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.

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 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.

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

In such situations, the staff member’s emotional labor is likely to increase if their manager responds in anger. 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
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 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.

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

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 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.

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

**REFERENCES**

**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.

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**RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**
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