

EMOTION MANAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE: A STUDY ON EMPLOYEE PERCEPTION

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine the effects of emotion and behavior control effort, which is stated to be especially necessary for service industry employees, on the performance level of employees. The research was carried out with the participation of a total of 14 employees, 4 women and 10 men who provided call center services for a law firm that carries out receivables follow-up works subject to enforcement files of a well-established company serving in telecommunications. In the interviews conducted with in-depth interview method, 8 open-ended questions were asked to the participants aged between 22-35. When the participants were evaluated in terms of demographic characteristics, it was seen that singles (64%), male participants (42.86%) and participants with undergraduate education (35.71%) exhibited surface acting. 7 participants (50%) whose seniority is between 1 and 2 years and who earn between 1000-2500 TL stated that they exhibit surface acting. It is seen that the behavioral rules applied in order to keep the performance of the employees under control, to a certain standard and to keep them at the maximum level can help achieve the goals set for the organizations in terms of the desired criteria but trigger negative courses on the employees such as stress, leaving the job, loss of motivation and divergence from organizational citizenship.

We can state that there is a decrease in the rate of surface acting depending on the increase in the amount of earnings obtained and therefore there is an inverse correlation between them.

Keywords: Burnout, Emotional Labor, Employee Performance, Surface Acting

JEL Classification: M12, M50, M54

DUYGU YÖNETİMİ VE PERFORMANS: ÇALIŞAN ALGISI ÜZERİNE BİR ARAŞTIRMA

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, özellikle hizmet sektörü çalışanlarının göstermek durumunda olduğu ifade edilen duygu ve davranış kontrolü çabasının, işgörenlerin performans düzeyine olan etkilerinin belirlenmesidir. Araştırma, telekomünikasyon sektöründe hizmet veren köklü bir şirketin, icra dosyalarına konu olan alacak takip işlerini yürüten bir hukuk firması için çağrı merkezi hizmeti sunan firmanın 4'ü kadın, 10'u erkek toplam 14 çalışanın katılımı ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Derinlemesine mülakat yöntemi ile gerçekleştirilen görüşmelerde yaşları 22-35 arasında değişmekte olan katılımcılara 8 açık uçlu soru yöneltilmiştir. Demografik özellikler açısından katılımcılar değerlendirildiğinde bekârların (%64), erkek katılımcılar (%42.86) ile lisans eğitimi almış olan katılımcıların (%35.71) yüzeysel davranış sergiledikleri görülmüştür. Kıdem süresi 1 ile 2 yıl arasında olan 7 katılımcı (%50) ve 1000-2500 TL arasında kazanç sağlayan 7 katılımcı (%50) yüzeysel davranış sergilediğini belirtmiştir. Çalışanların performanslarının denetim altında tutulması, belli bir standarda bağlanması ve maksimum düzeyde tutulması amacıyla uygulanan davranışsal kuralların örgütler açısından belirlenen hedeflere, istenen kriterler açısından varılmasına yardımcı olabildikleri ancak çalışanlar üzerinde stres, işten ayrılma, motivasyon kaybı ve örgütsel vatandaşlıktan uzaklaşma gibi olumsuz süreçleri tetiklediği görülmektedir. Elde edilen kazanç miktarındaki artışa bağlı olarak yüzeysel davranış sergileme oranında düşüş yaşandığı ve bu sebeple de aralarında ters yönlü bir ilişkisi olduğunu ifade edebilmekteyiz.

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1. Introduction

Competition and being preferable, which are the most crucial points of the cold war in market conditions, stimulate the desire of managers and employers to control their employees as well as their competitors. It is observed that organizations operating in the service sector, in particular, focus more on controlling, auditing and performance processes. The positive effect of surplus time on money and income causes both customers and organizations to seek alternative ways in their acting processes. For this reason, while customers tend to online platforms, corporate structures target faster and lower-cost solutions such as e-mail, online correspondence and call center during the communication phase with customers.

It is known that in the last twenty years, especially the call center units have been the busiest unit providing communication with the customers of the institutions. Although call centers provide benefits on employment, they can sometimes have challenging conditions in terms of working conditions. Since its structure based on the principle of customer satisfaction and the representation of the institution are in question, both employers and managers constantly try to keep their employees under control and direct them to predetermined goals and objectives, which can cause the working conditions to be much more stressful for employees.

