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Exploring Emotional Dissonance: On Doing What You Feel and Feeling What You Do

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to investigate and to critically examine the link between emotional dissonance and employee well-being by drawing on a conceptualization of emotional dissonance through a theoretical model, focusing on the biggest retail store chains in Turkey. There is no such a study exploring the ***cognitive antecedents of customer contact service-workers' well-being like emotional dissonance*** in Turkey till now. Study results approve that emotional dissonance (surface acting) has a significant negative impact on employee well being (i.e. emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction) and the significant moderating impact of self concept (importance of authenticity and surface acting self efficacy) were also proven. Satisfaction of employees and maintaining their well being is an important intangible asset in creating a real competitive and **strategic advantage** therefore it has important contribution to strategic management process. Managerial implications and future research direction is also discussed in conclusion.

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Keywords: Emotional dissonance; employee well-being; self concept; customer contact eervice workers

I. Introduction

In today's competitive marketplace, firms in every industry are seeking new ways and solutions for satisfying customers. Customer satisfaction is an important determinant of customer loyalty and in turn firm's profitability and longevity. Therefore, having satisfied customers and their loyalty have become key success factors for sustainable competitive advantage. And, for satisfying customers firms must gain a broader understanding of the essentials that are required if they are to thrive and survive in a rapidly evolving and increasingly competitive global market. While the importance of satisfying customers is generally accepted, some debate exists regarding the factors leading to satisfaction. The means used to build customer satisfaction in different industries generally include and related with variety of

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characteristics (Pettijohn et al. 2004:44). Especially, in services industry these characteristics may be affected by ***employee satisfaction*** and ***employee well being*** which are crucial to service delivery for customer contact employees. Satisfaction of employees and maintaining their well being is an important intangible asset in creating a real competitive and **strategic advantage** therefore it has important contribution to strategic management process. From this point of view, personal interaction component of services is often a primary determinant of the customer's overall satisfaction. Furthermore Farrell & Oczkowski (2009) note that customers often base their impressions of the organization on the quality of service received from customer contact employees. For instance, Pettijohn et al. (2004) state that in service industry customer contact employees have an important role in determining customer satisfaction and firm profitability. Since customer satisfaction represents a legitimate goal for the service firms, it may be assumed that **service-workers having well-being** (i.e. "job satisfaction" and "emotional exhaustion") those are more "satisfied" would be more likely to engage in activities designed to build customer satisfaction.

In a service setting, well-being of service workers is critically important because customers have fewer tangible cues to use in evaluating the quality of the service items (Kelly, 1992 cited in Pettijohn et al. 2004:45). Thus, one method that can facilitate lasting differentiation may be found in service-workers especially in customer contact employees (Uru & Yozgat, 2010). Nonetheless, the degree to which **well-being of service-workers and their expression of positive emotions about service delivery** may provide a distinguishable and lasting competitive advantage in services industry (Pettijohn et al., 2004). If we view well-being of service-workers and their expression of positive emotions as a resource in the competitive marketplace, the question then becomes ***which factors may support or inhibit the well being of service workers***. Well-being of service-workers can be fostered and inhibited by several factors. Until recently, research on well-being of service-workers focused on identifying personal characteristics and work environment. Although many variables influence well-being of service workers, there is reason to suspect that the **management of felt and displayed emotions** and in turn **"emotional dissonance (discrepancy between felt and expressed emotion)"** represent a particularly powerful influence.

So the main purpose of this study is to investigate and to critically examine the link between emotional dissonance and employee well-being by drawing on a conceptualization of emotional dissonance through a theoretical model, focusing on the biggest retail store chains in Turkey. Most of the research has been conducted in Western countries, primarily in the United States about the ***cognitive antecedents of customer contact service-workers' well-being like emotional dissonance*** but there is no such a study conducted in Turkey till now. Therefore, this study's theoretical contribution is examination of the effect of emotional dissonance (surface acting) on dimensions of customer contact service-workers' well-being in a comprehensive model; proposing new variables in the model and filling this gap in the research. Furthermore, this study's practical contribution is there is lack of research that consists of stated variables in our model conducted in retail store chains especially with customer contact service workers. And finally, the methodological contribution of this study is investigation of antecedents of customer contact service-workers' well-being in Turkey, a developing country; it shows the external validity of factors supporting or inhibiting customer contact service-workers' well-being which were tested in Western developed countries.

