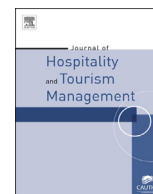




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How the need for “leisure benefit systems” as a “resource passageways” moderates the effect of work-leisure conflict on job burnout and intention to leave: A study in the hotel industry in Quebec



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ABSTRACT

Based on a conceptual framework and a survey of 258 persons in the hotel industry in Quebec, this study examines how work-leisure conflict contributes in increasing job burnout and intention to leave. Also, it examines the moderating role of “leisure benefit systems” on the effect of WLC on burnout and intention to leave. Using SEM and critical ratios for differences between groups, the results indicate that WLC has a positive effect on burnout and intention to leave. Moreover, our study reveals perception of need for subsidized recreation and extended vacations time moderates and increases the effect of WLC on depersonalization. Implementing practices such as flexibility in working hours, as well as leisure benefits could help employees to balance work and leisure.

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1. Introduction

Over recent years, organizations in tourism and hospitality industry have had to constantly improve the quality of services to attract new clients, retain current clients and remain competitive, while at the same time trying to offer better working conditions to attract and retain the best employees.

It is a sector where staff turnover is high, since factors such stress at work and difficult working conditions lead employees to consider leaving their work (Burke, 2003; Tsauro, Liang, & Hsu, 2012; Sharma, Verma, Verma, & Malhotra, 2010). This makes it difficult to attract and retain workers, as employment in the hospitality industry is characterized by poor conditions, low pay, a high percentage of workers drawn from socially disadvantaged groups, poor status, absence of professionalism (Marco-Lajara & Úbeda-García,

2013). The issue of work-leisure conflict and work-family balance is particularly important since the hospitality industry is 59% female. In the context of Québec, studied here, the issue is all the more important since Québec counts 37561 workers in this sector (in 2012), 11% of the tourism industry. It is a growing industry; jobs have increased 16% in Québec from 2004 to 2014, and hours of work increased 17%, to 62 million hours. In Canada, the tourism, hospitality and restaurant sector is the 2nd largest after retail trade, and for Québec it is the 5th export sector with 10.6 billion \$ in total income.

The attitudes and behaviors of hotel employees may indeed affect customer satisfaction and loyalty (Lin, Wong, & Ho, 2013). In many sectors, including the hospitality industry, work is characterized by a high level of stress (Kim, Murrmann, & Lee, 2009), which is a major issue in the hospitality industry (Hsieh & Eggers, 2011). Research has shown that stress at work is due to high job demands such as excess workload (Karatepe, 2008; Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009), long and irregular working hours (Zhao, Mattila, & Ngan, 2014), and difficulty in reconciling work and family life (Choi & Kim, 2012), the latter affecting many sectors, but being particularly difficult in all service sectors where work goes beyond “9 to 5”. These work stressors can “also require much time and energy of service employees, leaving less

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opportunity to engage in leisure activities in their time off" (Wong & Lin, 2007). These researchers have extended research from work-non-work conflict to work-leisure conflict (WLC), which occurs when the demands at work interfere with the ability of employees to participate in leisure activities. Studying WLC is at the core of research in the field of hospitality and tourism research (Lin, Huang, Yang, & Chiang, 2014), as it concerns clients as well as employees. "The quest to balance leisure and work, including how to do it and maintain standards of excellence continues to be a topic of interest" (Taneja, 2013, p. 113). Leisure can be considered as a coping strategy for work-related strains (Iwasaki & Mannell, 2000). Therefore, most studies have been interested in the coping effect of leisure on work (e.g., Iwasaki, 2003). However, as reported by Tsaaur et al. (2012), few studies have focused on the WLC. More WLC causes lower satisfaction at work and lower quality of life (Lin et al., 2013) more job burnout and lower well-being (Lin et al., 2014).