Although the controlling and supervisory attitude of the managers in order to reach the goals contributes positively to the realization of the organizational goals causes negative results on the stress and motivation levels of the employees (Morris and Feldman, 1996; Grandey, 2000). Even if the control measures applied in order to keep the employee performance at the maximum level during the supervision process and to adapt the employees to the organizational acting rules seem to be beneficial in the institutional sense, it can cause burnout and weakening of the bond with the organization for the employees.

It has been revealed that the concept, which is expressed as emotional labor in the literature and explained as an effort to control the emotions and behaviors of the employees working in the service sector, indirectly reflects the negative results on the performance and psychology of the workers.

2. Conceptual Framework

The concept of emotional labor, which was first expressed by Hochschild in the literature in 1983, has been interpreted as “reflection of employees’ regulated emotions to the other side with facial and body movements that can be observed from the outside”. According to the researcher, employees exhibit the emotions they expect organizations to fulfill rather than their own emotions. Emotions, which are used intensively especially in the service sector are a part of the work performed, but it turns the workforce into a commodity with trading value. This leads us to the assumption that emotions have exchange value because they are fulfilled for a fee. Hochschild, who compared the behavioral situation of the employees in the business environment to the performance of a theater play, positioned the working environment as the stage; the employees as the actors and the customers as the audience.

He suggested that employees who have to keep their emotions under control and adapt to the organizational behavior rules should act like the best performers in order to gain the appreciation of the customers.

Hochschild stated that employees exhibit surface acting or deep acting while expressing their feelings, while behavioral changes are observed in people in surface acting, there is no change in the emotions felt, only the feeling is given. In the deep acting dimension, the employee feels the expected emotion by regulating and controlling his/her emotions at the same time. This ensures a natural harmony between behavior and emotion. Hochschild states that it is a tiring process for employees in both dimensions but after a while employees have argued that negative consequences such as an increase in stress levels and triggering the feeling of burnout may occur (Hochschild, 1983).

Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) were focused on the behaviors of employees rather than their emotions and expressed the concept as the process of displaying emotions within the framework of social identity theory. In addition to the more expressed surface and deep acting dimensions, they gained the genuine acting dimension. According to the researchers, whether the superficial dimension or the deep dimension is exhibited, after a while, employees will make this behavior a habit and sometimes the behavior that should be exhibited and the behavior that the individual wants to exhibit can adapt and there will be no need to pretend or make an effort to harmonize it. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) stated that how realistic the behavior is perceived is as important as the fulfillment of an expected behavior and it was emphasized that this process determines the degree of impact it will have on the other side and that the behavior will be reflected in the quality. As a result of research on the concept, in addition to contributing to the customer satisfaction, productivity and quality stages in terms of organizations, it has been determined that it has a positive effect on the reinforcement of the sense of self efficacy and the resolution of communication problems for the employees and it has been concluded that the feeling of burnout can have a negative effect on the employees (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993).

Morris and Feldman (1996) have expressed the concept of emotional labor as making efforts, planning and controlling the emotions that should be exhibited in line with the expectations of the organizations. Our researchers suggested that even if the employees fulfill their duties sentimentally, they should make some effort and the employees already endeavored on the concept of emotional labor because they use their emotions in the work environment. In the research, they concluded that they have to act within the rules of emotional behavior outside of their own initiative about the feelings of the other party. In their models, which focused on the consequences of behaviors and the effects of organizational and individual factors, they discussed the concept of emotional labor within the framework of four dimensions: effort, variety of emotions, emotional disharmony and frequency of display of emotions. Our researchers supported Hochschild's (1983) argument for the commodification of labor and its monetary value. They argued that if the emotional contradictions that individuals will experience are high, the emotional labor effort that should be shown will increase. They concluded that the concept, which provides positive results such as reaching the planned goals and objectives in terms of organizations, may cause work satisfaction, a feeling of burnout and emotional contradictions in employees (Morris and Feldman, 1996).

Grandey (2000) has included the concept of "emotion regulation" in his model, which is a mix of previous studies and he expressed as the ability of the individual to control his emotions when faced with any stimulus and to provide an appropriate reaction to the situation by providing emotional balance.

