

To Measure Coping Strategies Adopted By The Hotel Employees

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ABSTRACT

Purpose

Employees in the service sector interact with their customers face to face as well as through electronic mode. At times they have to put on an act to control their emotional state (Emotional labor) in dealing with the demands of the customers, their complaints and service failures this may lead to emotional exhaustion, burnout and stress. The study was conducted in the hotel sector to find out coping strategies adopted by hotel frontline employees.

Design / Methodology/ Approach

Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The sample unit was hotel employees. Non probability convenience sampling procedure was adopted and 280 hotel employees were selected as a sample unit. Data were collected through structured questionnaire.

Findings

Through factor analysis 5 dimensions of coping strategies that were adopted by the hotel employees were identified. They were active strategy, expressive strategy, social support, Psychological response, multi-pronged approach- active, expressive and denial strategy.

Keywords

Active strategy, expressive strategy, social support, Psychological response, multi-pronged approach- active, expressive and denial strategy, hotel industry.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the service industry mainly in hotel industry, being sociable, pleasant or kind to its customer or people is a value-added ingredient (Schneider & Bowen, 1985). Servicing the hotel guest is one of the core activities in the hotel industry. From the customer's point of view, the most vivid impression of service firm occurs in the service encounter, when the customer interacts with the employees. Every encounter is a "moment of truth", for the hotel guests. From the organization's point of view, each encounter thus presents an opportunity to

prove its potential as a quality service provider and to increase customer loyalty. Frontline service employees i.e. boundary spanners are considered as significant human resource influencing major customer outcomes such as satisfaction and loyalty. As the “face of the service firm”, these employees ought to show certain optimistic emotions such as friendliness, joyfulness, affection, warmth, zeal, enthusiasm, confidence, good mood while controlling their pessimistic emotions such as anger, irritation, rage, ill feeling in their day to day interactions with guests (Hochschild, 1983). In this view, the success of hospitality organizations as well as of service organizations in general largely depends upon the performance of its frontline employees (Chung and Schneider, 2002; Chebat et al., 2003; Hartline et al., 2000). Therefore the employees in the service sector lay emphasis on meeting up the demands of their customers as per their expectations. So service employees lay emphasis on emotional labor. Hochschild (1983:7) defined emotional laborers, “as those that enter into face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact with the public”. It requires one to “induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others”.

Emotional labor was first defined by the noted sociologist Arlie Hochschild in her book, “*The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling*”. It's essentially putting on an act to affect the emotional state of others in a way that meets the expectations of an employer. Naturally, all employers expect their workers to obey company rules and procedures, but emotional labor goes beyond simply following the rules, as it requires individuals to alter their personality into one that is company-approved, one that is often far different from their usual disposition. Jobs that entail emotional labour require the incumbent to produce an emotional state in another arising from their interactions. The emotional manifestation of the employee also has become a part of the service itself (Hochschild, 1983; Morris & Feldman, 1996)

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

In psychological research, coping is defined as an individual's response mechanism encompassing various cognitive and behavioural efforts to regulate external and/or internal factors that deplete one's resources (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). The manner of coping is typically complex and multi-dimensional. In their early work, Folkman and Lazarus (1980) distinguished between problem-focused (managing the problem) and emotion-focused (managing elicited emotions) coping, but later noted that these are complementary rather than

rival strategies (Lazarus, 1996). It means that in dealing with stressful incidents, problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies can be used in tandem to deal with the same situation.

According to Duhachek (2005) coping mechanism encompasses three major strategies: active, expressive and avoidance/denial.

Active strategy: It is aimed at problem solving and resolution.

Expressive strategy: It is aimed at emotional expression, emotional communication and support-seeking behaviours to deal with the elicited stress.

Finally, avoidance/denial strategy: It is a passive dismissal of a problem.

Duhachek and Kelting (2009) proposed that coping is a trait-based construct, a repertoire, comprised of consistent strategies that consumers employ to deal with stress. If this is the case, variations in a coping repertoire can be attributed to certain variations in individual beliefs and competencies that are relevant to coping. Prior research has emphasised the effectiveness of various coping strategies in producing certain outcomes for an individual (e.g. perceived stress or subjective well-being), drawing several conclusions about the adaptability of these coping strategies. Specifically, individuals who engage in problem-solving coping suffer from lower levels of stress and exhibit stronger well-being (Aldwin and Revenson, 1987). Alternatively, prolonged and severe depression has been linked to avoidance/denial (Duhachek, 2008). Expressive coping has been shown to exert both positive and negative effects on one's well-being, depending on the nature of a service failure. For instance, ineffective social support as well as repetitive emotional venting decrease one's well-being and prolong stress; however, in low control situations, i.e. situations in which individuals have limited control over fixing a problem (e.g., with cancer patients; Pavia and Mason, 2004), expressive coping is more successful at relieving stress than are problem-focused strategies. Finally, the denial coping strategy is a passive emotional and cognitive response to stress. Service failure is a situation where the perceived level of stress is highly subjective (Yelena et al 2010).

We had identified dimensions and variables related to coping mechanism adopted by the employees after conducting an exhaustive literature review. An instrument incorporating 20 items was developed and administered to the respondents. We went in for factor analysis for data reduction and identification of resulting dimensions. Means scores of the resulting dimensions were also calculated.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Objective of the study

The objective of the study is to study coping mechanism adopted by the hotel employees.

