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Emotional Dissonance and Customer Service: An Exploratory Study

Abstract

In this paper, the broad context for the study of emotional dissonance and its importance to marketing is set out. The relevant literature on emotional dissonance, its antecedents and outcomes are introduced together with the knowledge gap in the literature. The conceptual framework of emotional dissonance is expanded via exploratory research using case studies in order to identify the key issues and the managerial implications. The study's findings extend the previous theoretical and empirical research on emotional dissonance in the workplace and customer service role internalization in high contact services involving face-to-face interactions between employees and customers. Specifically, the findings highlight the influence of customer service role internalization on emotional dissonance and further suggest examining the impact of emotional dissonance on key job outcome variables namely, customer oriented behaviours and job satisfaction.

Keywords: emotional labor, dissonance, performance management, customer service, customer orientation, job performance, job satisfaction.

Emotional Dissonance and Customer Service: An Exploratory Study

Introduction

There are many high contact services involving direct interactions with customers and requiring service providers to manage how they present their emotions during service encounters (Leidner, 1999). In these interactions, service workers may have to comply with employer prescribed occupational expectations about emotional expression, otherwise known as “display rules” (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993), or “feeling rules” (Hochschild, 1983) by hiding true feelings from clients and displaying feelings required to perform the job role effectively. Mann (1999, p. 1) highlighted an interaction involving a health care worker and a psychiatric patient to illustrate the emotional labor involved in high contact services as follows: “I spend a lot of my time trying to control my emotions at work. People don’t expect me to be emotional, whether that means angry, upset, or excited. I have to be the same neutral person at all times.”

Almost 40 percent of jobs require substantial amounts of emotion management in the workplace according to Hochschild (1983). If we limit the analysis to high contact service roles, involving face-to-face interactions between service employees and customers, the percentage would be considerably higher. Service marketers generally agree that the manner in which interactions between employees and customers unfold constitute a principal component of a customer’s expectations and experience of service quality. Hence, it is considered a key source of customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Gronroos, 2001; Lovelock, 2001). Service marketers further recognize that it is the emotions displayed by service workers when interacting with customers as a key factor in determining customer evaluations of service quality (Pugh, 2001).

Emotional Dissonance and its Significance to Marketing

Hochschild (1983, p. 90) defined emotional dissonance as: “maintaining a difference between feeling and feigning”. Hoffman and Bateson (2001, p. 252) conceptualized emotional dissonance as a result of person/role conflict in which “contact personnel are required to hide their true feelings and present a front or face to the customer”. Emotional dissonance therefore occurs when expressed emotions that satisfy feelings rule, or role expectations pertaining to emotional expression that come with the job rule, but clash with inner feelings.

Julian and Ramaseshan (1994) highlighted in a study the issue of emotional dissonance and its importance to customer contact personnel and marketing, where the role of customer-contact personnel in the marketing process of a retail bank was recognized as being important by the customer-contact personnel and the organization. However, the customer-contact personnel felt they were not well rewarded for their contribution to the retail bank's marketing effort, were not involved in an official training programme, and a significant percentage (37.1%) felt they received greater blame, condemnation and threat of dismissal than did salespeople. The significance of the Julian and Ramaseshan (1994) findings highlights the low self-esteem evident in the customer-contact personnel that could permeate itself within the organization. A result of this low self-esteem could be poor customer service ultimately leading to poor organizational performance (Julian and Ramaseshan, 1994).

Scholars in the field of services marketing like Lovelock (2001) for example have suggested that expressing emotions that one does not feel during service encounters can be stressful for service workers. The emotional dissonance that results can lead to feelings of falseness and in-authenticity (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). The possible long-term psychological consequences of such stress and feelings of in-authenticity include emotional exhaustion, job burnout (Erickson and Ritter, 2001; Hochschild, 1983), job dissatisfaction (Morris and Feldman, 1997) and depression (Erickson and Wharton, 1997).

