Hotel Frontline Employee’s Affective Commitment and Service Creativity: the Mediating Effect of Emotional Labor

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Abstract. According to the investigation of three star hotels’ employees and 108 effective questionnaires, we study the relationship between the affective commitment and service creativity of employees and the mediating effect of emotional labor. The results showed that affective commitment has a significant positive relationship with emotional labor and employees’ service creativity; and emotional labor has a significant positive influence on the service creativity; deep acting plays a part of the mediating role between affective commitment and employees’ service creativity. Surface acting plays a completely mediating role in the relation between affective commitment and service creativity.

Introduction

In recent years, with the adjusting of countries’ industrial structure, the service industry gradually becomes a top priority. At the same time, more and more companies realized that creativity was the important supporting power of enterprise development. As the direct contact with the customer, hotel frontline employees fully understand the needs of customer and have to streamline and improve the creative process. The level of their innovation abilities has an important influence to the competition of companies in some extent. Wenhua Wu (2011) proposed that there is a significant relationship between organizational commitment and employee’s creativity, which, affective commitment promote innovative behavior [1]. Other scholars found that affective commitment has a direct effect to the innovation performance and this relationship will be weakened when employees show the achievement goal orientation [2]. Due to the moderating effect of goal orientation, different scholars have different conclusions. What’s more, hotel frontline employees engage in not only physical labor but also emotional labor. Different employees will adopt different emotional labor strategies in the same situation when they contact with the customer. As a result, the customer has a different satisfaction with the employee adopt different emotional labor strategies. That will cause employees to work tired and separation rate rise. So, service creativity of employees will be different. Previous studies often discuss the relationship between emotional labor and organizational commitment when they regard emotional labor as independent variable and organizational commitment as dependent variable. This study regards emotional labor as mediating variable and discusses the relationship between the emotional labor and service creativity of employee. According to that, we want to solve the questions as follows,
how does hotel frontline employees ‘affective commitment influence the emotional labor? Does employees’ emotional labor strategy have an effect on the service creativity of employees?

**Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

**Affective Commitment and Service Creativity**

Affective commitment is one of factors in organizational commitment. The concept of organizational commitment was put forward by Becker (1960) [3] for the first time. He considered that organizational commitment is a psychological phenomenon occurring when employees had to stay in the organization with the increased investment in the organizations unilaterally. Gadrey (1995) [4] considered that service creativity is the combination of all employees’ abilities to solve customers’ problems. Zhou and George (2001) [5] proposed that personal innovation ability is the basic of organizational innovation. Employees with affective commitment want to be committed to the organization’s service innovation target.

From the above discussion, we put forward the following hypotheses:

H1: Affective commitment has a positive impact on service creativity of employees.

**Affective Commitment and Emotional Labor**

Emotional labor, as advocated by Arlie Hochschild (1983) is all about ‘the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display for a wage. She suggested two main processes of emotional labor (surface acting and deep acting) that represent how employees manage emotions to meet work role demands [6]. Humphrey and Ashforth (1993) defined emotional labor as the act of displaying appropriate emotions, with the goal to engage in a form of impression management for the organization [7]. Feldman and Morris (1997) defined emotional labor as “the effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally” [8]. Above all the scholars paid attention to the emotional expression of behavior, but, they ignored the surface performance and deep of the internal emotion management is of great importance. Grandey (2001) defines surface acting, as the suppression of one’s felt emotions and faking the desired emotions, and deep acting, as the modification of one’s feelings in order to display the appropriate emotions [9]. Affective commitment refers to employees’ emotional investment in organizations. It includes employees’ identification with the goals and values of organization, a sense of pride from organization and they voluntary sacrifice and contribution in order to the interest of organization. Some scholars considered that affective commitment is negative related to the surface acting and has negative prediction effect on surface performance [10]. To sum up, we put forward the following hypotheses:

H2a: Affective commitment has a negative influence on employees’ surface acting.

H2b: Affective commitment has a positive influence on employees’ deep acting.

**Emotional Labor and Service Creativity of Employee**

Surface acting is a kind of emotional expression that employees pretend temporarily, so that, the employee’s service could achieve the required organizational level. Previous studies showed that employee’s surface acting is negative related to the service quality. Deep acting includes that employee sincerely treat the customer and they think it is valued, then they get positive feedback from customers, finally, this feedback increases employee’s self-efficacy [11]. Totterdell and Holamn (2003) found that deep acting has a positive impact on the
organizational performance and employee’s enthusiasm [12]. To sum up, we put forward the following hypotheses:

H3a: Surface acting has a negative influence on the service creativity of employees.
H3b: Deep acting has a positive influence on the service creativity of employees.