Within this context, it is necessary to define what emotional dissonance and related concepts are in our theoretical framework.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1. Emotional Dissonance & Surface Acting

More simplistically, emotional dissonance is a discrepancy between felt and expressed emotion (Hochschild, 1983), "analogous to the theory of cognitive dissonance which is created by Festinger in

1957. This discrepancy arises when the emotions employees display as a part of their job performance don't match the emotions they feel. Hochschild (1983) asserted that when felt emotions differ from expressed emotions, tension results. The tension is due to the estrangement from the self and feelings of inauthenticity. Expressing emotions that are different from the emotions that are felt "poses a challenge to a person's sense of self" (Pugh, Groth, Hennig-Thurau, 2011). Based on past empirical research about emotional dissonance, it has been argued to be a source of "strain" that threatens employee well-being (Pugh, Groth & Hennig-Thurau, 2011; Grandey, 2000; Morris & Feldman, 1997; Hochschild, 1983) and research on emotional dissonance has focused on mainly two emotional dissonance strategies commonly used by employees to meet display expectations. As Pugh, Groth & Hennig-Thurau (2011) stated in their articles (*and this article is also the basic model reference in our research*) these are surface acting and deep acting. **Surface acting** is the act of displaying emotions that are not felt, where an employee consciously modifies felt emotions to produce the required emotional displays (Pugh, Groth & Hennig-Thurau, 2011; Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). As Pugh, Groth & Hennig-Thurau (2011) stated in their articles about emotional dissonance, "*surface acting is widely considered to be the more detrimental emotional dissonance strategy because it produces a mismatch between felt and displayed emotions and has been associated with a wide range of negative outcomes, including lower job satisfaction, higher levels of burnout, and intentions to quit*" (Pugh, Groth & Hennig-Thurau, 2011; Grander, Fisk & Steiner, 2005; Heuven & Bakker, 2003; Grandey, 2003; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Côté & Morgan, 2002; Morris & Feldman, 1997).

2.2. Surface Acting & Employee Well- Being

As the mentioned results about emotional dissonance indicate, emotional dissonance has some direct negative impacts on well being of the employees. With regard to employee well being, "job satisfaction" and "emotional exhaustion" as two key variables in defining the concept and these are two of the most frequently examined outcomes in emotional dissonance literature in the west. ***Job satisfaction*** is the basic employee attitude towards one's job; as Pugh, Groth & Hennig-Thurau (2011) quotated from Weiss (2002), "it is defined as an evaluative judgment that an employee makes about his/her job". On the other hand ***emotional exhaustion*** is the basic and preliminary dimension of burnout syndrome and it refers to feelings of being over extended and depleted of one's emotional and physical resources (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001).

Employees who engage in surface acting experience a lack of control over their emotions (Erickson & Ritter, 2001) and experience in authenticity (Simpson & Stroh, 2004), this creates value conflict and person-job incongruence that Maslach & Leiter (2008) identified as the important determinants to burnout. Research indicates that poor person- environment fit is one of the important determinants of job dissatisfaction and job burnout; "because feeling one emotion while being required to display another implies a lack of fit between one's personal state and job demands" (Pugh, Groth & Hennig-Thurau, 2011). In summary, employees who surface act likely perceive a lack of fit between their true emotions and demands of the job which means and would be expected to lead to higher levels of emotional exhaustion and lower job satisfaction.

H1: Surface acting has a negative impact on employee well being dimensions.

2.3. "Self-Concept" as Moderator between Surface Acting and Employee Well- Being

A dominant theme in the literature is that surface acting is detrimental because it produces emotional dissonance, which is distressing because it conflicts with **workers' self-concepts.** A person's self-concept is a relatively stable image of himself or herself pertaining to his or her abilities, interests, needs, values, history, and aspirations (Pugh, Groth & Hennig-Thurau, 2011; Super, 1980). The self-concept is generally