The significance of emotional dissonance to marketers was in the way employees experience their jobs, which was reflected in the perceptions customers have of the service quality they receive (Julian and Ramaseshan, 1994; Schneider, 1994). There is also a well-established link between employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, sales and profits (Heskett, Sasser, and Schlesinger, 2003). Despite the compelling link between the employee's experience of the job role, emotional dissonance and customer satisfaction, there has been a paucity of research to explore how emotional dissonance can be managed to improve employee satisfaction and job performance in the context of high contact customer services (see Julian and Ramaseshan, 1994; Kotler, 1991). For example, Kotler (1991) presented a model of three types of strategic marketing orientation; external marketing, internal marketing, and interactive marketing, and explained how they can be applied. External marketing describes how a company's marketing mix strategy consisting of product, price, promotion and place (distribution) is used to create a beneficial exchange relationship between producer and consumer. The emphasis is on improving marketing relationships between the company and its customers by adopting and utilising effective marketing mix strategies. However, this traditional marketing approach is no longer sufficient to retain customers in today's rapidly changing global marketplace (Kotler, 1991; Waterschoot and Van Den Bulte, 1992). Rather, two other marketing orientations - internal marketing and interactive marketing - are needed in order to meet the needs of today's companies effectively (Lu, Madu, Kuei, and Winokur, 1994).

Internal marketing is a concept that emphasises team management. The company should encourage and motivate employees in non-marketing departments to work as a team and support employees in marketing related areas (e.g., sales, marketing and customer service) who have frequent contact with customers. A focus of internal marketing is the management of relationships between marketing and non-marketing personnel. Internal

marketing also involves ensuring that all non-marketing personnel have a marketing focus and that they understand their role in customer service provision and the marketing of the company's products and services (Julian and Ramaseshan, 1994). Systems marketing, which is a current practice within the broader context of internal marketing, involves the interaction between the company's management and employees, and its customers. Here, emphasis is placed on pre-selling, selling, and post-selling activities (Caruso, 1992; Lu *et al.*, 1994).

Interactive marketing measures the level of efficiency of the marketing department in contacting and addressing customers' needs. Database marketing can be used to illustrate this concept. Here, information on customers such as personal and/or organisational interests, goals and objectives is maintained in a database. The premise is: "the more information a company has about its customers, the better it interacts with them and, therefore, the better their needs are satisfied" (Lu *et al.*, 1994, p. 43). A typical example is a company that has a customer service department that maintains a database on customer complaints, needs and, perhaps, expectations. This information can be used to improve work processes.

These three types of strategic marketing orientation as proposed by Kotler (1991) can be adapted and further developed to support a company's vision and long-term goals and objectives in the global marketplace. However, they all hinge on satisfactory work place relationships between employer, employee and customer with emotional dissonance making a substantial contribution to that work place relationship. As such, this paper suggests an integrative approach to the study of emotional dissonance. The authors focus on research on workplace emotion management and its consequences, emotional dissonance, from a diverse range of literatures including sociology, management and marketing, in an effort to extend the application of emotional dissonance to the field of marketing.

The sociology and management literatures have contributed mostly to the conceptual and empirical study of workplace emotions and emotional dissonance. Hochschild (1983)

first coined the term “emotional labor” to describe what employees perform when they are required to feel, or at least project the appearance of feeling particular emotions as they engage in job related interactions (Hochschild, 1983). Although Hochschild’s (1983) work focused on the negative psychological consequences of expressing emotions in order to comply with job expectations, positive consequences have also been conceptualized and found. These included the enhancement of professional judgement and commitment to a professional identity (Yanay and Shahar, 1998), psychological detachment from deeply felt emotions (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987), self-efficacy, objectivity and emotional equilibrium (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). However, most of the literature on emotional dissonance deals conceptually with the negative consequences yet to be empirically tested. This paper addresses the paucity of empirical research in this area from a marketing perspective.

Based on the theory of dramaturgy, a field of sociology that applies the metaphor of a theatrical performance to social interactions, Hochschild (1983) considered the service employee to be an ‘actor’ who consciously attempts to deal with emotional dissonance and comply with feeling rules by engaging in two forms of acting. “Surface acting” requires employees to display emotions required for the job that they do not actually feel. This was achieved by carefully presenting verbal and non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures and tone of voice. “Deep acting” requires much more effort from employees who actually psyche themselves into feeling the emotions they were required to express, thus eliminating the emotional dissonance initially experienced. According to Hochschild (1983), these different forms of acting affected the employee’s psychological well being in very different ways. However, as previously explained, most of these propositions have not been empirically supported.

Instead, the majority of sociological studies on the expression of required emotions in the workplace have focussed on conceptualising the negative psychological consequences of

displaying emotions not felt amongst employees in typical front-line service roles such as airline attendants (Hochschild, 1983), bank employees, (Erickson and Wharton, 1997; Julian and Ramaseshan, 1994; Wharton, 1993), health care workers (Erickson and Wharton, 1997; Morris and Feldman, 1997; Pugh, 2001; Wharton, 1993), debt collectors (Morris and Feldman, 1997), and supermarket cashiers (Rafaeli, 1989). These emotions include burnout, stress, estrangement from one's "self", poor self-esteem, depression, cynicism and alienation from work (Julian and Ramaseshan, 1994; Wharton, 1999).