According to Grandey, the content and style of communication, whether it is temporary or permanent, the employee's autonomy in the interaction process and the complexity of the interaction are the four factors that are important in the display of emotional labor. Defining the concept of emotional labor as the display of both emotions and behaviors in line with the goals and objectives of the organization, Grandey supported Hochschild (1983) in the process of sub-dimensions, expressing that employees tend to exhibit superficial or deep behavioral dimensions when they engage in emotional labor effort. The researcher, as a result of his research on the management of emotions model, concluded that the effort of emotional labor can create negative effects on employees such as stress, burnout and depersonalization (Grandey, 2000).

Since it is important that emotions and behaviors overlap with organizational expectations, it may cause employers and managers to apply the orientation, control and supervision processes on employees much more intensely. Although the control of criteria and standards in line with organizational decisions and targets contributes to the increase of organizational performance, it is seen that it causes an increase in the stress level on employees who have to fulfill their duties under constant control and supervision. The content and style of communication, whether it is temporary or permanent, the autonomy of the employee and the complexity of the interaction, and the effort exerted, the variety of emotions, emotional disharmony and the frequency of display of emotions depend on the dimensions. It has been determined that the emotional labor effort to be shown causes a decrease in the level of stress, burnout, work satisfaction and self-efficacy in parallel with the intensity of the effort (Morris and Feldman, 1996; Grandey, 2000).

3. Methodolgy of research

3.1. Purpose And Importance of The Research

The purpose of this study is to determine whether the call center employees, who are at the forefront of the busy working environments in the service sector, prefer to show surface or deep acting while showing their feelings and behaviors during the emotional labor effort they have shown in order to comply with the organizational behavior rules. At the same time, the effects of control, supervision and compliance processes of emotions and behaviors that form the basis of the emotional labor process on employees and their reflection on their performance have been tried to be clarified.

As a result of the findings, it is predicted that it will be beneficial to determine the processes affecting the concept of emotional labor in order to minimize the negative effects such as the increase in the level of stress and burnout, the formation of work satisfaction and the thought of quitting the job for the employees working in the organizational structures operating in the service sector.

3.2. Universe and sample of the research

The research is about the employees of the legal follow-up unit of a call center serving in the district of Kadıköy, Istanbul. It was carried out with 14 employees who are responsible for the collection of the debts subject to the legal follow-up process at the call center by a company operating in the telecommunication sector. The average age of the participants, whose ages were between 22 and 35, was 28, and 4 participants were women and 10 participants were men.

Only 1 of the participants was married, and all of them were receiving bonuses depending on their performance in addition to the minimum wage. 3 employees in our research were graduated from high school, 3 has associate degree, 7 undergraduate and 1 graduate degrees. In terms of seniority, it is seen that 8 participants have worked in the institution between 1 and 2 years, and 6 participants between 3 and 4 years.

3.3. Method of Data Collection and Evaluation

In the data collection phase, a qualitative research method was preferred and it was deemed appropriate to conduct interviews with the in-depth interview method so that the participants could express their emotions more clearly. Although interviews were planned as face-to-face, they were completed as one-on-one video-call interviews with each participant via online applications. During the interviews, eight clear and open-ended questions were asked to the participants. These questions were;

1. Are the behaviors and attitudes that they expect you to reflect on your customers in your workplace, the attitudes you do in your normal life, or do you only exhibit the behaviors that are requested from you?
2. Does your attitude in communication with your customers exhaust you? (You can exemplify, I would like to do it like this but they want me not to do that)
3. How do you think you communicate with your customers? Is your language in communication realistic or superficial? How would you like to behave?
4. Does the expectations of your employers and managers from you in your communication with your customers create a feeling of burnout in you? (Do you have thoughts like why am I still working in this workplace, I don't belong here?)
5. How do you think the standardized behavior and customer relations affect your performance?
6. Do you find the salary you have earned, your position in the company and the appreciation you receive from your managers sufficient for the efforts you have made in order to realize standardized behavior and customer relations?
7. If you are offered better working conditions and a better salary, would you consider working in a different company on the condition that you still do the same job?
8. Which expectation of your managers from you is the biggest source of stress in your working life? If you have any suggestions to reduce this effect, can you share?

The qualitative data obtained from the answers to these questions were analyzed according to the demographic characteristics of the participants. The expressions, that the participants used frequently in the interviews were determined by word cloud analysis with Nvivo qualitative data analysis method. Word tree analysis was also applied, in order to determine the language that the participants used in common and the subjects they focused.