conceptualized as a multidimensional knowledge structure consisting of attributes related to a person's self-perception. From the perspective of our research model (i.e., emotional dissonance), when service workers engage in surface acting (which produces a discrepancy between felt and displayed emotions), the extent of the negative effect surface acting has on an service worker's well-being depends on the relevance of the discrepancy to the service worker's self-concept (Pugh, Groth & Hennig-Thurau, 2011). Furthermore, research show that there are two theoretically relevant facets of a service worker's self-concept, each of which reflects a dimension of the self-concept construct: **importance of authentic emotional displays** (reflecting an employee's self-liking) and **self-efficacy for surface acting** (reflecting the employee's self-competence). Importance of authentic emotional display is the ***value*** employees place on expressing true and authentic emotions when interacting with customers. Some workers want to sincerely offer their true feelings to customers and some of them may tolerate it. Importance of authenticity and self-monitoring are similar concepts and may have similar impacts which may influence emotional dissonance that an employee feel when interacting with customers. High self-monitors may strategically cultivate public appearances with the goal of impressing and influencing others (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). Mostly, people high in self- monitoring view their interactions with the others as more pragmatic and they are more willing and able to construct and project images different from their private self about many aspects of their work lives. With a similar logic, individuals vary in the extent to which they feel it is important to express their true emotions in service interactions and for those who believe it is important to display authentic emotions surface acting is at odds with their self-concept and the dimensions of self-liking is constituting a conflict between behavior and personal values (Pugh, Groth & Hennig-Thurau, 2011). So importance of authentic emotional display may moderate the direct interaction between surface acting and employee well being outcomes.

H2: Importance of authenticity moderates the relationship between surface acting and well- being.

As a second component of self-concept, employees self efficacy with regard to performing surface acting represents an important facet of their self-competence as frontline service employees as such moderates the general negative impact of surface acting on well- being. Specifically, as Pugh, Groth & Hennig-Thurau, (2011) quotated from Wilk & Moynihan (2005), general job self-efficacy serves as an important personal resource that helps frontline workers to cope with the emotional labor demands of the job, reducing psychological and physiological strain. Similarly Hueven, Bakker, Schaufeli & Huisman (2006), found that emotional work self efficacy moderates the relationship between emotional dissonance and employees' work engagement. Within this context the last hypothesis of this study is:

H3: Surface acting self-efficacy moderates the relationship between surface acting and well- being.

Consequently, according to the proposed model, the effect of emotional dissonance (surface acting) on dimensions of customer contact service-workers' well-being will be tested. Furthermore, the moderating effects of self-concept variables in these effects will be tested. On top of all this, our model proposes control variables like gender, job tenure and income level since these are related to well-being of employees.

Figure.1 shows our model developed for this purpose.

3. Method

3.1. Sampling & Procedure

This research comprises 21 biggest ready-made clothing, cosmetic and restaurant chains in Turkey. In this context, customer contact service workers' opinions and perceptions are taken as base. This study

will be performed by explanatory research model. According to this, the effect of emotional dissonance (surface acting) on dimensions of customer contact service-workers' well-being will be explained.

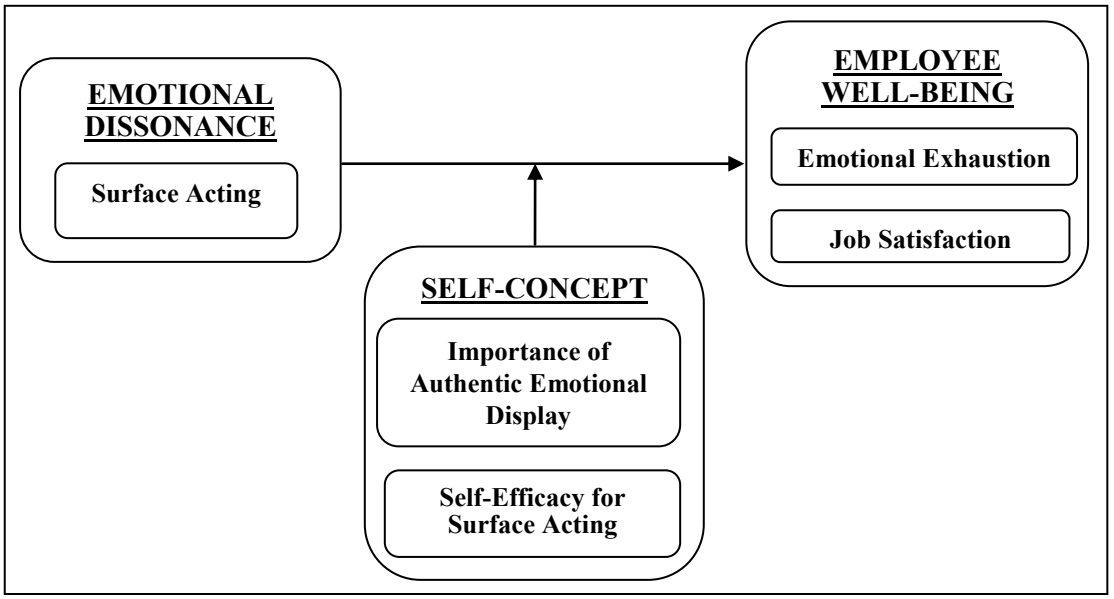

Figure.1 Proposed Research Model

Data is collected through structured questionnaires. The questionnaire prepared for service workers, consists of 23 questions in 6 parts (one part for 5 demographic questions). Removing respondents without complete data on the study variables through list-wise deletion resulted in a final sample size of 239.