The field of sociology has contributed conceptually to an understanding of workplace emotions in general and their impact on psychological wellbeing. However, there has been little empirical support for the propositions pertaining to job performance outcomes such as job satisfaction and perceived job performance, which is of particular interest to the management and marketing disciplines. As identified earlier, Kotler (1991) alluded to this when he examined internal marketing orientation and its effect on performance outcomes. However, it is now timely to test the importance of workplace emotions on performance outcomes in an empirical model.

Antecedents of Emotional Dissonance: Customer Service and Role Orientation

Drawing from the sociology literature on social identity theory, Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) argued that the more one identified with a particular job role, the less emotional dissonance one experienced and the less hypocritical one felt when performing according to the expectations of that role. Using role theory, Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) argued that the more one's internalised feelings rule for a particular role, the less emotional dissonance one experiences when complying with feeling rules on the job. However these propositions have not been empirically tested.

Morris and Feldman (1997) subsequently conceptualised and tested a model of workplace emotion management that included the antecedents of emotional dissonance. They explored a number of exogenous job design variables, specifically, job autonomy and task routine-ness, as antecedents of emotional dissonance. Endogenous variables, such as personality traits specific to the individual employee that included a degree of customer orientation as defined by Brown et al. (2002), or the degree of role internalisation as defined by Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) have largely been ignored in the mainstream literature. Morris and Feldman (1997) did, however, find empirical support for previously argued negative impacts of emotional dissonance on key job outcomes namely, emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction. These outcomes have important marketing implications for customer satisfaction in high contact service roles.

Marketing has also drawn on role theory and social identity theory in conceptualising phenomena related to high contact service encounters. Of particular relevance is the theoretical framework for understanding role stress in front-line service jobs which explains three kinds of role stress namely role ambiguity, role over load and role conflict (Dewettinck and Buyens, 2003). Amongst the different types of role conflict recognised in the marketing literature, it was person/role conflicts, which reflected a bad fit between an individual's self perception and the specific role the person must play in an organization (Hoffman and Bateson 2001) that was of most relevance in the study of emotional dissonance.

When the employee is faking their emotions in order to fulfil job expectations this is a recognised form of person/role conflict that arises when an employee does not identify with the job role (Hoffman and Bateson, 2001; Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987), which may result in emotional dissonance (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987), role stress, negative impacts on employee satisfaction, low levels of employee commitment and job performance amongst front-line employees (Dewettinck and Buyens, 2003). Despite these important consequences of

emotional dissonance in service organisations, there is surprisingly little conceptual and empirical literature that focuses on employee emotions and how person/role conflict can be managed by managing emotional dissonance. Instead, the focus of the literature for managing role stress has been on exogenous factors such as leadership style, employee empowerment and job design (Dewettinck and Buyens, 2003).

An earlier application of role theory to marketing by Solomon *et al.* (1985) argued that the more employees internalized their expectations and values of a job role as their own, the more authentic they would feel performing their role and the more committed they will be to providing good service. Despite the recognised importance of role expectations in service performance, consideration of role expectations that guide one's performance has not included expectations about emotional expression and how these expectations, or feelings, might influence a role incumbent's experience of emotional dissonance and as a consequence, job satisfaction and performance. The omission of expectations for emotional expression by organisational theorists who have adopted role theory has been recognised for quite some time (see Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987) yet, to date, it has not been empirically examined in the marketing and management literature when analysing the topic of person/role conflict.

There is, however, emerging recognition and awareness of the importance of managing employee emotions in marketing. The concept of "internal service recovery" introduced by Bowen and Johnston (1999) referred to the efforts organisations carried out to make internal customers, i.e., front-line employees, feel a greater sense of "wholeness" after external service recovery episodes. Internal service recovery involved helping employees recover from possible negative feelings associated with dealing with complaining customers and making them more confident in their ability to satisfy customers in the future. The focus of internal service recovery has been on what the organization does to support customer

contact employees who have to hide their feelings of low perceived control and helplessness in dealing with service failures and the impact on job performance (see Julian and Ramaseshan, 1994). Bowen and Johnston (1999) argued that their work was an important initial step in addressing the lack of attention paid to understanding how repeatedly dealing with angry customers in recovery situations affected the attitudes, emotions, and behaviours of the customer-contact employee.

