

6th International Research Symposium in Service Management, IRSSM-6 2015, 11-15 August
2015, UiTM Sarawak, Kuching, Malaysia

Flow Experience and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour among Hotel Employees: Moderating Effect of Socio-Cultural Factor

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Abstract

Flow, a positive psychology movement making normal life more fulfilling, is claimed to have a strong impact and proven to correlate positively with performance enhancement. As the nature of hotel jobs may give high level of stress and create many problems for people, the presence of Flow characteristics may affect among the hotel employees. The objective of this study is to distinctively investigate the influence of flow on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and the moderating effect of socio-cultural factors (i.e collectivism / individualism) on flow and OCB. This cross-sectional study used self-administered questionnaire, which was collected from 293 hotel employees in Sarawak, Malaysia. Confirmatory factor are analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via AMOS 21 and the measurement model is validated prior to testing the hypothesized model. The result reveals that Flow has a significant relationship with organizational citizenship behavior. Employees who experience Flow are likely to find their work enjoyable and intrinsically motivating. This phenomenon encourages employees to perform extra roles beyond the requirements of the formal duties. This study also revealed that there is a significant moderating effect of socio-cultural factors on the relationship between flow and organizational citizenship behavior. Specifically, individualistic employees experience Flow are more likely to display the characteristics of organizational citizenship behavior. Understanding these relationships will provide a strategy for hotel employers to retain and develop the most capable and talented human capital towards improving their competitiveness in hotel business.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Universiti Teknologi MARA Sarawak

Keywords: flow; organizational citizenship behavior; individualism; hotel

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1. Introduction

The hotel industry is often linked to high rates of failure and poor performance (Blanck, 2003; Dimond, 2004; Enz, 2002; France, 2002) and is one of the industry's service components that needs to be supported towards service climate for customers. Service climate refers to emphasis on services and customer satisfaction by the hotel. Flow, defined as the ultimate positive experience, is one of the example of positive psychology movement. The positive psychology movement concentrates on the investigation on scientific method in making normal life more meaningful, fulfilling and know how well things will go right (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001). This contributes towards improved work performance and feeling of satisfaction having achieved tasks with intense feeling of enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988).

Numerous studies on flow have been conducted in several fields, such as executives (e.g. Donner & Csikszentmihalyi, 1992), technology employees (e.g. Webster et al. 1993; Ghani & Deshpande 1994), internet usage (e.g. Chen et al. 1999), and music teachers (e.g. Bakker 2005). This study explored the effect of flow in the Malaysian hotel industry to test the Csikszentmihalyi's (2003) statement that employees who are engaged in a very complex and challenging work use their talents and strengths, unleash their new skills are likely to find their work enjoyable and intrinsically valuable. This chain reaction would definitely contribute to the improvement in their productivity. Therefore, the creation of service climate in the hotel industry, further enhanced with psychological capacities, is deemed necessary (Schneider et al., 2000).

This paper distinctively investigate the influence of flow on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) from a sample of hotel employees in Sarawak and the moderating effect of socio-cultural factors (i.e collectivism / individualism) on flow and OCB. This study is based on the self-determination theory (SDT), while motivation theory is based on premise that people are growth-oriented and actively seek opportunities to develop their fullest potential (Roche & Haar, 2012). Thus, this study seeks to investigate the flow experience and OCB towards greater positive well being in the hotel industry.

2. Literature review

Flow is relatively a new construct and there is limited knowledge about the relationship between organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) and flow (Bakker 2005; Demerouti 2006). The only nearest outcome influenced by flow is work engagement, which is defined as positively fulfilling and work related to the state of mind, and share the affinity with the flow variables discovered by Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzales-Roma & Bakker (2002).

The study of flow originated when Csikszentmihalyi tried to understand this phenomenon experienced by the artists (painters). Research on flow became prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s Csikszentmihalyi and his fellow researchers in Italy became the pioneers on the theory of flow. Since then, researchers have been keen on total concentration in work's related activities, emphasizing positive experiences, especially in the areas of business world and education, and began studying the theory of flow in this period of time (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, Mihaly & Jeanne, 2002). Csikszentmihalyi (2003) quoted that frequent experiences of flow at work would lead to higher work productivity, innovation, and employee development. In addition, Bakker (2005) mentioned that flow was proven to be useful in the context of the workplace.

