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Research paper



Flow Experience as a Mediator between Antecedents and Extra-Role Performance among Hotel Employees in Sarawak, alaysia

Mark Kasa[1]*, Zaiton Hassan[2], Jackelyn Ng[3]

[1]Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, 94300 Sarawak, Malaysia
[2]Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, 94300 Sarawak, Malaysia
[3]Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management, UCSI University Sarawak campus, Malaysia
**Corresponding author E-mail: markyek@yahoo.com*

Abstract

Employees who go beyond their job description are regarded as highly prized employees by organizations. This extra-role performance is often seen as a key indicator of whether employees are performing well in their job. Past studies linked engagement to be positively related to job performance, yet there are a limited number of studies on flow and performance, particularly on extra-role performance. This study was conducted on 290 hotel employees in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia to examine the correlation between flow experience and extra-role performance. In addition, this study also looked into flow as the mediator between the antecedents (job demand and job resources) and extra-role performance. The study hypothesized that flow experience is instrumental in employees' extra-role performance. The results of the study suggested that flow correlated with the employees' directional behaviour at work and flow mediates the correlation between job resources and extra-role performance. It was also discovered that flow did not mediate the correlation between job demand and extra-role performance. The findings indicated the benefits and practicality of flow experience on the employees' extra-role performance and also the pros of retrospective flow experience.

Keywords: *Extra-Role Performance; Job Demands; Job Resources*

1. Introduction

In Malaysia, the hotel industry is one of the most competitive of all service industries. The emergence of alternative lodging units, such as B&B (bed-and-breakfast), homestays and service apartments, gave hotel organizations even more competition and took a noticeable chunk from their market share. Such increase in competition has driven conventional hotels to focus on providing exceptional service quality to increase customer satisfaction in order to retain profitable loyal clients for their survival, whilst attracting prospective clients. Also, to remain competitive, increased employee performance is needed to produce increased service quality. Nonetheless, service quality is usually intangible and unstandardized; its evaluation is mainly subjective and relies greatly on the customers. Service quality greatly depends on how effective hoteliers deal with customers and clients (1) while efforts to encourage such quality is to be grounded on managing workforce behavior (2).

In-role and extra role performance have an important aspect in the employee and organisation's success. In-role performance is defined as outcomes and behaviours that are formally required and that directly serve organizational objectives (3). Meanwhile, extra-role performance is generally perceived as the non-essential behaviours and/ or activities that are non-vital in the employees' job but essential for the effectiveness of an organization, such as courteous behaviour, yet its execution is within one's discretion (4,5). In the hotel industry context, in-role and extra role performance are both essential to achieve organisational goals and objectives.

The central aim of the present study is to explore how flow affects one's extra-role performance and whether flow experience will mediate the relationship between antecedents and extra-role performance. Tsaur and Lin (1) has highlighted that a substantial number of researchers have emphasized the importance of customer-contact workforce in producing and providing favourable service quality (6,7). Nevertheless, hotel organizations are encountered with the challenging role of searching effective means of ensuring the attitude and behaviours of its workforce are congruent with the management and customers' expectations (6). More importantly, to the best of the authors' understanding, empirical research on the relationship between flow experience and extra-role performance, and flow as a mediator using the data obtained from the Malaysian hotel industry, has yet to exist in hospitality management literature.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Job Demands-Resources Model

This study utilised the Job Demand-Resources model as its underpinning theory. In brief, the JD-R model (8,9) is a heuristic model that enumerates the manner in which the well-being of the employee can be produced through the two distinguishing arrays of working conditions. Job demands is the first array, which portrays job attributes that has the potential in eliciting strain to the stage of outstripping the adaptive capability of employee. In further precision, job demands illustrate the physical, social and/ or organizational aspects of the job which call for sustaining physical as well