In another application of social identity theory, Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) argued that individuals who regard their roles as a central, salient, and valued component of who they are, are apt to feel most authentic when they are conforming to role expectations including display rules. They conceptually linked employee experience of authenticity to lower levels of emotional dissonance and enhanced psychological well-being. Empirical support for this link existed between emotional dissonance and job satisfaction (Morris and Feldman, 1997) and emotional dissonance and job burnout (Kruml and Geddes, 2000). However, the marketing literature has yet to extend the application of social identity theory and the related concept of role internalisation to emotional dissonance and the outcomes of job performance and job satisfaction.

Based on the work of Goffman (1959), Grove and Fisk (1983) used role theory in their application of the dramaturgical metaphor to explain behaviour in high contact service exchanges. Grove and Fisk's (1983) conceptual work focussed on the service provider's behaviour and appearance in the context of a service setting and the resultant impression of reality given off to an observer. Consistent with Goffman's (1959) impression management perspective, this application of dramaturgy to marketing was not concerned with explaining the service provider's experience including emotional dissonance. Instead, the focus was on how the service employee's behaviours may sustain or undermine the desired impression of reality as perceived by the customer. Although Hochschild (1983) extended the application of

the dramaturgical perspective in high contact service interactions to incorporate the concepts of “surface acting” and “deep acting”, the marketing implications of managing emotions through genuinely hiding the emotions felt have yet to be explored empirically.

A central argument of this paper is that there is conceptual and empirical support for extending the links between role internalisation, emotional dissonance and job outcomes. According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), role internalisation referred to the incorporation of values, attitudes and so forth within the self as guiding principles. The marketing literature has traditionally explored the antecedents of customer-oriented behaviours (Hartline, Maxham and McKee, 2000; Hoffman and Ingram, 1991). More recently, the marketing literature has conceptualised customer orientation as beliefs and surface personality traits rather than behaviours (Licata *et al.*, 2003; Brown *et al.*, 2002; Kennedy, Lassk, and Goolsby, 2002). Kennedy *et al.* (2002) conceptualised customer orientation as a “customer mind-set” defined as “an individual’s belief that understanding and satisfying customers, whether internal or external to the organization, is central to the proper execution of his or her job”. Brown *et al.* (2002) conceptualised customer orientation as “an employee’s tendency or predisposition to meet customer needs in an on-the-job context”. This paper suggests that this more recent definition of customer orientation represents a form of role internalisation. This definition of customer orientation will therefore be referred to as “Customer service role internalisation” (CSRI) to distinguish it from traditional definitions of customer orientation that reflect the performance of customer oriented behaviours.

Perceived Job Performance and Job Satisfaction

Licata *et al.* (2003); Brown *et al.* (2002); and Kennedy *et al.* (2002), found that customer oriented beliefs and surface traits positively influence key job outcomes namely, job satisfaction (Kennedy *et al.*, 2002) and job performance (Brown *et al.*, 2002; Licata *et al.*,

2003). Just as an individual who has internalised role expectations and values experiences less emotional dissonance resulting in positive job outcomes when performing a job role, so too will an individual with a high degree of CSRI experience less emotional dissonance resulting in positive job outcomes and an increase in job performance and job satisfaction.

Some researchers have conceptualised customer orientation as a set of behaviours rather than beliefs. These researchers have found that job satisfaction, amongst other variables such as role conflict, role ambiguity, psychological empowerment, organisational socialization and commitment, were the antecedents of customer orientation (Hoffman and Ingram, 1991; Kelly, 1992). These apparently conflicting findings pertaining to the antecedents and consequences of customer orientation are due to the different ways in which the customer orientation concept has been conceptualised and operationalized. The distinction in this paper between CSRI and customer orientation as behaviours addresses this issue.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for emotional dissonance is set out in Figure 1 taking into consideration the literature review and the early development of the key concept of customer service role internalization, operationalized as two antecedent variables, namely, an enjoyment dimension and an external customer mindset dimension with perceived job performance and job satisfaction as outcome variables. Based on the literature review and the conceptual framework, the research propositions are as follows:

Proposition 1: Customer service role internalization has a positive influence on emotional dissonance.

Proposition 2: Emotional dissonance has a negative influence on customer orientation and job performance.

Proposition 3: Job satisfaction has a positive influence on job performance.