OCB is the defined as role-related behaviours that go above and beyond the routine duties (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Organ, Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 2006). Organ (1988) states that OCB have five distinct dimensions which are altruism (help others), civic virtue (keep up with important matter within the organization), conscientiousness (norm compliance), courtesy (consulting others members before taking any action), and sportsmanship (not complaining about trivial matters). Based on previous studies, OCB has a significant importance in the workplace. Padsakoff and MacKenzie (1994, as cited in Organ et al., 2006), in their study among insurance agencies, found that the OCB variables, sportsmanship and civic virtue, were both significantly related to sales performance index while Padsakoff, Aheame, and Mackenzie, as cited in Organ et al. (2006), who conducted their study among paper mill workers, found that helping behaviour was significantly related to product quality.

Every unique culture in this world is grounded by its own set of basic assumptions to the basis of thinking, feelings, and actions among its members and towards others. Investigation of cultural variables as the moderator can help to determine whether the cultural variables will be an important determinant in the study (Gibson, Maznevski & Kirkman, 2009). Kirkman, Lowe & Gibson (2006), and Leung, Bhagat, Buchan, Erez & Gibson (2005) summarized that cultural values may have stronger effects under certain conditions than others, and further stated that the cultural

moderator variables should specify the conditions under which the cultural values are more likely to give impacts towards organizational outcomes. Therefore, it is relevant to investigate this present study with the variable element from the cultural perspective.

This study is based on the self-determination theory (SDT), a motivation theory based on premise that people are growth-oriented and actively seeking for opportunities to develop their fullest potential (Roche & Haar, 2012). In addition, as suggested by Ryan & Deci (2008); SDT motivates human to seek out connections, relationship and challenges that help humanistic growth and to further enhance the development of authentic self. Flow experience is reflected in the involvement of an intrinsically motivating activity (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005) and could make a person feel in control doing an enjoyable activity, has positive effects, arousal. This high tendency will balance up the challenges and skills that are essentially important towards the flow phenomena. Thus, the experience of flow not only benefits the employee by enhancing the work performance (Engeser & Rheinberg, 2008), but also contributes toward the success of the organization by boosting the productivity level (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003).

3. Research statement

This study is to explore the hotel industry in Malaysian context with the goal to examine Csikszentmihalyi's (2003) statement. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance the creation of service climate in the hotel industry with psychological capacities (Schneider et al., 2000). The present study seeks to investigate the relationship of flow on organizational citizenship behaviour. Specifically, this study also investigates the influence of socio-cultural factors (individualism/collectivism) as the moderator between flow and OCB among the hotel employees.

Taking into consideration the objectives of this study, it is hypothesized that:

H1 There is a significant relationship between flow and organizational citizenship behavior.

According to Bakker (2005) and Demerouti (2006), flow construct is relatively new and the knowledge on flow phenomenon on the relationship with organizational citizenship behavior is still limited. Based on other similar studies, the nearest to flow construct is job engagement (Bakker, 2005). Previous studies mentioned that job engagement is a potential predictor in organizational citizenship behavior (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010). Therefore, the above hypothesis has been constructed to examine the relationship between flow and organizational citizenship behaviour.

H2 Socio-cultural factor moderate the relationship between flow and organizational citizenship behavior.

Based on previous studies, the investigation of cultural variables as the moderator can be an important determinant of the findings in the study (Gibson et al., 2009). In addition, Kirkman et al., (2006) & Leung et al., (2005) concluded that the cultural values may have stronger effects under certain conditions than others. Cultural dimensions as the moderating variables should specify the conditions under which cultural values are more likely to have an impact to organizational outcomes. Thus, it is relevant to investigate the moderating effect of socio-cultural factor; (individualism/collectivism) in relationship between the relevant variables.

4. Research methods

The present study is conducted among hotel employees working in Sarawak (Kuching, Sibul, Bintulu and Miri) in Malaysia and the random sampling method was employed. For approval and cooperation to conduct the study, the researcher met the top management and the key personnel at their respective hotels. The questionnaires were distributed to the targeted population sample based on the permission given by the respective Human Resource Manager. Respondents were given two weeks to complete and return the questionnaire to the researcher. The confidentiality and anonymity of their answers remain secured, thus protecting the respondent's rights and privacy. This study adopted self-administered quantitative survey questionnaire which was developed and validated by earlier studies. All measures were bilingual in English and Bahasa Melayu. A total of 293 hotel employees from 10 reputable hotels in Sarawak responded to the questionnaires.