3.4. Results

According to the demographic results³; while it was determined that 10 people (71%) of 14 employees who participated in the study exhibited surface acting and 4 (29%) exhibited genuine acting; it was observed that all of the employees who stated that they exhibited genuine acting were male employees. It is seen that 5 out of 10 people exhibiting surface acting have a bachelor's degree and the ratio of this to the general is 36%. We have determined that 7 employees (50%) with a monthly income of up to 2.500 TL indicate that they exhibit superficial behavior. In the increase in income level, while the rate of showing surface acting decreased, the rate of showing genuine acting increased. In the answers to the open-ended questions directed to the participants, it was remarkable to explain that the attitudes of the managers that do not attach importance to the feelings and thoughts of the employees in the process of reaching the determined goals negatively affect their motivation and performance levels. In particular, employees who stated that they exhibited surface acting stated that being constantly supervised increased the pressure on them, and they distanced themselves from their work because they could not behave like themselves. All of the participants, who stated that the income obtained was low compared to the effort and effort despite the heavy working conditions, stated that they wanted to work in better terms and conditions, but they continued to work under the current conditions because they believed that the market conditions were not that different in this regard.

In Figure 1, image of the word cloud of the most repeated expressions of the participants that were obtained by Nvivo qualitative data analysis is shared.



Figure 1: Nvivo Qualitative Data Analysis (v12) - Word Cloud Analysis Report (Report in Turkish)

³ This study is generated from the MA thesis titled "The Effects of the Concept of Emotional Labor on Employee Performance: A Qualitative Practice for Call Center Employees" conducted within the scope of Beykoz University -International Trade Department.

According to the word cloud analysis report of the participants performed with Nvivo qualitative data analysis application, the first ten words frequently included in the interviews were identified as follow: stress (39), burnout (28), “surface acting” (28), “I have to/have to” (24), constantly (19), effort (15), empathy (14), “I wanted/want to quit my job” (13), “I would like/want to change” (11), job satisfaction (11), swearing/insulting (11). The participants expressed the feeling of burnout as “boring” and “overwhelming” as a common expression in their comments. On the other hand, in their statements that they prefer surful behavior, it was seen that they often include common expressions such as "we have to", "it is exhausting", "it is stressful", "I take it down", "I suppress", "I do what is asked to me" and "I wanted to be like myself". In addition to the behavior and sincerity that the managers expressed that they found artificial to them, they thought that they were not realistic and fair; it is also noteworthy that they use the expressions "pity" and "unfortunately" for the monthly targets they are expected to achieve.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

As a result of in-depth interviews with 14 participants, it was determined that 71% of the participants preferred to perform surful acting and it was observed that they have stated that they felt under stress and pressure while performing their duties and that they had a feeling of burnout. It is seen that the repetition of organizational standardized emotions and behaviors many times during the day while performing their duties causes a decrease in the level of job satiety on the participants and triggers job satisfaction. The result we have obtained is similar to the results of Morris and Feldman in 1996. It has been determined that the participants, who stated that the injustices in reward and punishment practices especially perform surful acting, may cause them to have the thought of quitting their job. The result we have obtained supports the argument that intensely used emotions become a commodity and become a part of the service offered (Hochschild, 1983; Morris ve Feldman, 1996).

Based on the results of the word cloud and word tree analysis reports obtained by the Nvivo qualitative data analysis method, results were obtained indicating that the participants experienced a decrease in stress, burnout, quitting, surface acting, job satisfaction and satiety. It is seen that the demographic and interview data analysis results of the participants and the Nvivo results support each other.

We can state that the style and attitude of the managers while communicating with their subordinates is related to motivation and performance. In order to be impartial and transparent, especially in the auditing process, it is foreseen that the independent and feedback process will be carried out with experts, and evaluation and feedback will be made regularly. In order to reveal the real performances of the employees, it is recommended to implement multiple criterias such as the managers, customers, co-workers and the performance targets that the employee is in contact with while performing their duties. It is foreseen that the employees will be allowed to use autonomy within the framework of the organizational vision and mission while performing their duties to minimize the possible negative effects of emotional labor effort and to achieve the determined targets.

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