“take in Figure I”

The theoretical underpinnings of this paper is that there is an empirical link between customer service role internalisation, emotional dissonance and job outcomes, measured in terms of job satisfaction and performance. Customer service role internalisation will be determined by items designed to tap an individual’s belief or mind set that understanding and satisfying customers, whether internal or external to the organisation, is central to the proper execution of the employee’s role. Brown *et al.* (2002) conceptualised customer orientation as an employee’s tendency to satisfy customer needs on the job. This paper adopts this principle of customer orientation as a form of customer service role internalisation.

Emotional dissonance will be measured via items designed to tap the personal or role conflict experienced by customer contact personnel in the workplace. Expressing emotions that one does not feel during service encounters can be extremely stressful for service workers (Lovelock, 2001). The emotional dissonance that results can lead to feelings of in-authenticity (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). The possible long-term psychological consequences of such stress and feelings of in-authenticity include emotional exhaustion, job burnout (Erickson and Ritter, 2001; Hochschild, 1983), job dissatisfaction (Morris and Feldman, 1997) and depression (Erickson and Wharton, 1997). There is also a well-established link between employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, sales and profits (Heskett, Sasser, and Schlesinger, 2003).

Job outcomes will be determined via items designed to tap perceived job performance and job satisfaction. Perceived job performance and job satisfaction will be determined via items designed to tap various customer oriented beliefs and surface traits because customer

oriented beliefs and surface traits positively influence key job outcomes (Licata *et al.*, 2003; Brown *et al.*, 2002; Kennedy *et al.*, 2002). Just as an individual who has internalized role expectations and values experiences less emotional dissonance resulting in positive job outcomes when performing a job role, so too will an individual with a high degree of CSRI experience less emotional dissonance resulting in positive job outcomes and an increase in job performance and job satisfaction.

Analysis and Probable Outcomes

The paper's primary purpose is to identify the influence of customer service role internalization and emotional dissonance on job outcomes as determined by perceived job performance and job satisfaction. The paper also examines the relationship between customer service role internalization, emotional dissonance and job outcomes. The paper's framework suggests that emotional dissonance is determined by customer service role internalization when measured via items designed to determine the employee's internalization of their expectations and values of a job role as their own. Job outcomes are in turn determined by emotional dissonance and customer service role internalization. The conceptualization posits a link between customer service role internalization and job outcomes through emotional dissonance highlighting the central role of emotional dissonance in determining job outcomes when assessed by perceived job performance and job satisfaction. This is because of the various roles performed by the customer contact employee in providing customer service. The firm must give due consideration to the fit between the employee's feelings and the behavior he/she is required to display at work.

Customer service role internalization has a positive influence on emotional dissonance

An exploratory study was initiated with 3 case studies; a department store, Robinson, a courier company, Federal Express and an airline, Singapore Airlines. A total of 20 separate interviews were carried out with top management and service staff of these companies using face to face in depth interviews from January to March 2005. In all these businesses, secondary research was also carried out through the Internet and company publications such as their annual reports. The authors felt that the case study approach was the most appropriate in this case as this study focuses on contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context, i.e., the circumstances in which an event or events occurred (Yin, 2002).

From the results of the interviews with employees of the various companies, it is clear that all the three companies had some form of role internalization program to induct new employees into their organizations and to underline the importance of service in their work. These programs had speakers from the various departments within the organizations covering topics such as an introduction to the organization structure, background information on the organization, corporate mission and goals, achievements, plans and the competitive business environment. The employees of these companies recognized and acknowledged the need and usefulness of the role internalization programs to provide information about the companies and to socialize employees into the corporate culture of the organizations. These programs also helped the employees identify with the organizations, take pride in the organizational goals and achievements and encourage the formation of emotional links within the organizations. Detailed below is the expressed attitude of a respondent in regards to the orientation program:

“Most of us feel we now have a good idea of what the company is about, about the business and the people manning it. We have this sense of pride of having been selected to be a part of this organization and holding responsible positions within it. We also realized the importance of good customer service in our work.

Sales coordinator, Federal Express, 28 years

Generally, these employees acknowledged that there is a role for these programs, and the need to be inducted into the organizational business mission and culture. More importantly, in all these businesses studied, the main motivation behind the orientation program appeared also to provide service workers with tools for managing their emotions, allowing them to appear empathetic to customers and clients. In this regard, service workers can be likened to stage actors who can practice "deep acting" or "surface acting," or both.