3.2. Measurement Tools

Surface acting is measured with 3-item five-point Likert-type scale employing to a great extent/not at all format. They were drawn from Grandey's Surface Acting Scale (2003). In measuring *well-being* of customer contact service workers we consider emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction like Pugh, Groth & Hennig-Thurau's (2011) framework. For measuring *emotional exhaustion* 5 items of widely cited five-point likert type burnout scale of Pines & Aronson (1988) is used; in measuring *overall job satisfaction* widely cited Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins & Klesh's (1983) 3-item scale is used.
In measuring self concept, we consider importance of authentic emotional display and self-efficacy for surface acting. *Importance of authentic emotional display* is measured with Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne & Ilardi's 4-item five-point Likert-type scale (1997). *Self-efficacy for surface acting* is measured with Pugh, Groth & Hennig-Thurau's' 3-item five-point Likert-type scale (2011).

4. Findings & Results

Means, standard deviations, correlation coefficients, and reliability estimates of all variables are shown in Table.1. The reliability of all scales is satisfactory, with α scores ranging from .81 to .91. To assess the convergent and discriminant validity of all measures, a measurement model of all multi-item measures was subjected to confirmatory factor analysis. The overall fit statistics for our five-factor model indicate an acceptable fit to the data: χ^2 (142, N = 239) = 282.19, p < .01; comparative fit index = .94; incremental fit index = .94; root-mean-square error of approximation = .064 with p (close fit) < .05.

When we analyze the demographic characteristics of the respondents, they reported a mean age of 28.2 years (SD=5.81) and an average job tenure of 3.6 years (SD=4.18). Of respondents, 62% were female. Respondents in the sample indicated that they spent an average of 82.3% of their work time (SD=13.88%) interacting with customers.

In Table.1 means, standard deviations and correlations of the variables are exhibited in detail.

Table.1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	Mean	StdD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	1.38	0.49	-						
2. Tenure	3.59	4.18	.09	-					
3. Surface acting	3.32	1.18	-.14*	-.03	.86				
4. Importance of authentic emotional display	3.06	1.13	.00	.17**	.03	.85			
5. Surface acting self-efficacy	74.93	20.46	-.17**	-.04	.28**	-.15*	.84		
6. Emotional exhaustion	190	0.88	-.10	.03	.38**	.25**	.06	.91	
7. Job satisfaction	3.88	1.03	.04	.03	-.25**	-.14*	.13*	-.49**	.81

Note. N = 239. Values along the diagonal represent internal consistency estimates.

*p<.05 (two-tailed). **p <.01 (two-tailed).

Results in Table.1 show that, consistent with prior research surface acting is positively related to emotional exhaustion and negatively related to job satisfaction. Respondents who engage in more surface acting also report higher levels of emotional exhaustion (r=.38, p<.01) and lower levels of job satisfaction (r= -.25, p<.01).

Table.2 Regression Summary for Importance of Authenticity and Self-Efficacy Surface Acting

	Emotional exhaustion			Job Satisfaction		
Predictor	R^2	ΔR^2	*Std.Beta*	R^2	ΔR^2	*Std.Beta*
Step 1: Control variables	.00			.00		
Gender			-.05			.03
Tenure			.02			.03
Step 2: Independent variables	.22**	.22**		.11**	.11**	
Surface acting			.48**			-.33**
Importance of authentic emotional display			.23**			-.11
Surface acting self-efficacy			-.23**			.25**
Step 3: Interactions	.26**	.04**		.13**	.02**	
Surface acting x Importance of authentic emotional display			.12*			-.15*
Surface acting x Surface acting self-efficacy			-.14*			.10

Note. N = 229. All coefficients are reported for the final step.

*p < .05. **p < .01.

