

ABSTRACT

Title of the Research: **CALL CENTER EMOTIONAL LABOR, WORKPLACE WELL-BEING AND TENURE: THE IMPACT OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS**

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This study examined the relationships of emotional labor with workplace well-being and tenure of Philippine call center agents (CCAs). In addition, it examined the impact of moderating psychological characteristics of optimism, perseverance, personal growth initiative, and subjective happiness. Particularly, this study investigated the following questions: (1) What is the level of emotional labor, optimism, perseverance, personal growth initiative, subjective happiness, workplace well-being, and tenure of the CCAs? (2) Is there a significant relationship between emotional labor and workplace well-being of Philippine CCAs? (3) Is there a significant relationship between emotional labor and tenure of Philippine CCAs? (4) Do the positive psychological characteristics of optimism, perseverance, personal growth initiative, and subjective happiness moderate the relationship between emotional labor and workplace well-being of Philippine CCAs? (5) Do the positive psychological characteristics of optimism, perseverance, personal

growth initiative, and subjective happiness moderate the relationship between emotional labor and tenure of Philippine CCAs?

A mixed method research design that utilized a sequential explanatory design was adopted for this study. Six instruments, namely, 18-item Emotional Labor Scale (Chu, 2002), 6-item Optimism Scale (Lai et al., 1998), 12-item Perseverance Scale (Duckworth et al., 2007), 9-item Personal Growth Initiative Scale (Robitschek et al, 1998), 4-item Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), and 14-item Workplace Well-being Scale (Page, 2005) were used to assess the different variables in the study.

A total of 643 out of the targeted 669 call center agents from Metro Manila, Metro Cebu, Metro Davao, Baguio and Pampanga were surveyed. Area sampling or geographical cluster sampling was used in the study in selecting the call center agents. The area cluster was based on the location of the call center companies. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean, standard deviation, Pearson correlation, and hierarchical regression.

This study found that emotional labor associates negatively with workplace well-being, $r(641) = -.778, p < .01$. This study found that emotional labor also negatively associates with tenure of call center respondents, $r(641) = -.411, p < .01$. Personal growth initiative and subjective happiness moderate the relationship between emotional labor and workplace well-being. The β coefficient of the main effects of emotional labor ($\beta = -.224, p < .01$), personal growth initiative ($\beta = .264, p < .01$), subjective happiness ($\beta = .506, p < .01$), and

the interaction effects between emotional labor and personal growth initiative ($\beta=.232$, $p<.05$) and between emotional labor and subjective happiness ($\beta=-.261$, $p<.05$) are all significant. The model $R^2=.742$ is also significant at the .01 level.

The study also found that among all the positive psychological characteristics, only perseverance moderate the relationship between emotional labor and tenure of call center agent respondents. The β coefficient of the main effects of emotional labor ($\beta=-.296$, $p<.01$), perseverance ($\beta=.491$, $p<.01$), and the interaction between emotional labor and perseverance ($\beta=-.247$, $p<.01$) are all significant.

These findings reveal that when higher levels of emotional labor are experienced by call center agents, the lower their reported levels of workplace well-being. Similarly, lower levels of emotional labor predict longer tenure in the company. Subjective happiness and personal growth initiative moderates the negative effects of emotional labor on workplace well-being.

The study concludes that emotional labor is central to tasks performed by call center agents. Emotional labor negatively impacts workplace well-being of call center agents. Emotional labor also negatively impacts on tenure of CCAs. CCAs who are actively engaged in their personal growth and those who positively evaluate their experiences tend to have higher levels of workplace well-being despite engaging in emotional labor. Only perseverance significantly moderates the relationship between emotional labor and tenure.

These results imply that CCAs who take charge of how they deal with the stress of their work by engaging in various activities available and accessible to them have higher levels of workplace well-being. Further, it really takes persistence to endure hardships of work. Some people are just tougher than others and it would take a lot more onslaught of stress and job demands to make them quit.

This present study thereby recommends that the call center industry take into account the centrality of emotional labor in customer contact service work in the selection of potential agents, in enhancing the person-environment fit between call center agent and work environment, in embracing a culture and values that emphasizes simplicity, contentment and patience. Likewise, this study encourages human resource managers, counseling psychology and organizational development professionals to advocate an organization culture that goes beyond efficiency and speed in order to create a work environment that can further improve service and minimize turnover problems in the call center industry. Finally, it is recommended that future investigations should consider the possible contrast among emotional labor, workplace well-being, and tenure between CCAs who are still in the industry and those who have already left in order to provide a complete picture of the situation in the call center industry.