



Effects of recovery experiences on hotel employees' subjective well-being



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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the occupational well-being process in the formation of hotel employees' subjective well-being based on the recovery experience scale (RES). More specifically, the study (1) evaluates the construct validity of the RES in the hotel sector and (2) examines structural relationships between the RES, organization-based self-esteem (OBSE), job dedication (JOD), career satisfaction (CAS), and life satisfaction (LIS) in a heuristic model. To test the hypotheses, a total of 376 hotel employees were considered in an empirical analysis using a two-step SEM approach. The results verify sufficient validity for the four RES factors and reveal that all recovery experiences, namely psychological detachment, relaxation, mastery experiences, and control, predicted OBSE. In addition, OBSE had positive effects on JOD, CAS, and LIS, and JOD and CAS had significant positive effects on LIS. These results have important implications, and the study's limitations provide some interesting avenues for future research.

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1. Introduction

The ultimate goal of people's daily lives is to maintain some level of subjective well-being (King et al., 1998). This social paradigm leads to the importance of and need for organizational endeavors for both employees and consumers in research on transformative services (Rosenbaum et al., 2011), which has pointed out individuals' pursuit of occupational and subjective well-being in their professional lives (e.g., Siltaloppi et al., 2009). However, an unsolved problem of diverse occupational groups (e.g., general practitioners, teachers, and nurses) is related to occupational stress and strain, which can stimulate the necessity of an individual's recovery experience (Chan et al., 2000). In this sense, organizational theorists have focused on recovery experiences enabling employees to restore their energy resources (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007), which can ultimately lead to the formation of subjective well-being (Cuyper et al., 2008; Simon et al., 2010) as well as the quality delivery of customer service (Gilboa et al., 2008).

In an organizational setting, recovery experiences, the initial process in which subjective well-being is formed, are used to understand behavioral patterns of individuals' recovery activities during their off-work days. Because of its crucial function, the recovery experience scale (RES) has been highlighted mainly in the science of service, including salient subdimensions of psychological detachment, relaxation, mastery experiences, and control (e.g., Bakker et al., 2014; Kinnunen et al., 2011; Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007; Shimazu et al., 2012). These recovery experiences make it possible for employees to not only return to their pre-stressor levels but also maintain their levels of subjective well-being (i.e., life satisfaction) (Siltaloppi et al., 2009). This indicates that employees with favorable recovery experiences are likely to be satisfied with their psychological subjective well-being. Given this recognition, the application of the RES has been activated in the context of diverse countries such as Germany (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007), Spain (Sanz-Vergel et al., 2010), Finland (Kinnunen et al., 2011), Japan (Shimazu et al., 2012), and the Netherlands (Bakker et al., 2014). However, it remains arguable whether the RES contains either a three-factor trait version (i.e., psychological detachment, relaxation, and mastery experiences) or a four-factor trait version (i.e., psychological detachment, relaxation, mastery experiences, and control). Therefore, the validity of the RES must be identified in new areas of research.

In recognition of potential advantages of using recovery experiences, a number of studies have focused on a deeper understanding

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of the formation of employees' subjective well-being as part of the broader interest in the service sector (Diener et al., 2003, 2009). More specifically, the concept of organization-based self-esteem may play a crucial role as a potential predictor or consequence of occupational well-being (Bowling et al., 2010). In addition, salient components of occupational well-being, such as work engagement (i.e., job dedication) (Rothmann, 2008; Shimazu et al., 2012) and job/career satisfaction (Burke, 2001; Rothmann, 2008), should be understood as determinants of the formation of subjective well-being, including life satisfaction. In this regard, one interesting but untouched issue is the causal order of prominent dimensions of subjective well-being in a comprehensive model.

Among various types of service organizations in the hospitality industry, hotel work has been regarded as a stressful occupation because of frequent exposure to long working hours, inflexible work schedules, and demanding customers (e.g., Chiang et al., 2010; Zhao et al., 2011), among others, which implies that job stressors may deteriorate life satisfaction (subjective well-being) among hotel employees. According to O'Neill and Davis (2011), the nature of hotel employees' unfavorable situations pertains to work arguments, interpersonal tension, employee/co-worker stressors, hotel guest stressors, and work overload. Because of stressful situations in the hotel sector, employees may actively pursue recovery experiences to replenish new energetic and psychological resources during off-work days. This reveals that employers should offer optimal support for employees in terms of recovery experiences. Despite this, there is paucity in the current literature of empirical research focused on recovery experiences and their potential outcomes, particularly in the hospitality industry. Consequently, it is important to identify the role of recovery experiences through occupational well-being dimensions in the formation of life satisfaction in the hotel sector context.

