The effects of emotional dissonance and quality of work life perceptions on absenteeism and turnover intentions among turkish call center employees

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Abstract

Service industry gained importance in recent periods. Call Centers have been situated within that sector in which emotions are most intensively used. For competitiveness, understanding the emotional processes is important. Therefore, the aim of this study is to understand the effect emotional dissonance has on turnover intentions and absenteeism, and the moderating effect of quality of work life perceptions for call center employees. The study was conducted with 318 Turkish call center employees. A significant positive effect was found regarding emotional dissonance on turnover intentions and on unexcused absenteeism. Instead of functioning as a moderator, quality of work life perceptions affected turnover intentions and absenteeism directly.

Keywords: Emotional Dissonance, Turnover intentions, Quality of work life, Absenteeism, Service Industry, Call Centers

1. Introduction

Increased growth in service sector elicited call center industry which accentuate emotions of employees in the workplace. The reason to focus on the emotions or affective responses of employees is their frequent interaction with the customers (Dormann, & Zijlstra, 2003).

1.1 Emotional Dissonance and Call Center Work

Emotional dissonance is defined as ‘the conflict between expressed and experienced emotions’ (Abraham, 1998a). It arises when an employee’s displayed emotions represent the obeying organizational rules, but do not represent his or her actual feelings (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Expressing appropriate emotions during face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions is a job demand for many employees in the service industry, particularly in call center jobs (Zapf, Isic, Becholdt, & Blau, 2003). Recent studies have differentiated various dimensions of emotion work while most of them comprise the frequency of emotion expression and emotional dissonance (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Büssing & Glaser, 1999). For call centers, increasing percentage of turnover is among the basic challenges they face today (Aşkun, 2007) As part of the task specifications, call center work is often highlighted as particularly stressful, and by implication, that it is more stressful than any other comparable forms of employment (Turnover of Moroccan Call Centers, 2005). Related to this, emotional labor can become dysfunctional for the call center agent when dissonance between felt emotions and displayed emotions is experienced.
1.2 Organizational Resources: Quality of Work Life in Call Centers

Quality of work life as a concept is usually defined through one or with all of the below concepts: professional activities and career development, recognition for competence and expertise, department and external relationships, perceptions of discrimination, and positive working conditions. Many have found significant relationships between increased quality of work life and high employee commitment (Jaskyte, 2003; Cropanzano & Folger, 1989) increased job satisfaction (Cole & Flint, 2005; Folger & Greenberg, 1985), and decreased turnover intention rates (Arvey & Sackett, 1993; Cropanzano & Folger, 1989).

1.3 Emotional Dissonance and Absenteeism

Like turnover, absenteeism is also a major problem for organizations. Types of absenteeism were simply classified as organizationally excused versus organizationally unexcused absences by previous studies. According to these studies, excused absences are personal sickness, injuries or funeral leave. Unexcused absences are the cases in which employees intentionally don’t come to work (Blau & Boal, 1987).

Related to the above findings, our hypotheses for our research are:

H1: There is a positive relationship between emotional dissonance and unexcused absenteeism.

H2: There is a negative relationship between quality of work life and unexcused absenteeism.

H3: There is no relationship between emotional dissonance, quality of work life and excused absenteeism.

H4: There is a positive relationship between emotional dissonance and turnover intentions.

1.4 Quality of Work Life as a Moderator between Emotional Dissonance and Turnover Intentions

Chang (1999) had mentioned that attitudes of individuals toward their career may also affect their attitudes toward their organization. In line with this understanding, Huang, Lawler, & Lei (2007) had hypothesized that the perception of quality of work life has a direct negative effect on turnover intention. Related to these arguments, we are also wondering the effects of quality of work life variables in an organization regarding the link between emotional dissonance, turnover intentions and absenteeism:

H5: Perception of organizational QWL Resources moderates the effect of emotional dissonance on turnover intentions among call center employees.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

A total of 318 call center agents (187 Female and 111 Male) with 5.5 years tenure participated to the study. Majority of the call centers belonged to national companies (94.7%) and had both inbound and outbound service (81.1%).

2.2 Procedure

The managers and the team leaders administered the questionnaires during agents’ lunch and/or break times and the questionnaires were filled by those agents who volunteered to take part in the study.
2.3 Instruments

Emotional dissonance was measured by Full Scan Questionnaire (FSQ) by Xanthopoulou, Bakker, & Schaufeli, (2003), ranged from 6 “always” to 1 “never”.