The study of WLC in the hospitality industry is important for other reasons. Firstly, leisure is valued in contemporary society with an increased interest for personal wellbeing confronted to globalization, computerization, lack of time and changes in lifestyles. However, "people seem to have forgotten the idea of leisure as part of their day-to-day schedules" (Taneja, 2013, p. 113). Thus leisure time is increasingly competing with work domains and it is all the more important to pursue research on WLC. Indeed, theoretical and empirical research in the field of work and leisure has not been numerous (Tsaaur et al., 2012) and studies on WLC are also sparse (Lin et al., 2014). In our literature review on WLC, we found only six articles published in academic journals (Lin et al., 2013, 2014; Staines & O'Connor, 1980; Tsaaur et al., 2012; Wong & Lin, 2007; Zhao & Rashid, 2010). More specifically, we have identified only one study that investigated the relationship between WLC and job burnout. This is the research of Lin et al. (2014) achieved in the hospitality and tourism industries in Taiwan which demonstrated that WLC influenced negatively wellbeing and positively job burnout. Moreover, no study has examined the role of WLC on intention to leave the organization. Secondly, the hospitality industry is characterized by long and irregular working hours, work on weekends and short holidays which leave less little time for leisure. Due to the nature of their work, service employees experience higher job interference with leisure time than employees in other sectors (Wong & Lin, 2007). Hence, it seems very relevant to explore the role of WLC on burnout and the intention to leave in this industry. Thirdly, research shows that family-friendly policies decrease work-family conflict (Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002; Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2006; Russell, O'Connell, & McGinnity, 2009). Indeed, Greenhaus and Allen (2011) recommend flexibility in working hours to reconcile work and family life, but this is not frequent in the hospitality industry. Very few studies have examined the influence of "leisure benefit systems" on frontline employee behaviors and attitudes (Lin et al., 2013). Our study is an extension of the work of Lin et al. (2013) who examined the effect of WLC on job satisfaction and quality of life and the moderating effect of satisfaction with "leisure benefit systems". These authors recommended further research in order "to evaluate the effectiveness and implementation of leisure benefit systems in human resource management to justify the importance of provision of leisure benefit policies in organizations" (Lin et al., 2013, p. 185). Our study attempts to fulfill this gap by testing the perception of employees on the need for two leisure policies (subsidized recreation and extended vacation time). Our study is also an extension of the research by Lin et al. (2014) who studied the effect of WLC and leisure participation on job burnout.

2. Theoretical grounding and hypotheses

Our research analyzes the effect of WLC on job burnout and intention to leave. It examines the moderating effect of the need for "leisure benefit systems" on these relationships.

The model of our hypotheses is presented in Fig. 1.

2.1. WLC and job burnout

According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), workers are confronted to work and non-work conflict when the roles at work and in life are incompatible. In other words, WLC occurs when employees are unable to reconcile their professional role and leisure activities outside the workplace. This conflict is a form of "interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and leisure domains are mutually incompatible" (Tsaaur et al., 2012, p. 396). In other words, when employees need to spend more time to respond to heavy work demands and work hours, this exhausts their energy, while diminishing time and opportunities for leisure activity (Wong & Lin, 2007). We can also define this form of conflict building on the basis of the theory of conservation of resource (COR). We suggest the following definition: a form of interrole conflict that occurs when workers are exposed to high job demands exhausting their valuable resources such as energy and time and making them incapable to meet their professional role and to have adequate leisure activities.

Work-family conflict can be conceptualized in accordance with role theory (Kahn & Byosiore, 1992) which reveals that this interrole conflict influences job stress because of the conflicting demands, depleting resources such as time, energy, as well as cognitive, psychological and emotional resources which are necessary to fulfill both work and family responsibilities (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992). Likewise, the theory of the conservation of resources (COR) contends with this reasoning. According to this theory, job stress or burnout occurs when resources are lost in the process of managing both work role and family obligations. Studies in the hospitality industry indicate that work-family conflict produces job burnout when staff has difficulty to combine work and family life (Karatepe, Sokmen, Yavas, & Babakus, 2010; Namasivayam & Zhao, 2007; Yavas, Babakus, & Karatepe, 2008).

We can to a certain extent assimilate the WLC to work-family conflict and suggest that WLC happens when employees in the hotel sector experience difficulties in managing the high job demands and therefore have fewer opportunities, time and energy to participate in leisure activities during their free time. One study has examined the effect of WLC on job burnout. For Halbesleben (2008) job burnout refers to "a psychological weakness caused by a state of chronic and uncontrolled stress resulting in fatigue and frustration especially among employees".

Burnout is a process in which the individual first is exposed to a destruction of emotional resources that progressively leads to disengagement from work (Maslach & Jackson, 1986; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). It consequently introduces a phase of cynic depersonalization which leads to a sense of lack of fulfillment at work (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Ebbinghaus, 2002; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The MBI (Maslach Burnout Inventory) scale contains three factors: emotional exhaustion, which refers to a weakening of physical, psychological and emotional resources of individuals in dealing with work demands that exceed their adaptive capacity to work (Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007; Lee & Ashforth, 1996); depersonalization, which is characterized by cynicism or disengagement, and is the reaction to emotional exhaustion (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004) and thirdly, personal accomplishment, which refers to individuals' fruitful achievement, skill, and sufficiency at work (Maslach & Jackson,

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