

SERVICE WITH A SMILE:

How organizational injustice impacts emotional labor

In the hospitality industry, where staff are expected to always deliver “service with a smile,” organizational injustice can affect staff wellbeing and create emotional dissonance, preventing them from delivering high quality service. Dr. Valeriya Shapoval from Rosen College of Hospitality Management has documented the relationship between organizational injustice and emotional labor. Her work proposes solutions that hotel managers can implement to support their staff in achieving brand success.



Being treated unfairly by management could result in staff experiencing procedural injustice.



Experiencing rudeness from a customer is an example of interactional injustice.

The service economy relies on emotional connection between brands and customers. The traditional “service with a smile” is nowadays expanded to include customers’ expectations of empathy and relatability from the staff they interact with. Staff in the hospitality industry, in particular, are under increased pressure to regulate their emotions and deliver the most positive and uplifting experience to the customer or client, regardless of their own emotional state at any given moment. “Emotional labor” – the ability to consistently display friendliness across hundreds of interactions in exchange for salary – is a significant strain on the modern workforce. When combined with a lack of suitable support or effective management, it can lead to work stress and job

dissatisfaction, often resulting in negative customer interaction. Friendly service is associated with benefits for organizations by increasing positive word of mouth, making it important for brand performance and survival. However, over time, the strain this expectation imposes on staff can lead to emotional exhaustion.

SMILE AT ALL TIMES

Previous studies have shown the consequences of emotional labor such as job dissatisfaction, psychological burnout, high levels of stress and others, but the reasons for elevated emotional labor remain subject to controversy. In fact, other studies have shown that emotional labor can be challenging and that workplace-specific factors can affect employees’ ability to maintain a positive persona. Organizational justice

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT THE PERCEPTION OF BEING TREATED FAIRLY AT WORK CAN SUPPORT AN EMPLOYEE’S ABILITY TO MAINTAIN THE FRIENDLINESS CUSTOMERS EXPECT.

has been identified as one of the relevant determinants: Empirical evidence suggests that the perception of being treated fairly at work can support an employee’s ability to maintain the friendliness that customers expect.

Organizational justice can be broken down into four components – procedural, interpersonal, informational and distributive – and perception of injustice in any of these components can harm staff’s ability to deliver a positive

customer experience. Although some evidence exists for the role of each of these components in staff’s ability to maintain a happy front, the associations of all four facets of organizational injustice have not been previously tested in a comprehensive and rigorous way.

WORKPLACE INJUSTICE

All four types of injustice can be experienced by frontline hotel employees. First, procedural injustice describes a situation

in which an employee’s voice is not given full attention or consideration in decision-making. Feeling dismissed is often judged as a procedural misdeed and has been associated with strain and anxiety, although a direct link to emotional labor has not been firmly established in the literature.

Nevertheless, hotel staff might experience procedural injustice when customers react unreasonably to an event, for example, when they complain about receiving a smoking room despite never requesting a non-smoking one. In such situations, the staff member’s emotional labor is likely to increase if their manager makes a judgment on the situation without first hearing the staff member’s side of the story.

In the same situation, the staff member is likely to experience the second type of injustice – interactional injustice. This is specifically associated with the customer’s behavior towards staff. The customer’s reaction to the assigned room could result in mistreatment of the staff member, for example through a display of anger or rudeness. The staff member in this situation will have to exert him or herself to remain friendly and polite rather than responding in anger.

At the same time, lack of courtesy on the side of the customer can invoke feelings of being disrespected, resulting in significant emotional strain on the staff member. These responses can also be related to the third type of injustice, informational injustice, where lack of clear



Staff's job satisfaction, or lack thereof, is likely to affect their work performance.

communication from the customer impedes proper service delivery, leading to feelings of resentment in the employees.

Finally, the fourth type of injustice, distributive injustice, signals a departure from the idea that allocation of goods, such as salary or promotion, depends on input. Perceived injustice in this category is strongly associated with negative emotions.

Although conceptually convincing, the evidence of the impact of these elements of organizational injustice on emotional labor is scarce.

ROSEN'S CONTRIBUTION

To elucidate the relationship between types of organizational injustice and emotional labor, Dr. Valeriya Shapoval from Rosen College of Hospitality Management developed a series of hypotheses, stating that each type of organizational injustice increases the emotional labor of the employees. Subsequently, she surveyed hourly-wage workers employed by large hotels in Central Florida over six months, focusing on staff members who regularly interact with customers.