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as psychological, such as cognitive or emotional effort from the employee and hence, job demands are in association with several physiological and/or psychological costs, such as fatigue (10).
The second array of the JD-R model is the degree of resources provided during the job completion process for each individual employee. Job resources typically cover the physical, psychological, social and/or organizational aspects of the job which come along with the capability of (a) curbing job demands along with the attached physiological and psychological costs, (b) being functional towards attaining work-related goals, or (c) invigorating personal learning, developing and growth (11). There are several levels of such resources: (a) the firm such as career opportunities and salary, (b) interpersonal and social relations being support from colleagues and supervisor, (c) the work organization such as clarity of duty and decision-making involvement, and (d) the task including skill variation and also performance feedback.
A challenging goal can only be accomplished when the employee has a certain professional skill (12) and/ or provision of adequate job resources (such as autonomy, supportive colleagues, and performance feedback) at their work that can deal with the challenging work situation (8,11,13). Moreover, recent study has shown that job demands (such as workload and emotional demands) are related with exhaustion while job resources deficiency (such as social support and performance feedback) will result in employee disengagement or absence of flow experience (11). To sum up, motivating job characteristics (such as job resources) is known to be predictive of flow experience, and flow in return predicting extra-role performance (14).

2.2. Flow Experience

The two primary characteristics of flow are (1) total concentration in an activity and (2) enjoyment that an individual derives from an activity (15), where there is "an optimum level of challenge in relation to a certain level of skill" (16). In the past decades, many various studies have focused on unfavourable aspects such as burnout and stress, and its connection with the organization outcome including turnover and intention to quit from particular firm. This situation left the knowledge about flow experience, a positive psychology experience, to be lacking. Nevertheless, a positive psychology movement that concentrates on examining the way to improve normal life to become more fulfilling and to understand how things go right by scientific mean is still on-going (17). Researchers have mutually agreed that flow is highly likely to take place when one attains a balance between their skills and the challenges faced (15,18,19).
In the work context, when job demands or challenges match an individual's professional skills, the employee is more prone towards experiencing flow (20). Take for instance, there is balance when experienced duty manager succeed in handling customer complaint that has never happened before in certain service area. Such a goal will certainly be achieved in the event of employees possessing particular professional skills (12).
Flow experience is very much recognized as the positive psychological phenomenon and/ or experience that can be a robust motivating force (21) or an optimum motivational mind state which affects the behaviours of individuals (22). It is also known as the holistic experience individuals feel being in complete engagement whilst completing a task or activity (15). Furthermore, for flow to take place, the activities or tasks need to be viewed as voluntary, pleasurable, and being intrinsically motivating by the individual employee (23). Flow brings about positive consequences including increased subjective well-being, enhanced happiness, satisfaction towards life, and other positive effects (17,24) for individuals whom experience flow.

2.3. Flow and Extra-Role Performance

Due to the voluntary nature of extra-role behaviours, it ought to rely on intrinsic motivational determinants to a higher extent than that of in-role behaviours (25).
Currently, a handful of scientific findings revealed that work engagement is positively correlated to job performance in a positive manner. Take for instance, Bakker, Demerouti, and Verbeke (9), through their survey findings on 146 employees from various sectors and position - the majority of the participants worked with people (72%) in business services (28.5%) - indicated that employees that are engaged obtained higher ratings in term of extra-role performance from their colleagues. In other words, it showed that engaged individuals execute their work well and is willing to go the extra mile. Such positive relation between work engagement and performance has indeed been pointed out by recent scientific findings (26).
Salanova, Agut, & Peiro (27) has also shown that in the service climate, that engagement levels of contact employees who work in hotels and restaurants is shown to be positively related to their extra-role performance (based on customers' ratings). It is further deduced that the relationship of work engagement with extra-role performance appear to be stronger when compared to its experiential antithesis, i.e., burnout (26). Another research by Seeley (28) discovered that the correlation between work engagement and extra-role performance is significant and positive. In addition, as to date, there is no direct research between the flow and extra-role performance. Based on the present overview, we draw up the first hypothesis as such: (H_1) Flow is positively correlated with extra-role performance.