In Singapore Airlines, the role internalization and customer service programs were part of a 3 months long program while in Robinson's department store and Federal Express, customer service programs were carried out separately from the internalization program. For these two companies, the customer service programs were usually held periodically and were available even for long-term service staff as a value-added or refresher course. The employees were instructed on the importance of customer service as they were workers that had to deal with customers at some stage of their working life. The emphasis on these programs was clearly to understand the customers' needs and to serve them well, whether they were in the department, courier or airline business.

In the case of Robinson's department store, where customer service is paramount in making a sale, all sales employees were required to attend a 3 day program. In this course, they were taught what the company called, "non-negotiable service standards". These standards governed different scenarios like what to say at the selling floor, at the till, on the phone, polite phrases to use when serving customers and how to dress, (neat hair, light make up and neatly trimmed nails) and behave as a promoter, (e.g., act in a business-like manner and no idling or chatting). This training can be seen as providing the tools for the service workers to manage their emotions by standardizing the service encounters to some common recipe or polite phrases or words to use when in contact with the customers .However, the

sales trainers invariably would emphasize to the trainees the importance of appearing genuine, friendly, caring and helpful as according to a trainer, “the customers could easily spot a bad attitude or uncaring manner”.

In the case of the airline, the new recruits go through a 3 month training period, where they were taught service procedures, (such as preparation of food and wine, the serving of passengers etc.) to emergency procedures in situations where the aircraft may have ditched into the sea. The message that was constantly repeated and incessantly preached to the flight attendants was that they were the cream of the flight crews, the best in the world. The instructors frequently referred to the especially designed uniform, (the form fitting sarong kebaya) that was especially meant to enhance their figures and looks. It is no wonder that such a close identification and pride in the company resulted in the formidable performance of the “Singapore Girl”. This is reflected in the words of a flight attendant.

“We were constantly told we are the best in the world. When we are walking down the aisle of the airplane, pushing the trolley or serving drinks, we represented the best in customer service – the ‘Singapore Girl’. In fact, we are trained to believe we look so good, that if we did not receive special attention from the male passengers, we would probably have failed in our role.

Flight Attendant, female, 22 years

The result of the qualitative analysis lends support to our proposition that customer service role internalization (CSRI) has a positive influence on customer orientation. In situations where the employee has internalized and identified with the company’s corporate mission, goals and culture, he/she will tend to be more oriented to the needs of the company and its customers and to the satisfaction of those needs.

Emotional dissonance has a negative influence on customer orientation and job performance

With regards to the above assumptions, this could be expressed by the degree of emotional dissonance experienced by an employee. In situations where how he/she felt does not correlate with the organization's dictum of his/her required emotions and the consequent display and customer orientation. In other words, the employee would be least likely to be customer oriented if he/she experienced some conflict between his/her true feelings and the emotions he/she is required to possess and to display to others around them.

The kind of situations that result in emotional dissonance can easily occur in service encounters because of the inconsistent nature of service delivery as much depends on the situational factors involved such as the employee's feelings on the work day or stressful encounters with demanding or difficult customers. In such a scenario, bad service is not always the inevitable consequence as factors such as how well the employees are trained, the cohesion of the team as well as the presence of external constraints like supervisors and mystery shoppers could also affect service performance.

In the airline industry, the service performance of the flight attendants is crucial as they are often represented as a global icon. Their performance would be rigorously scrutinized by at least two levels. One level is the immediate superior of the attendant in question and the other is the presence of "mystery shoppers" who could be posing as passengers on board the plane. The superior would typically observe the performance of the attendant on board the plane and her interactions with the passengers and at the end of the flight would be presented to her in the form of a report. If the attendant does not pass the scrutiny of her superior it is unlikely that she will be confirmed in her job. The other source involved is the "mystery shopper". He or she is typically employed by an independent market research company and his/her report on the performance of individual attendants would go through the corporate hierarchy to reach the top management of the airline where assessment

of the suitability of the attendants would be determined. This is best expressed in the words of a flight attendant:

We often have to work in stressful situations when the flights are crowded. We may be on a long flight to London or Paris and have been on our feet for hours. Still we have to put on a smile and be obliging to answer to the passenger's request for food, drinks or other things. Maybe you can call this superficial acting but our jobs are at stake when you consider our bosses are on board and who among the passengers might put in a complaint.

