 5 points indicate a multicollinearity problem (O'Brien, 2007).

The multiple regression model has tested the relationship between procedural justice and emotional exhaustion, controlling for situational factors and demographics (hypothesis H1). The independent variables explain the 36.8 percent of the total variation of frontline hotel employees' emotional exhaustion. In Table 2, the values of the standardized coefficients beta reveal that the procedural justice dimension of understanding has a strong negative effect on emotional exhaustion (Std. beta=-0.354,  $p < 0.01$ ). Additionally, only resource inadequacy among situational factors, is positively and significantly related to emotional exhaustion (Std. beta =0.211,  $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 2:** Results of multiple regression analysis

	Std beta <sup>a</sup>
<b>Control variables</b>	
Gender	-0.099
age	-0.235
Educational level	0.056
Work tenure	0.117
income	0.044
Work status	-0.060
<b>Situational Variables</b>	
Job Autonomy	-0.094
Job Motivation	-0.138
Role Conflict	0.037
Resource Inadequacy	<b>0.211*</b>
Work Overload	0.085
Job Security	0.055
<b>Procedural Justice</b>	
Fairness	-0.163
Two-way communication	-0.190
Trust	0.240
Clarity	0.054
Understanding	<b>-0.354**</b>
Adjusted R-square	<b>0.368**</b>

<sup>a</sup> Standardized beta, Significant at \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001, Valid N=224.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Building on the hospitality marketing research, this paper aims to explore the association between procedural justice of the PA system and emotional exhaustion. Drawing from a sample of 224 frontline hotel employees, the strong negative relationship between procedural justice and emotional exhaustion was confirmed.

Procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of PA processes which are used in order to determine decisions about pay, rewards, evaluations, and promotions. In particular, understanding of the appraisal process among the five dimensions of procedural justice (fairness, two-way communication between supervisor and subordinate, trust to the supervisor, clarity of expectations and understanding of PA) was the most dominant predictor of emotional exhaustion.

Regarding situational factors, only resource inadequacy exerted a significant relationship, highlighting the importance of resource allocation within the organization.

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