4.1 Research instrument

Flow was assessed with the work-related flow instrument - “WOLF” (Bakker, 2008). The WOLF includes 13 items, measuring absorption (e.g. “when I am working, I forget everything else around me”), work enjoyment (e.g., “when I am working very intensely, I feel happy”), and intrinsic work motivation (e.g. “I get my motivation from the work itself, and not from the reward for it”). The respondents were asked to indicate the frequency of the experience during the preceding week (0 = never, 6 = everyday) with the reliability scale surpassing the value of .70 (Nunnally, 1978).

The OCB scale developed by Lee and Allen (2002) was adapted to measure helping behaviours that benefits specific individuals and the organization as a whole. The items ratings were obtained from a 6-point Likert scale that had responsiveness ranging from 1= ‘Strongly Disagree’ to 6= ‘Strongly Agree’. In this study, the overall measure of OCB was used with items such as “I help others who have been absent” and “I offer ideas to improve the functioning of the organization”. The ratings indicated the extent of each of the behaviour as characteristic of the employee’s behaviour. The coefficient alpha for OCB scale composite score was .89.

The individualistic-collectivist dimension was measured via the Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism Questionnaire (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). The 16 items consist of four sub-scales: Horizontal Individualism, Vertical Individualism, Horizontal Collectivism, and Vertical Collectivism. The questionnaire was used with samples from the United States and Korea, with its divergent and convergent validity confirmed (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). All 16 items were scored on a 6-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 6 = Strongly agree) with coefficient alpha meeting the benchmark value of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978).

5. Data analysis and result

790 questionnaires were distributed and from it, a total of 293 valid, usable and completed questionnaires collected which is consider as a sufficient sample size for the purpose of confirmatory factor analysis and structural model test (Hair, Black, Rabin & Anderson; 2010, Byrne, 2001). There were 194 (66%) male and 99 (33%) female respondents in this study. The respondent’s age ranges between 20-29 years old and the majority are of Iban ethnicity, represented by 101 respondents (34%). A total of 189 (64%) have qualifications in Middle Certificate of Education/Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia. The majority were single (54%) while the length of service ranges between 1 to 5 years (60%) from the total respondents in this study.

Amos version 21 and SPSS version 19 was utilized to conduct the data analysis. A Two-stage approach was utilized to minimize the changes to avoid any interaction between the structural and the measurement models (Hair et al., 2006). First, the measurement model for each construct was independently tested for validity and reliability. Construct validity for this study was met with each indicator variables arrived at a minimum value of 0.5 for standardized regression weight (Hair et al, 2010). For reliability testing, the Cronbach’s alpha value was above 0.70, which indicated the existence of internal consistency (Hair et al, 2010) while composite reliability is a measure of the overall reliability of a collection of heterogeneous (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) also met the value of 0.70 (Raykow, 1997). The standardized loadings are larger than 0.5, all average variance extract (AVE) value exceed 0.5, Composite reliability and Cronbach’s alpha value exceeded 0.70. Thus, the scale has a good convergent validity (Gefen et al., 2000), discriminant validity requirement been well fulfilled (Kline, 1998) and all Cronbach’s alpha value and Composite value showed a good reliability (Nunnally, 1978).

The second stage of the two-stage approach involved examining the structural model to test the research hypotheses (Anderson and Gebing, 1988). The result of factor loading of Flow, OCB and Socio-Cultural Factors were found to be good fit. Table 1 summarized the goodness-of-fit index, it was revealed that the models met the level of goodness-of-fit for this study.

Table 1. Goodness-of-fit index of the hypothesized model.

| GOF | Benchmark | Overall Measurement Model Index Value | Acceptance of Index Fitness Category |
|----------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| CMIN/DF | 1.0 – 5.0 | 2.968 | Parsimonious fit |
| X ² value | >.05 | .000 | |
| RMSEA | <.08 | .080 | Absolute fit |
| IFI | >.90 | .959 | Incremental fit |
| CFI | >.90 | .958 | Incremental fit |
| TLI | >.90 | .943 | Incremental fit |

Harmon's single factor was utilized to test all the variables to determine that there was no general factor that accounted for a majority of the variance. It concluded that common method variance was not present in this study.

