REVIEW OF ARTICLE: ”Stressors and resources in customer service roles: Exploring the relationship between core self-evaluations and burnout”

Dana Yagil, Gil Luria and Iddo Gal
Department of Human Services, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel

(Review by: Albert Alarcón)
Albert.alarcon.ros@gmail.com

The goal of this article is to explore the role of core self-evaluations (CSE) as a coping resource in customer service roles. The results show that CSE is negatively related to service provider burnout as reflected in depersonalization and emotional exhaustion, and positively related to a sense of accomplishment. CSE was also negatively related to perceived customer negative behaviors and to emotional regulation. The results show a partial mediation effect of emotional regulation on the relationship between CSE and burnout. Service orientation and social support were found to interact with CSE and enhance its effect on social stressors.

The results of this study can inform several managerial practices mainly designed to enhance service providers’ resources of coping with role stressors. Service organizations often tend to emphasize candidates’ interpersonal orientation and skills in making selection decisions. A similar approach is likely to be reflected in training, when employees’ behavior and attitudes toward customers are emphasized. While these qualities are certainly important, our results show that in addition to service providers’ orientation toward others, self-perception is also a significant attribute of service providers. The results show that CSE helps to prevent burnout and thereby contributes to the quality of service provider interaction with customers. Moreover, our data suggest that CSE affects employees’ perception of customer behavior. These results may have beneficial organizational implications if organizations seek candidates with high-CSE levels (i.e. self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, emotional stability) when selecting employees for service roles. While a high level of employee CSE is always an advantage, it seems to be especially crucial in service contexts which involve a high level of stress and which are known for the high level of burnout experienced by service providers, such as call centers (Zapf et al., 2003).

Furthermore, as most of the components of CSE are considered to be affected by situational variables, these self-perceptions may be enhanced by an organizational environment that fosters a sense of empowerment and trust in the employee’s abilities.
Empowerment contributes to well-being: empowered service providers feel better about their jobs and themselves (Bowen and Lawler, 1995) and report higher levels of self-efficacy (Chebat and Kollias, 2000).

Social support was found to have a positive effect on the relationship between CSE and surface acting. Because most service jobs are performed individually, employees do not have many opportunities to interact with their colleagues. However, it might be precisely the loneliness involved in the service job which makes social support so valuable for service providers. Management might consider creating opportunities for service employees to interact during working hours, as well as initiating off-work social activities to enhance cohesion, bonding and social support. For example, in addition to informal social activities, organizational support groups designed for service providers may provide the much needed interaction with colleagues who share similar experiences. Furthermore, since supervisors are considered an important source of social support (van Daalen et al., 2006), leadership training programs designed for service managers should give emphasis to this aspect of the leader’s role. Managerial activities designed to enhance social support should be especially emphasized among service providers who work outside the organization (e.g. salespeople) and therefore have even fewer “natural” opportunities to interact with their colleagues.

In addition to enhancing coping resources, organizations may consider ways to reduce the stress involved in emotional regulation and perception of customer negative behavior. Emotional regulation reflected in surface acting, which was found to be positively related to burnout dimensions, is especially stressful when a service provider feels he/she has to accept negative interpersonal customer behavior and react pleasantly rather than freely express his/her negative emotions. However, organizational training that emphasizes the customer’s view point, increases empathy, and reframes the customer behavior as impersonal, may lessen both the negative perception of the customer behavior and the need for emotional regulation.

In conclusion, employee burnout, one of the major problems in service organizations, has been mostly explored with regard to the effect of situational variables. The present study introduces a fundamental personality trait, CSE, to the area of service and shows its effect on burnout through its relationship with situational stressors and interaction with coping resources.