Table 1: Research plan: Research Approach, Design, Method

| Research Design | Research Methods | Sampling Plan | | | Instrument |
|-----------------|------------------|---------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| | | Sample Unit | Sample Size | Sampling Procedure | |
| Descriptive | Survey | Frontline employees | 280 | Non-probability Convenience | Undisguised structured |

Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The sample unit was Frontline hotel employees. Non probability convenience sampling procedure was adopted and 280 Frontline hotel employees were selected as a sample unit. Data were collected through structured questionnaire.

4.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Reliability test

The internal consistency of the instrument was checked through reliability test. The reliability of the instrument was acceptable as the value of cronbach alpha is .777

Table 2: Reliability Statistics(coping mechanism adopted)

| Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
|------------------|--|------------|
| .777 | .852 | 20 |

Coping Mechanism adopted

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Test was used to measure suitability of data for **Factor Analysis**. The test measures sampling adequacy for each variable in the model **and** for the complete model. As the value of KMO and Bartlett's test was 0.849 we can say that the suitability is meritorious.

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test

| | | |
|--|--------------------|---------|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. | | .849 |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity | Approx. Chi-Square | 5.775E3 |
| | Df | 190 |
| | Sig. | .000 |

Factor analysis was conducted for data reduction and dimension identification

Table 4 : Factor Analysis-Output

| Component | Item | Score | Dimension |
|-----------|--|-------|---|
| 1 | Concentrate on ways the problem could be solved | .910 | Active strategy |
| | Try to make a plan of action | .925 | |
| | Generate potential solutions | .914 | |
| | Considering all the things you do, you handle dissatisfied customers quite well | .541 | |
| | You do not mind dealing with customers complaints | .752 | |
| | No customer you deal with, leaves with problems unresolved | .872 | |
| | Resolving a complaint for a customer is a great thrill to you | .838 | |
| 2 | Ask friends with similar experience what they did | .571 | Expressive strategy |
| | Try to get advice from someone about what to do | .680 | |
| | Have a friend assist you in fixing the problem | .759 | |
| | Complaining customers you have dealt with in the past are among today's most loyal customers | .671 | |
| 3 | Do what has to be done | .723 | Social support |
| | Seek out others for comfort | .832 | |
| | Rely on others | .689 | |
| 4 | Think about the best way to handle things | .774 | Psychological Response |
| | Concentrate on best efforts on doing something about problem | .826 | |
| | Pretend that this event never happened | .587 | |
| 5 | Follow a plan to make things better/more satisfying | .701 | Multi-pronged approach-active, expressive and denial strategy |
| | Sharing your feelings with others you trust and respect | .485 | |
| | Refuse to believe that the problem ever occurred | .617 | |

From the above table it can be seen that 5 dimensions were identified through factor analysis. They were active strategy, expressive strategy, social support, Psychological response, multi-pronged approach- active, expressive and denial strategy. We calculated mean score for the above mentioned 5 dimensions.

Summary- Dimension and Mean

Table 5 : Dimensions -Mean

| Sr. No. | Dimension | Mean Score |
|---------|--|------------|
| 1 | Active Strategy | 2.0255 |
| 2 | Expressive Strategy | 1.94195 |
| 3 | Social Support | 2.6071 |
| 4 | Psychological Response | 2.2976 |
| 5 | Multi Pronged approach- Active, Expressive and Denial Strategy | 2.4833 |

From the above analysis it could be interpreted that coping mechanism that employees adopt is expressive strategy as the mean score is 1.94 followed by active strategy, its mean score being 2.0255. The other coping dimension adopted by employees are psychological response followed by multi pronged approach and social support, their respective mean scores being 2.48433 and 2.6071 respectively.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The frontline employees have to deal with such customers and the dealing may lead to stress as some customers could be jay customers. There are 7 types of jay customers such as (the cheat, the thief, the rule breaker, the belligerent, the family feuders, the vandals and the dead beat) that are found in every services including hotel industry (Lovelock and Chatterjee, 2011). So coping strategies are adopted by employees that could be active, expressive or multi pronged (combination of active and expressive strategy). Many times they have to seek support from the organization.

The coping mechanisms adopted by the employees identified from our research were expressive strategy (as the mean score for it was 1.94), followed by active strategy (as the mean score is 2.0255), psychological response, multi pronged approach and social support. Expressive strategy is aimed at emotional expression, emotional communication and support-seeking behaviours to deal with stress.

Active strategy is aimed at problem solving and resolution. Employees draw upon the support system provided by the Organization when adopting active strategy. The Organization should focus on the functional dimensions like information support, technology support and

developing systems. They should develop active support system which should help their employees in their difficulties (Lovelock and Chatterjee, 2011).

Managerial Implications

They should develop active support system which should help their employees in their difficulties. To be efficient and effective in their jobs, service workers require internal support systems that are aligned with their needs to be customer focused. One way to encourage supportive internal service relationships is to measure and to reward internal service. The hotel management should develop sound internal marketing activities that include active encouragement of the employees, establishment of an open and encouraging internal climate, management support, knowledge support, leadership and internal dialogue, developing systems and providing technology support to enable employees.

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