Fight attendant, female, 22 years

One aspect of cabin crew training was to engage the cabin staff in role playing with difficult passengers. This would take different forms such as incessant demands by a customer to be given preferential treatment like the serving of alcoholic drinks or causing a disturbance on board the plane. Part of the training required the cabin crew to visualize the difficult passengers as being tired and anxious customers, who were perhaps flying for the first time. In this way, they were able to deal with passengers like they were children who were not intentionally causing mischief. This process of visualization has the net effect of rationalizing the behavior of passengers and making it easier for the cabin crew to display the appropriate behavior to appease the passengers and provide them with the required service.

The experiences of the sales coordinators in Federal Express also illustrated the role of organizational factors, such as teamwork in alleviating the impact of emotional dissonance amongst its employees. The coordinators in Federal Express were assigned to different geographical sectors within Singapore and were in charge of the accounts and sales of courier services within their own sectors. Most of the coordinators were happy with these arrangements as the sectors were rotated periodically so that every employee had a chance to be in charge of a high billing and transactions area where they were able to achieve better sales targets. Since the coordinators were paid commissions on their sales as well, meeting

and bettering the sales targets were important for increasing their monetary incomes as well as serving as a basis for promotions.

The inculcation and emphasis of the importance of team work in this company meant that ideally the employees would view themselves as part of a team in the effective performance of whatever duties they were assigned. This attitude would help contribute to a state of positive emotional equilibrium and acceptance in the assignment of duties and responsibilities even if the said employee felt that the top management may be less than justified or fair in the allocation of their responsibilities. If one is allocated a low sales area for a prolonged period of time or not given due recognition on performance, it would be expected that resentment would occur as it did in some cases when sales coordinators were interviewed during the study. But this resentment and dissatisfaction was rather muted as in this particular company established channels of feedback existed for the staff to express their dissatisfaction, like channels for staff grievances and group assessment of the employees' superiors. These channels for grievances and assessment of superiors were taken very seriously by management as there were strict procedures and time limits governing the use of these channels. The company was, therefore, able to institutionalise the resolution of employees' personal emotional conflict and promote emotional equilibrium that would in turn have a positive effect on customer orientation.

As for the sales coordinators' relationships with their customers, there were several occasions where the sales coordinator voiced their unhappiness when under pressure to adhere strictly to the company's "customer first" philosophy. As in many sales jobs, the need to think positive and strive for constant sales targets, called for some degree of personal discipline. Some of the sales coordinators felt they were tested particularly in situations where the clients were "unreasonable in their expectations of service regarding overnight delivery or in the charges that had been incurred" which were expectations built up by the

company in line with its external marketing communication emphasizing speed and reliability as its competitive advantages. Fortunately, the company's recent introduction and use of information technology in the form of document and parcel registration and tracking has in some ways reduced the incidences of customers' anxiety and complaints about the delivery of important documents and parcels.

According to a sales coordinator, the emphasis on client loyalty has resulted in a long-term strategy of cultivating good relationships with customers. What this meant in operational terms, is that sales coordination attempted to build strong customer relationships through a series of initiatives such as preferential rates, periodic phone calls, visits and corporate gifts during important festival occasions. Thus, how sales coordinators felt about their customers during the course of their relationship with them was moderated by the company's long-term goal of customer relationship management and loyalty programs.

There were occasions in this company where staff had to take on roles that were incongruous with their status. One aspect of the company's corporate culture was to ensure that even top managers had to undertake duties of the lower level staff and this included the physical delivery of documents and parcels. One manager, in spite of the orientation program and her seniority with the company (or perhaps because of this seniority), felt very uneasy and experienced great discomfort when she had to put on the delivery man uniform and cap and make the rounds of delivery in times when the company was shorthanded. Her ambivalence arising from status and role conflict was further exacerbated by customers' reactions that often expressed surprise that women had to deliver the parcels.

In such a situation, the extent of her ability to reconcile her status and role conflict and her strength of attitude towards customer orientation, would determine whether she exhibited the required emotion and display of behaviour. Thus, it would appear that the more one identified with a particular job role, the less emotional dissonance one experienced and

the less hypocritical one felt when performing that role according to the expectations of that role. Consequently, if there was no emotional dissonance experienced by the employee, this would lead to greater job satisfaction as the employee would accept the duty of delivery as part of her job requirement.

Job Satisfaction has a positive influence on job performance

From the excerpts of the results of the interviews, it would appear that in order to perform the job well, there has to be some degree of job satisfaction. Otherwise, this lack of job satisfaction would show up in various negative ways, such as internally in job stress, burn out and feelings of in-authenticity and externally in poor work performance and output.