2.4. Flow as a Mediator

Csikszentmihalyi (29) indicated that organisations can help develop and heighten the productivity among its employees with the help of flow. However, in order for proper application in the work environment, flow is more likely to be experienced by employees when there is a match between their job demands and/ or challenges with their professional skills. For instance, an experienced general manager successfully satisfies the need of sophisticated customer who complain about the poor attitude and service of the staffs. Goal such as this will specifically be achieved when employees possess particular professional skills (12) or when there is adequate amount of resources available at their work, for instance, colleagues support, autonomy and performance feedback (8,11)
To conclude, when there are sufficient resources or professional skills, employees will experience flow in the equilibrium form between job demands and job resources. Hakanan, Bakker, & Schaufeli (30) has indicated that job resources in the form of autonomy, information feedback and social climate are all correlated to flow experience in a positive manner. Moreover, they also discovered that flow experience mediates the correlation between job resources and organizational commitment. In the similar vein, another finding also reported that flow experience as a mediator has influence the correlation between job resources and employee's turnover intention (31). Based on the preceding studies, the hypotheses are formulated subsequently: (H_2) Flow mediates the correlation between job demand and extra-role performance, (H_3) Flow mediates the correlation between job resources and extra-role performance. The research framework is seen in Figure 1.

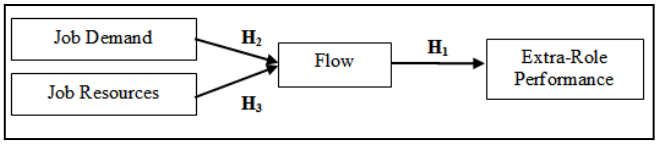


Fig. 1: The Research Framework

3. Research Methodology

A quantitative method was employed via self-administered survey questionnaire using convenience sampling method towards full-time hotel employees serving in Sarawak, Malaysia. The selected hotels are members of the Malaysian Association of Hotels. The bi-lingual questionnaires (English & Bahasa Melayu) were delivered to the intended population through their respective Human

Resource Departments, which took approximately 3 months for the distribution and collection of questionnaires. The total valid questionnaires collected were 290, which exceeded the minimum sample required of 107, as calculated using G* Power version 3.1.9.2 with actual power was 0.950 with effect size of 0.15. Table 1 summarized the variables, number of items and coefficient alpha values (α). No major issues with normality and outlier as well as the result analysis derived from exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation factor loading exceeded value of .60. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin of sample adequacy (KMO) above value of .60 (32) as well as the Bartlet's test result was highly significant (p<.000).

Table 1: The Research Instruments

	Instruments	Number of Items	Sources	Cronbach Alpha (α)
1	Flow	13	WOLF; Bakker (2008)	0.87
2	Extra-Role Performance	7	Goodman & Svyantek, 1999	0.85
3	Job Demand	18	Furda, 1995; Van Veldhoven & Meijman, 1994;	0.84
4	Job Resource	25	Bakker et al., 2003; Van Veldhoven & Meijman, 1994	0.76

The indirect effect was analysed through Preacher & Hayes (33) approach by utilizing SPSS macros version 22; PROCESS Model 4 in simple mediation model simultaneously with bootstrap approach (34). To determine the mediation result, the significant value of lower limit (ULCI) and upper limit (UPCI) should be above zero or positive value (> 0 / + value) (33).

4. Results and Findings

4.1. Demographic Data

The majority of the respondents are single females aged between 21 and 30, had a SPM certification with 1 to 5 years of service length. To break down, nearly half of the respondents (49%) are between the ages of 21 to 30. Among the respondents, 28 percent are aged between 31 and 40 years while the remaining was older than 40 years old with 3 percent respondents being younger than 20 years old; 56 percent are made up of females. The present study consist of relatively well-educated sample; precisely 36 percent of the respondents were high school leavers (SPM certification), while 33 percent had college diplomas and 28 percent bachelor degrees.