In sum, this study assumes that four factors of recovery experiences, namely psychological detachment, relaxation, mastery experiences, and control, reflect a phase in the development of subsequent well-being outcomes in their casual order, suggesting that they precede organization-based self-esteem, job dedication, career satisfaction, and life satisfaction. Therefore, this study (1) examines the construct validity of these four factors associated with recovery experiences of hotel employees and (2) tests structural relationships between salient constructs in the formation of subjective well-being based on the RES. The results provide guidelines for organizational support based on employees' recovery experiences such that they can maintain occupational and overall subjective well-being in the hotel sector.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Recovery experiences

Recovery experiences can be viewed as an individual strategy devoted to restoring individuals' energy resources and maintaining their psychological and subjective well-being, which can be helpful in stressful organizational situations. The RES can be divided into two types as follows: (1) a three-factor version of the RES (TF-RES) and (2) a four-factor version (FF-RES). At first glance, some studies have shed light on the importance of TF-RES, including psychological detachment, relaxation, and mastery experiences during off-work hours in a variety of research areas (Fritz et al., 2010; Oreyzi and Amiri, 2013). In addition, FF-RES has been found to offer good psychometric properties by adding the experience of control to TF-RES in diverse workplaces (Bakker et al., 2014; Kinnunen et al., 2011; Shimazu et al., 2012; Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007). To the authors' knowledge, FF-RES is effective for employees in the hotel context. However, it remains unclear whether the RES is composed

of the three- or four-aspect subdimension structure. Therefore, this study examines the structural validity of the RES for hotel employees in FF-RES. In this regard, the four factors of recovery experiences are now discussed in greater detail.

Many studies have pointed out the concept of psychological detachment as a key dimension of recovery experiences in different organizations. According to previous studies, psychological detachment refers to an individual's effort to be absent from work situations without any physical and psychological engagement in work tasks during off-job hours (e.g., Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007). As a recovery strategy for regaining new sources of energy, psychological detachment from the workplace allows employees to neglect current or future work demands, which offers opportunities for restoring self-regulatory resources (Hahn and Dormann, 2013). More specifically, those who feel a strong sense of psychological detachment tend to avoid work-related tasks and activities, such as receiving job-related phone calls, reading e-mail messages at home, and thinking about work and job-related problems or opportunities, which can impede the detachment process (Sonnentag et al., 2010; Kinnunen et al., 2011; Shimazu et al., 2012). As a result, psychological detachment is used as a dimension of recovery experiences in the hotel sector.

Relaxation has been acknowledged as an important dimension of recovery experiences in human resource management research (Stone et al., 1995; Kinnunen et al., 2011; Oreyzi and Amiri, 2013; Shimazu et al., 2012). Relaxation can be defined as a process of doing some non-demanding activities during off-job hours (Pelletier, 2004), such as taking time off for leisure activities, relaxing, and doing other relaxing activities (Oreyzi and Amiri, 2013; Shimazu et al., 2012). In an organizational setting, relaxation occurs when employees are confronted with off-job hours without any requirements for physical or mental efforts for work-related tasks (Tinsley and Eldredge, 1995). An advantage of relaxation in employees' recovery experiences is the potential to facilitate employee well-being at work, which can help reduce sympathetic activation (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007) or increase positive affective experiences (Fritz et al., 2010; Smith, 2005). Therefore, employees attempt to arrive at a state of relaxation during off-job hours in the hotel sector.

Mastery experiences refer to the extent to which an individual pursues a mastery-related activity during off-job hours/days, such as learning new knowledge (e.g., new service or language skills) (Fritz and Sonnentag, 2006; Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007). Mastery experiences can produce an individual's sense of recovery achievement, which can help him or her overcome the challenges of a situation in which he or she is confronted with unfamiliar and/or monotonous work tasks (Shimazu et al., 2012). The core function of mastery experiences is closely associated with employees' improvements with respect to affective experiences and energy levels outside of the workplace (Sonnentag, 2001; Sonnentag and Natter, 2004; Thayer et al., 1994). Thus, employees that engage in favorable mastery-related activities during off-job hours/days are more likely to recover their energy by either gaining new knowledge or doing activities that challenge them. These activities allow them to unwind from stressful situations at work and enhance their levels of competence and self-efficacy when performing their given tasks in an organization (Bakker et al., 2014). In light of the aforementioned discussion, mastery experiences can be considered a key dimension of recovery experiences in the hotel sector.

Control in off-work hours is defined as the extent to which an individual believes that he or she can decide on something to do for off-day schedules without being concerned about others in a variety of settings. Experiencing control includes relaxing and perceiving temporarily release from work while being at home or other relaxing places, which may fulfill the individual desire and need for autonomy or control. In addition, the recovery experience of control

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