As for job performance, it was preferred that service staff engage in deep acting (i.e., generating courtesy and empathy for customers) rather than surface acting (forging empathetic behaviors towards the customers in the absence of consistent emotional and cognitive reactions). Service staff should recognize that their work has an element of emotional labor and that they would enjoy more professional satisfaction in their jobs if they engage more in the process of empathetic service of the customers.

From the case studies, it would appear that surface acting would over time resulted in the employees feeling demeaned or even “prostituted to the company” though the employees may expend less effort in the initial stages,. The long term effects of surface acting include feeling burnt out and for those who do not really feel within their role, they are also more likely to quit and leave the company. Deep acting requires an initial investment of effort and conviction, however, it is in the long run potentially more rewarding for employees. This is best expressed by a sales supervisor in Robinson’s department store.

“I feel really stressed when the store is crowded over the festive period or during the sales. My company has many of these sales which attract a lot of bargain hunters. These customers tend to be aggressive and pushy and grab what they can. We have to tell them politely to stay in

the queue and limit the trying of clothes on to 3 pieces. While the customers may be rude, we have to stay focused and courteous and helpful. It is during these times that having a genuine respect and care of customers helps to keep us doing our jobs and rewards us with loyal customers. If you are faking at being nice, and all that, you will get completely freaked out”.

Sales supervisor, female, 34 years

Conclusions and Managerial Implications

This paper extends the previous theoretical and empirical research on emotional dissonance in the workplace and customer service role internalization in high contact services involving face-to-face interactions between employees and customers. Specifically, this paper identifies the importance of the influence of customer service role internalization on emotional dissonance. It also suggests examining the impact of emotional dissonance on key job outcome variables namely, customer oriented behaviours and job satisfaction.

The main managerial implications of such an examination are, firstly, that it provides a unique contribution to understanding the impact of internalizing customer oriented beliefs role on the emotional experience of employees. Secondly, it contributes to a better understanding of how to manage one type of person/role conflict by managing emotional dissonance through strategies that increase CSRI. Finally, it contributes to a better understanding of the factors that contribute to job performance and job satisfaction amongst high contact service workers by assessing the intervening influence of emotional dissonance.

The analysis of the case studies would suggest that there are no hard or fast rules regulating the feelings of prescribed emotions and displays in organizations. While employees may be trained to be courteous, helpful or empathetic to customers, no clear guidelines exist as to how and when these emotions and attributes are to be marshalled and presented. In our case studies, most employees were able to interact with customers based on minimally prescribed emotions or displays (surface acting), as long as they do not appear overtly rude or unhelpful to customers. This situation appears likely to be the norm in most

organizations as long as there is no major disruption to work or to the organization's bottom line profit and loss statements.

The importance of providing training programs to reinforce the ability of the customer contact personnel during their contact with customers is also highlighted in this paper. The role of the customer contact personnel in determining the satisfaction or dissatisfaction a customer receives when purchasing a service should not be underestimated. The personal relationship between the service salesperson and the customer, rather than the purchase itself leads to satisfaction or dissatisfaction in service purchases. This identifies the importance of the customer contact personnel learning more about the customer and being more empathetic to the customer's needs when representing the firm. If the customer contact personnel are in an emotional disequilibrium, it could result in a poor service experience for the customer and poor service performance by the firm, thereby highlighting the importance of emotional dissonance in the service encounter. Overt or under displays of emotions are as disruptive of good service encounters as understated displays though both could result from emotional dissonance.

The managerial implications of such a study would extend to improving the recruitment of customer service employees, evaluating the effectiveness of customer orientation training programs and developing greater customer orientation among customer contact personnel together with a change in management practices and the management of staff performance and satisfaction through the understanding and management of factors contributing to emotional dissonance. Because service selling requires considerable skill levels and extensive training of its personnel, the company will need to place a high emphasis on teaching selling skills. This in turn should flow on positively to influence customer satisfaction and profits.

In the past, organizations typically reward employees' physical and cognitive skills mainly because they are more easily identified and directly linked to outcomes of job performance. Thus we see very often in customer satisfaction surveys, great emphasis being placed on customer ratings of service workers' reliability, product knowledge and outward appearance and mannerisms. Emotional labour, (despite the fact that it often requires a significant effort by the worker concerned), are seldom or ever rated by customers. This should change in the future as more organizations recognize the importance of empathy and deep acting and how they would directly contribute to customer assessment of good service.

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Figure I – Conceptual Framework of Emotional Dissonance and Job Outcome Variables