Mean and standard deviation and inter correlation revealed that Flow (mean = 4.28) has the highest mean in comparison to organizational citizenship behaviour (mean = 3.73). Flow has significant relationship ($\beta = .410^{***}$, $p < .001$) with OCB. The statistical results also revealed that socio-cultural factor (Individualism) moderate the relationships with flow and OCB ($\beta = .752^{***}$, $p < .001$). However, socio-cultural factor (Collectivism) have no moderating effect on the relationship between flow and OCB ($\beta = .304$, $p \text{ value} = .009 > .001$).

6. Hypotheses testing

The two hypotheses were tested using Structural Equation Modelling via AMOS version 21. The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship of flow with OCB and the moderating effect of socio-cultural factor between flow and OCB.

H1 proposed that flow is correlated with OCB and was supported. The results revealed that flow was correlated with OCB with $\beta = .410$, $p < .001$.

H2 proposed that socio-cultural factor (Individualism) moderate the relationship between flow and OCB was supported.

The results revealed that there is a significant moderating effect between the constructs ($z = 1.965$ at $p < .001$). The relationship between flow and OCB is moderated by socio-cultural factors, as the relationship is only significant for the individualism group ($\beta = .752$, $p < .001$) in this study.

In sum, the result revealed that flow has a significant relationship with OCB while Socio-Cultural factors particularly, Individualism, have been found to moderate the relationship between flow and OCB.

7. Discussion

Two findings for this study are the following: firstly, flow has a significant relationship with OCB. Flow is a relatively new construct and there is limited knowledge about the relationship between OCB and flow (Bakker 2005; Demerouti 2006). The only nearest outcome influenced by flow is work engagement, which is defined as positively fulfilling and work related state of mind, and share the affinity with the flow variables, as discovered by Schaufeli et al., (2002). As suggested in related literature, OCB is the extra role related behaviors that go above and beyond the routine duties (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Organ et al., 2006). The enjoyment and intrinsic motivation experienced by the employees during flow include their being able to induce OCB among employees (Organ, Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 2006). In addition, flow experience enables the organization to attract and retain talented employees. It also helps to promote the well-being and engagement in the workplace (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003).

Another possible reason for the significance is the dimension between flow and OCB is interconnected with each other. One of the flow dimensions contain intrinsic work motivation and it is defined as the state in which people engage in the work activity for their own sake rather than for some extrinsic reward (Bakker, 2005), which share the same affinity with OCB's dimension, particularly civic virtue, which is defined as behaviors that reveal employees

are in deep concerns, as well as having utmost interest in the life of the organization or work related activities (Law, Wong & Chen, 2005). Both dimensions revealed that employees engage with utmost interest in work related activities.

In addition, past studies revealed that gender-role stereotypes have an impact on the significance of this current study. It is widely accepted that certain work behaviors are considered either more towards feminine or masculine. Feminine behaviors have been characterized as interpersonal in orientation and focused on a concern for others. On the contrary, masculine behaviors are typically more aggressive and independent (Spence & Helmreich, 1980). Thus, the OCB dimensions can be divided by gender role. In the case of this study, civic virtue is regarded as more in-role for men (Spence & Helmreich, 1980). Therefore, in relation to the gender-roles stereotypes with this study, it was revealed that majority of the respondents were male, which represented 66% (194) from 293 of the total respondents. Furthermore, past research (for e.g. Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009) demonstrated OCB, specifically the civic virtue construct, enabled the industry to increase productivity, efficiency, and customer satisfaction, and to reduce costs and turnover.

