

Hotel job burnout: The role of personality characteristics

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Abstract

In hospitality and tourism academia, most research focuses on the work domain as a major source of hospitality job stress, with little attention given to employee characteristics. This study examines the effect of the Big Five personality dimensions (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience) on hotel employees' job burnout. After controlling for two commonly known job burnout antecedents (autonomy and quantitative workload), study results indicate that personality attributes explain significant proportions of three job burnout factors. The most noteworthy finding is the predictability of the agreeableness trait in hotel employees' job burnout. Because of the mixed results reported on the relationship between this trait and job stress in other disciplines, more vigorous future research is recommended to validate the value of this personality to the hospitality industry.

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1. Introduction

The hospitality industry is a people industry. Hospitality jobs require customer contact around the clock 7 days a week. Such a work situation has been reported to be stressful for hospitality workers. For example, Bitner et al. (1994) found that dealing with problem

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clients is one of the most unpleasant incidents for restaurant, hotel, and airline employees. Pavesic and Brymer (1990) identified the following reasons why young, talented hospitality employees leave the industry: long working hours including nights and weekends, low pay, and stress from demanding duties and supervisors. In general, job stress of managers and frontline personnel has been well documented in the hospitality and tourism literature (Zohar, 1994; Law et al., 1995; Brymer et al., 1991).

Job burnout studies were originally conducted on people working in human services and education (Cordes and Daugherty, 1993). The topic continues to be of interest in various fields including hospitality academia. Within hospitality and tourism, most existing studies have investigated causes of burnout with a focus on the work environment including role stressors, organizational structures, and job characteristics. Specifically, role ambiguity, role conflict, poor management, poor communication, difficult customers, lack of autonomy, and work overload have been reported as precursors of hospitality job burnout (Law et al., 1995; Brymer et al., 1991; Zohar, 1994).

Industry psychologists have recognized that personality traits make a difference in handling stressful work situations (Maslach et al., 2001; Tokar et al., 1998). In other words, what is stressful for one may not be stressful for another. Despite the fact that the success of hospitality firms relies on employees who are capable of performing their jobs under stress, very little empirical research has been conducted on the effect of individual characteristics associated with personality. A number of burnout studies in other service professions have found a significant relationship between job stress and individual personality traits (Piedmont, 1993; Zellars et al., 2000; Allen and Mellor, 2002; Goddard et al., 2004; De Vries and Van Heck, 2002).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the role of personality dispositions in understanding hospitality employees' job burnout in the hotel work setting. The Five-Factor Model of personality, which in recent years has received significant support among personality experts, is used. In the literature section, the five personality dimensions and the antecedents of job burnout are described in detail.

2. Literature reviews

2.1. Definition of job burnout

A group of psychologists consider job burnout as a type of stress, which is one dimensional (Cordes and Daugherty, 1993). Others view it as multi-dimensional (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). The current consensus is that job burnout is composed of three sub-constructs: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to a lack of energy and a feeling that one's emotional resources are used up because of excessive psychological demands. Depersonalization is characterized by treating others as objects rather than people through cynical, callous, and uncaring attitudes and behaviors. Diminished personal accomplishment denotes a tendency to evaluate oneself negatively because of failure to produce results. Each sub-dimension of job burnout captures its unique aspect of job burnout (Maslach, 1993). In summary, the principal dimensions of job burnout are the stress component (emotional exhaustion), interpersonal relations (depersonalization), and self-evaluation (personal accomplishment).

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