Turnover intentions was measured by Rosin & Korabik (1991), ranged from 6 “totally agree” to 1 “totally disagree”. FSQ was used to measure absenteeism. For quality of work life dimensions, FSQ, Quality of Work Life in Self-Managing Work Groups Questionnaire (Cohen, 1997, p. 282); Communication Climate Inventory (Costigan & Schmeidler, 1987, p. 11); Questionnaire on the Experience and Evaluation of Work (QEEW) (Veldhoven, Lisle, & Moors, 1998, p. 1-9); Effort-Reward Imbalance Questionnaire (Hanson, Schaufeli, Vrijkotte, Plomp, & Godaert, 2000, p. 144) and self created items were used.

3. Results

3.1 Factor Analysis

The factor structure of the Quality of Work Life instrument yielded four factors (Recognition (% Variance: 38.7), Developmental Opportunities (% Variance: 12.9), Supportive Leadership (% Variance: 7.3) and Fair Pay and Promotion System (% Variance: 6.6) with Eigen values over 1.00 that explained 65.5% of the total variance with .819 KMO value.

3.2 The Relationship between Emotional Dissonance and Turnover Intentions

Regression analysis was used to test the relationship between emotional dissonance and turnover intentions. According to the analysis, there is a positive relationship between these two variables; the greater the emotional dissonance, the higher individuals’ turnover intentions (Beta: .179***, R^2: .32, Adjusted R^2: .029). Thus, H1 was supported.

3.3 The Relationship between Emotional Dissonance and Absenteeism

The relationship between these two variables was tested by t-test. Based on the results, individuals who were unexcused absent experience more emotional dissonance compared to others who were not absent. On the other hand, there is no significant mean difference between individuals who were excused absent and not absent. Thus, H4 was supported, and H3 was partially supported.

3.4 The Moderating role of Quality of Work Life Perceptions between the Emotional Dissonance and Turnover Intention Relationship

The role of quality of work life as a moderating variable between emotional dissonance and turnover intentions was tested by hierarchical regression analysis. The interaction effects of quality of work life and emotional dissonance do not have significant effects on turnover intentions. Instead of a moderating effect, Developmental Opportunities (Beta: -.325***), Supportive Leadership (Beta: -.182***) and Fair Pay and Promotion System (Beta: .200***) have direct effects on turnover intentions. Thus, H5, H5a and H5b were not supported.

3.5 The Relationship between QWL Perceptions andAbsenteeism

The relationship between QWL Perceptions and absenteeism was analyzed by a t-test. Results of the analysis indicated that, there is a difference between unexcused absenteeism and two QWL factors (Supportive Leadership and Fair Pay and Promotion System) perception. Employees who don’t make unexcused absenteeism have higher positive perceptions about organization’s Supportive Leadership and Fair Pay and Promotion System than employees who make unexcused absenteeism. Thus, H2 and H3 were supported (Xanthopoulou, et al. 2003; Rosin & Korabik, 1991; Cohen, 1997).
4. Discussion

Results indicated that, there is a significant relationship between emotional dissonance, turnover intentions and unexcused absenteeism. Adding to these results, quality of work life perceptions of call center agents has no moderating role in the emotional dissonance, turnover intentions relationship. Instead of functioning as a moderator, perceptions of quality of work life have a significant direct effect on turnover intentions. This result can be explained by the fact that emotional dissonance is defined to be a context-specific stressor (Heuven and Bakker, 2003) and is specifically related with the work itself. This might lead to an understanding that the call center agents might be separating call center work and call center environment in their minds. Another result of the present study is the negative effect of QWL perceptions on unexcused absenteeism meaning that organizational resources might have a predictive relationship with turnover intentions and absenteeism.

Four dimensions came out of the factor analysis based on the agents’ perceptions of organizational QWL dimensions: Recognition, developmental opportunities, supportive leadership, fair pay and promotion system. Perceptions of those dimensions were found to be contributing to developing turnover intentions and absenteeism in a reverse manner. In general, perceiving access to opportunity and resources is argued to be linked to intent to stay. As an example, in her study with a nurse population, Nedd (2004) found that perceived access to opportunity and resources were the best predictors of nurses’ intent to stay on the job. This result we believe is consistent with the ERI model mentioned earlier.

The effect of emotional dissonance on turnover intentions may be related with the depletion of the employees’ psychological resources. Individuals who live dissonance may detach from their own self and also from their organization. This stressor may be leading the agents to feel estranged from their workplace and may be directing them to look for another job. Therefore, the more an agent lives emotional dissonance, the higher the turnover intention and the number of unexcused absent days will be. In the Abraham’s (1998b) study, it was stated that, emotional dissonance leads personal fragmentation of the self which reduces commitment to the organization.

This study tried to shed light to the role of emotion in the workplace especially for service work regarding call center agents. Understanding the emotions of the employees seems to be crucial for a healthy and effective work environment, thus consistently lower turnover rates and unexcused absenteeism.

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