4.2. Hypothesis Testing & Discussion

The first assumption, flow is positively correlated with extra-role performance is supported. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was conducted to test the first assumption, and the result proved to be positively significantly related [r = 0.427, n = 290, p = 0.000]. Flow's closest congruent notion to engagement, in accordance to Bakker (20) explained that work associated with state of mind that is positively fulfilling to be capable of indicating employees' willingness to pay out discretionary exertion to assist the organization than that of those individuals whom are not experienced flow. Hotel employees must constantly fully focus on delivering ultimate customer services and highest quality of products and thus they are willingly step out from their normal job obligation to expedite the organization productivity (35). Another reason that could explain this finding is hotel employees experiencing flow often feel joyful while doing the work, confident, more concern and optimistic (36). In other words, Malaysian hotel employees are more prone to carry out extra-role performance if flow is encountered.

The second assumption, flow mediates the correlation between job demand and extra-role performance, is not supported. As seen in Table 2, the lower limit and upper limit value of job demand was -0.0093 and 0.0914 respectively. The reason for the non-significant result may due to the hotel employees' inability to experience flow as their job demands led the employees to be physically and mentally depleted as well as exhausted (11). Hotel employees are unable to enjoy the benefits of flow due to the constraints from their job demands, which does not contribute to the organization beyond their formal duty. In other words, being a fast-paced industry, hotels are often filled with demanding customers, coupled with its management's needs to constantly strive for customer satisfaction through top-notch customer services, both of which deplete the employees' resources. When hotel employees are put under a resource-depleted workplace condition, the occurrence of flow does not buffer the adverse effect of job demands. As such, this will have an effect on extra-role performance, where the employees will not carry out duties that exceed the job description during high work pressure, with or without feeling the flow.

Thirdly, flow mediates the correlation between job resources and extra-role performance. Table 2 exhibits the result of lower limit and upper limit of job resources with value zero (0) did not appear, which can indicate that the mediating effect of job resources and extra-role performance through flow was statistically supported. In an earlier finding, it was demonstrated that there was a mediation effect of engagement to the relationship of job resources with extra-role performance of workforce (37). This event evinced that individuals whom experience flow will carry out their official obligated role tasks in a more sterling manner and is enthusiastic to go extra mile (9). Put it simply, when job resources is provided alongside the occurrence of flow experience, hotel employees in Malaysia manifest their likelihood to perform activities outside their official duties to assist the organization in enhancing hotel images' and increasing the productivity and quality of products and services.

Table 2: Direct, Indirect, and Total Effect

Variables	Direct	Indirect	Total	Lower Limit (LLCI)	Upper Limit (ULCI)
Job Demands	-.0446	.0366	-.0080	-.0093	.0914
Job Resources	.2753	.1925	.4677	.1072	.3039
TOTAL	.2307	.2291	.4597		

5. Discussion and Implications

Generally, the current study possesses several strengths. First, this study explored the relationship of flow experience with job outcome, which is extra-role performance. It is relatively crucial due to the empirical evidence in regards with this relationship, particularly in hospitality management and marketing literature is scanty (38,39), let alone in the Malaysian context.

Secondly, the present study fills in the void by providing additional insights to the existing fundamental knowledge via testing flow experience's effect as mediator between the antecedents and extra-role performance in a workplace setting that job resources appear to be lacking.

Thirdly, the present study indicated that there is significant empirical support for flow as a mediator. The results has shown that when the organization provides sufficient job resources in a challenging work circumstances, they have favorable impacts on the flow experiences of the hoteliers and it affects job outcome via flow, and vice versa.

More importantly, the author recommends that the hospitality management have in place organization policies that promote the provision of a supportive and motivation-driving workplace setting for its workforces - in terms of physical, mental and social wellbeing. Such condition will facilitates the creation of job resources in the work context while promoting a flow-experience-prone workplace that result in employee engagement, which therefore lead up to the occurrence or improvement of extra-role performance essential in improving the overall image of organization. To sum up, employees that are engaged is capable of delivering

excellent service quality that satisfy customers through going the extra mile, beyond their formally required job roles (26,38).

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