In her research, Dr. Shapoval used previously validated instruments to measure emotional labor and organizational justice, as well as job satisfaction. Before the surveys were distributed to respondents, their content was adapted into plain English to ensure it was accessible and understandable to the entire cross-section of backgrounds represented by hotel employees. Such adapted surveys were also translated into Spanish and Creole to reach employees with limited fluency in English. Once the surveys were returned, Dr. Shapoval conducted statistical analyses to verify her hypotheses and to test whether there were gender differences in

the effect of each type of organizational injustice on emotional labor.

UNFAIRNESS IS A MOOD KILLER

Overall, 312 survey responses were included in the analysis. The majority of participants were white and hispanic, between the ages of 18–24 and 25–34, with a rather balanced distribution of gender, and front-of-house and back-of-house staff.

One of the key findings in this study was the connection between distributive injustice and emotional labor, which suggests that

prevalent in male workers than in their female counterparts. These differences likely stem from the fact that men and women tend to perceive stressors differently as well as from the fact that men and women are subject to different cultural norms when it comes to managing their emotions. As such, while need for control tends to be more acceptable for men than for women, women tend to adapt better to handling emotional dissonance and show positive emotions more easily when disappointed.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

These findings have implications for hotel managers and human resource departments concerned with staff development, compensation, well-being, satisfaction, and the overall work environment. If implemented effectively, the following points might be beneficial for the development of high-performing organizations and improvement of job satisfaction.

For example, in line with previous research, this study's findings suggest that fostering a culture where rewards are consistent with known expectations is likely to limit a sense

MANAGING PERCEIVED DISTRIBUTIVE INJUSTICE IS NOT NECESSARILY ABOUT SALARY INCREASES AS MUCH AS IT IS ABOUT APPRECIATION, RECOGNITION, AND JOB SECURITY.

growth opportunities and other direct or indirect monetary benefits which are perceived as unfair, lead in the long term to negative emotions.

This finding is particularly relevant given that hospitality is a service- and people-oriented industry, and staff's job satisfaction, or lack thereof, is likely to affect their work performance, which, in turn, is likely to affect customer experience damaging the brand.

Finally, there were gender differences in the importance of each organizational justice component on emotional labor. Moreover, Dr. Shapoval's research shows that perceived customer unfairness (informational) and managerial unfairness (procedural) is more

of distributive injustice and increase job satisfaction. Nevertheless, it should be noted that managing perceived distributive injustice is not necessarily about salary increases as much as it is about appreciation, recognition, and job security. These shifts in perception can be achieved through regular employee meetings, setting small goals, and praising staff members who achieve them. Similarly, greater involvement and engagement of employees can help counteract the perception of procedural and informational injustice. Regular meetings with management and additional training in relevant customer service areas can support employee development, allowing staff members to feel in control and to have positive influence on customer interactions.

RESEARCHERS IN FOCUS

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Dr. Shapoval sheds light on how organizational injustice affects emotional labor in hotel employees.

REFERENCES

Shapoval, V. (2019). Organizational injustice and emotional labor of hotel front-line employees. *International Journal of Hospitality and Management*, 78, 112-121.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

How widespread is organizational injustice in the hospitality industry and what drives it?

It is difficult to put a number on preserved organizational injustice by hotel employees. It does exist as research indicates, and it is not a rarity or some unique cases. Reasons for it are diverse since some of it is short term, like procedural or informational, and some is a long term such as distributive. During the research process, there were many discussions about emotional labor and organizational injustice with management and employees. As an overall result, the short term perceived injustice potentially comes from the fact that "the customer is always right." Distributive injustice is the long term and more linked with the ability to have a qualification and to have an opportunity for career growth.

Dr. Valeriya Shapoval



Dr. Shapoval is an Assistant Professor at Rosen College, UCF. She received MPS (2005) in Applied Statistics from Cornell University, obtained PhD (2016) in Hospitality Management from Rosen College, UCF, a Certification in Data Mining from SAS Institute at UCF and is a managing Editor of *International Journal of Hospitality Management*.

A: 9907 Universal Blvd Orlando FL 32819
E: Valeriya.Shapoval@ucf.edu **T:** +1 407-903-8053
W: <https://hospitality.ucf.edu/person/valeriya-shapoval/>

Appreciation, recognition, and job security are important for managing perceived distributive injustice.