We conducted hierarchical regression analyses to test our hypotheses. Gender and job tenure having been shown to be related to emotional labor in prior research were entered as control variables in the first step. Surface acting, importance of authentic emotional display and surface acting self- efficacy in were entered in the second step. Both interaction terms (Surface Acting X Importance of Authentic Emotional Display and Surface Acting X Self- Efficacy) were entered simultaneously in the third step. There is no meaningful impact of gender and tenure on employee well being dimensions. As the results indicated, surface acting has a meaningful positive impact on emotional exhaustion and a negative impact on job

satisfaction which means that H1 is accepted. When we look at the moderating affects, importance of authentic emotional display moderates the relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion and between surface acting and job satisfaction in that surface acting would result in more negative outcomes (i.e. higher emotional exhaustion and lower job satisfaction) for employees who place more importance on the expression of authentic emotions in service encounters. In other words, the relationship between surface acting and levels of emotional exhaustion and between surface acting and job satisfaction are stronger for individuals who place high importance on authentic emotional display when interacting with customers which is consistent with the theoretical arguments. Therefore H2 is supported. H3 is predicted that surface acting self efficacy would moderate the relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion and between surface acting and job satisfaction in that surface acting and job satisfaction in that surface acting is has less negative outcomes (i.e. lower emotional exhaustion and higher job satisfaction) for individuals who have high self –efficacy about their ability to engage in surface acting. Results in Table.3 indicates that the interaction is significant for emotional exhaustion but not for job satisfaction which means the results partially support H3.

5. Conclusion & Discussion

From the point of strategic management view, to create a real competitive advantage in the global market places companies have to take into consideration customer satisfaction especially in service industry. Satisfaction of the customers can be maintained with satisfied employees and for that purpose companies have to be taken into consideration subjective well being of their employees. Within that context, the purpose of this study was to examine the antecedents of employee well-being of customer contact service employees which has a crucial impact on overall customer satisfaction. Study results approve that emotional dissonance (surface acting) has a significant negative impact on employee well being (i.e. emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction) and the significant moderating impact of self concept (importance of authenticity and surface acting self efficacy) were also proven. Therefore, this study's theoretical contribution is examination of the effect of emotional dissonance (surface acting) on dimensions of customer contact service-workers' well-being in a comprehensive model; proposing new variables in the model and filling this gap in the research. Furthermore, this study's practical contribution is the research conducted in retail store chains especially with customer contact service workers using the stated model. And finally, the methodological contribution of this study is investigation of antecedents of customer contact service-workers' well-being in Turkey, a developing country; it shows the external validity of factors supporting or inhibiting customer contact service-workers' well-being which were tested in Western developed countries. The most important limitation of this study is about sampling size. This research comprises 21 biggest ready-made clothing, cosmetic and restaurant chains in Turkey. To make more valid generalizations it has to cover more companies within the specified sector and this research has to be repeated in different related sectors. However this study has important contributions to the development of new research models and it has some managerial implications.

As ***managerial implications***, managers who would like to create a competitive and strategic advantage they have to give importance to the subjective well being of their employees which means that they have to create some human resources management systems and policies to increase the well being and satisfaction of employees. Within that context as the emotional dissonance have a negative explanatory power on employee's well being, managers have to take into consideration this cognitive variable and they have to select and train their service workers to decrease this dissonance.

Furthermore, this study was the preliminary one that searches the impact of cognitive antecedents of customer contact service-workers' well-being in Turkey. So ***in the upcoming research models*** new individual, cognitive and contextual variables can be included in the model. For example the impact of other personality characteristics that may create emotional dissonance can be taken as independent variables like self-monitoring, self-esteem, Machiavellianism, political skill, mal-adaptive perfectionism,

injustice tolerance etc. that may have an impact on the self concept. At the same time besides employee well being (i.e. job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion), new dependent variables may also be added to the model. For example, organizational commitment, job engagement, organizational citizenship behavior, intention to quit, other dimensions of burnout like depersonalization and decrease in personal accomplishment can be proposed as such variables. Meanwhile, besides individual and personality dimensions that may increase or decrease emotional dissonance, the impact of contextual factors may also be taken into consideration in previous research models like leader-member exchange quality, perceived organizational support, leadership and management style, organizational culture, person-organization fit can be proposed as such contextual variables. All of these variables may also be linked to some company wide results like customer satisfaction, quality of service, corporate reputation of the company from a broader perspective.

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