Secondly, the finding indicates that there is a significant moderating effect of socio-cultural factors on the relationship between flow and OCB. Specifically, employees who are individualistic at their workplace who experience flow are more likely to find their work enjoyable and intrinsically motivating, and at the same time, display the characteristics of OCB. This finding is supported by Kirkman et al. (2006), as well as Leung et al., (2005), who asserted that cultural values may have stronger effects on organizational citizenship behavior under certain conditions than others. Based on this study, individuals who are individualistic tend to focus more on personal attainment and success, and therefore, they pay more attention to contribute to organizational outcomes. However, this finding is contrary to the previous findings (e.g. Mooman & Blakey, 1995; Wagner, 1995), who propose that collectivism is related to organizational citizenship OCB with work group, and the well-being of the group takes precedence over individual goals and pursuits (Triandis, 2001). For the case of individualism, independence and self-fulfilment is more important (Triandis, 2001). Thus, this study reveals that individualistic employees experience optimal concentration in doing the work-related task in their own way and approaches within their own compound of workplace, while at the same time, show the organizational citizenship nature. This could benefit the employers as this could contribute to higher positive productivity to the organization.

8. Implication

To date, there are, to the researcher's knowledge, a few studies on the state of flow, which investigated OCB on the relationship with the state of flow. Depending on the occupation type, the employee job demand and resources may differ from each other in different contexts (Bakker et al., 2007). Thus, the inclusion of socio-cultural factors (individualism/collectivism) as a moderating variable will better explain the finding between Western and Eastern culture because each cultural context is perceived differently. This study revealed the differences on the impact of individualism and collectivism on organizational outcomes in the hotel industry. Through the individualism construct, individualistic hotel employees do experience flow, which induces OCB among employees. On the contrary, the socio-cultural aspect of collectivism orientation showed no impact on the hotel employees' OCB.

OCB is a prosocial organizational behavior that enhances overall performance of employees and increases organizational efficiency (Katz, 1964). It is important for managers to understand situations that provoke the positive behaviors, such as cooperation with peers, performing extra duties without complaint, volunteering and helping others, punctuality, using time effectively, conserving resources, sharing ideas, and positively representing the organization (Turnipseed & Rassuli, 2005). This research helps employers to identify employees who are likely to display positive behaviors at workplace by increasing the potential of the involved construct, which is the civic virtue that is referred to as behavior that reveal an employee have deep concerns, as well as having utmost interest in the life of the organization or work related activities (Law, Wong & Chen, 2005). This is especially important due to the need for higher productivity and organizational success that depends on the well-engaged employees who do not care much about extrinsic reward. This could be an important strategy to ensure that hotels could stay competitive in the industry and the hotel employees can have rewarding experience, while delivering quality customer service to the customers. If we can emulate the painters of Csikzentmihayi's subjects of flow study in dedication and passion, then we can be more accountable to the hotel employees and leave an indelible impression just like the renowned painters.

9. Limitation and future research

The cross-sectional research design may result in difficulties in authenticating the direction of the relationship between the variables. Even though Harmon's Single Factor test proved that this study has no problem with common method variance, using the cross-sectional design to study the state of flow may result in difficulties in interpreting the results. From the contextual perspectives, this study focused on investigating flow experience among employees in the Malaysian hotel industry. Thus, the findings obtained in this study may be affected by industry-specific issues. Tasks in hotel industry are mainly routine work that rarely involve cognitive domains or involve challenging situations. Moreover, the micro and macro business environments of the hotel industry are mainly affected by both local and global dimensions.

It is suggested that future research include hotels outside Sarawak. This will ensure that the findings can be generalized to other hotels in Malaysia. In addition, Nielsen and Cleal (2010) suggested that context is an important determinant for flow. This cross-sectional study investigated flow experience in the hotel industry. Future research should consider a longitudinal study method to further investigate in the context of hotel industry. A longitudinal study research design may further describe and explain the pattern of change, reveal the direction and the magnitude of the causal relationship between the variables of interest.

10. Conclusion

In sum, new findings are obtained and the relationship between the flow and OCB as well as the moderating effects of socio-cultural factors (Individualism and Collectivism) in a non-Western context was explained. Flow is an important approach in promoting a continual positive momentum and motivation in any organization. The hotel management team could develop a working environment to facilitate the experience of flow among the employees that could encourage the feeling of organizational citizenship behaviour. Various approaches such as job enrichment, job redesigning, job enlargement or job rotation could assist in enhancing a positive manner to facilitate the flow experience. Therefore, hotel organization should constantly design job tasks that incorporate skill enrichment and also a considerable amount of challenging problems to encourage flow experiences among the hotel employees.

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