**Emotional Labor and Service Creativity of Employees**

Above the hypotheses, we found that affective commitment is an emotional investment between employee and organization. Frontline employee often has negative emotions when they interact with customers. Emotional labor may be a mediating variable between affective commitment and innovation ability of employee. According to the different situations, employee will adopt different emotional labor strategies. Thus, they will increase their service creativity. To sum up, we put forward the following hypotheses:

H4a: Surface acting mediated the relationship between affective commitment and service creativity of employees.
H4b: Deep acting mediated the relationship between affective commitment and service creativity of employees.

Based on above discussion, we put forward our conceptual model show in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. The Conceptual Model.](image)

**Methods**

**Samples and Procedures**

In order to test our hypotheses, we choose several star hotels in China to collect our data. After the pre-test of our questionnaires, we modified the sentences which can arouse misunderstanding of readers. Then we selected 120 frontline employees who work in the hotels in China. Finally, we received 108 completely and usefully questionnaires. T-test showed no significant differences between respondents and non-respondents with gender, age and tenure. The sample comprised 56% female and 44% male. 77% employees are 20-25 years old.

**Measures**

All of the constructs of the variables were adapted from the mature instruments in previous studies and were adapted with back translation. Each item is on a 5-point Likert scale.

We adopted the questionnaire of affective commitment to the organization which
developed by Mayer and Allen (1990) [13]. This questionnaire includes 7 items. The cronbach’s alpha coefficient is 0.62. The emotional labor scale was developed by Peijun Wu (2003) [14]. This scale includes 11 items. It includes 5 items of surface acting and 6 items of deep acting respectively. The cronbach’s alpha coefficient is 0.83 and 0.87 respectively. The total cronbach’s alpha coefficient of emotional labor is 0.73. The employees’ innovation ability scale was development by Gong et al. (2009) [15]. According to the service context, we made some adjusted. There are 5 items in our scales. The cronbach’s alpha coefficient is 0.86.

Results

Measurement Analysis

All of the cronbach’s alpha coefficients are higher than 0.8, showing good reliability and convergent validity. Then we compute the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) to further certificate the reliability and validity. All of the value of AVE are bigger than 0.5 and CR are bigger than 0.7, showing good reliability and discriminate validity.

Regression Analysis

The hypotheses are tested via ordinary least squares (OLS) regression using SPSS 20.0 software according to Wen Z’s (2005) [16] advice to test the mediating effect. After centralized variables, we tested the Correlation between independent variable and dependent variable, independent variable and mediating variable. At the same time, we input the independent variable and mediating variable into the test. If the relationship between independent variable and dependent variable isn’t significant, it will be fully mediation. If significant level is reduced, but still significant, it will be partly mediation. Table 1 reports the results of the mediation effect of emotional labor inspection at a time.

Table 1. Result of the Regression Analysis.

| variables                  | Equation 1 | Equation 2 | Equation 3 | Equation 4 | Equation 5 |
|----------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
|                            | Service    | Surface    | Deep acting| Service    | Service    |
| Independent variable       | creativity | acting     |            | creativity | creativity |
| Affective commitment       | 0.539***   | 0.32**     | 0.314**    | 0.389***   | -0.051     |
| Mediating variable         |            |            |            |            |            |
| Surface acting             |            |            |            |            | 0.315      |
| Deep acting                |            |            |            | 0.425***   |            |
| Adjusted R2                | 0.283      | 0.124      | 0.114      | 0.438      | 0.279      |
| R2 change                  | 0.290      | 0.093      | 0.090      | 0.158      | 0.002      |
| F value                    | 43.318     | 11.378     | 10.822     | 73.428     | 43.681     |

From the test, we can see that all the significant level of t- test was 0.000 (less than 0.05). So, H1, H2a, H2b, H3a, H3b were supported. From the results of regression analyses, we can see that deep acting plays a part of the mediating role between affective commitment and
service creativity. And, surface acting plays a completely mediating role in the relation between affective commitment and service creativity. So, H4a, H4b was supported.

Conclusion

In the service industry, emotional labor is an important factor to the service creativity of frontline employee. In this study, we found that affective commitment has a positive relationship with deep acting and service creativity, and emotional labor has a significant mediating effect between affective commitment and service creativity.

In the previous study, most of scholars studied the effect of organization to the emotional labor. In this study, we study whether affective commitment has impact on emotional labor from the perspective of individual workers. These findings enrich the studies of emotional labor and service creativity. From studies, organizations can take effective measures to increase employee’s service creativity. On the one hand, organizations should create a good enterprise culture to foster employees’ values and code of conduct and form a stimulating environment and increase employees’ emotional engagement. On the other hand, organizations should put the emotional labor into the human resources management. That could prompt employees to face the service better.

Due to the limit of samples, there are some problems in promotion. What’s more, our survey participants are mostly on the age of 20-30 because of the special characteristic of hotel industry. In the future, we should enlarge the sample size and test whether this model applicable to other service industries.

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