DO CUSTOMER AND COWORKER INCIVILITY MODERATE THE EFFECT OF POLYCHRONICITY ON JOB PERFORMANCE? EVIDENCE FROM HOTEL FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES IN NORTH CYPRUS

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Abstract

The present paper tests a model that investigates the effect of polychronicity on job performance among hotel frontline employees; concurrently, customer incivility and coworker incivility -two important social stressors- are considered as moderators in the relationship between employees' polychronicity and job performance. Data collection is done among frontline employees in the four and five-star hotels in Northern Cyprus.

The results indicate that polychronicity encourages higher employees' job performance. However, the effect of customer incivility on job performance is negative and significant and the moderating effect of customer incivility in the relationship between polychronicity and job performance is supported. That is to say high customer incivility lessens the positive relationship between polychronicity and job performance. Coworker incivility did not affect job performance and failed to moderate the relationship between polychronicity and job performance. Further, managerial implications and guidance for future research are specified.

Keywords: Polychronicity, Customer Incivility, Coworker Incivility, Job Performance, Frontline Employees

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POLİKRONİSİTE İLE İŞ PERFORMANSI ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİ ÜZERİNE MÜŞTERİ VE ÇALIŞAN KABA DAVRANIŞLARININ DÜZENLEYİCİ (MODERATOR) ETKİSİ VAR MIDIR? KKTC OTELCİLİK SEKTÖRÜ ÜZERİNE BİR ARAŞTIRMA

Öz

Bu çalışma otel çalışanları arasında polikronisitenin iş performansı üzerine etkisini ve iki temel sosyal stres kaynaklarından olan müşteri ve çalışan kaba davranışlarının otel çalışanlarının polikronisitesi ve iş performansları arasındaki ilişki üzerine düzenleyici (moderatör) etkisini araştırmaktadır. Bu amaçla Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyetinde faaliyet gösteren 4 ve 5 yıldızlı otellerde çalışan 295 personelden anket formu yardımıyla veri toplanmıştır.

Araştırma bulguları polikronisitenin çalışanları yüksek performans göstermeye teşvik ettiğini gösterirken, müşterilerin kaba davranışlarının çalışan iş performansı üzerine olumsuz bir etkisi olduğu ve çalışanların polikronisite ve iş performansı arasındaki ilişkiyi düzenlediği görülmektedir. Diğer bir ifadeyle, müşteri kaba davranışlarının artması çalışanların polikronisite ve iş performansı ilişkisini azaltmaktadır. Diğer taraftan, istatistiki bulgulara göre, çalışan kaba davranışının iş performansı üzerine bir etkiye sahip olmadığı ve çalışanların polikronisitesi ve iş performansı arasındaki ilişkiyi düzenlemediği görülmektedir. Araştırmanın teorik ve pratik uygulamaları ile sınırlılıklarına çalışmanın sonuç bölümünde yer verilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Polikronisite, Müşteri kaba davranışı, Çalışan kaba davranışı, İş performansı, Otel çalışanları

INTRODUCTION

Today, the essential role of frontline employees in the hospitality organizations is clear due to intensive competition in the service environment and customers' expectation for the highest level of service quality. Their frequent face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions with customers give them a key role in service-delivery & complaint-handling processes (Costen and Salazar, 2011; Yavas et al., 2011). Therefore it is necessary to have a proper fit between Employees' appropriate personal characteristics and the organization requirements (Jang and George, 2012). Organization performance is seriously depending on employees' job performance. Individuals with higher level of performance can retain competitive advantage for their organizations (Dessler, 2011).

Polychronicity is very important for frontline employees because in hospitality industry, they are the face of the firm who can show higher level of customer service and job performance. Workplace incivility is "low-severity deviant behavior to harm the object with unclear intention which breaks workplace mutual respect standards" (Andersson and Pearson, 1999, pp. 457) the examples including rude, impolite, or disrespectful actions. According to Van Jaarsveld et al. (2010) customer incivility is "treating an employee in an uncivil way (e.g., impoliteness, speaking in a discourteous or offensive manner". Coworker Incivility includes negligence to say "thanks" or "please" to other colleagues, raising voice or disregarding others (Pearson et al., 2001). Customer and Coworker incivility are two main sources of incivility.

Based on Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this study attempts to test a model that investigates the effect of polychronicity -as a crucial employee attribute in dealing with workplace stressors- on frontline employees' job performance in hotel industry. Concurrently, customer and coworker incivility are considered as moderators in the relationship between employees' polychronicity and job performance.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on Poposki and Oswald (2010), Polychronicity refers to an individual's preference for changing attention among continuing tasks, rather than concentrating on one task and complete it at first and then shifting to another task. Firstly, this issue was investigated as a cultural variable by Hall (1959) whose belief was that polychronic individuals prefer to do several activities and practice their preference at the same period of time (Wenhao, 2015). It seems that polychronicity and multitasking are the same but they are different (Konig and Waller, 2010). Polychronicity is a trait while multitasking is a behavior that can be changed in varying job demands, work conditions, and different personal physical or mental condition (Kirchberg et al., 2015). It is also a dynamic phenomenon that is emerged from computer science (Kelman et al., 1996). Time use preference, Context, and Time tangibility are three dimensions of polychronicity (Palmer and Shoorman, 1999). The important role of polychronicity is clear specifically for frontline employees in hospitality industry because they are expected to deal with multiple tasks simultaneously and succeed in challenging and stressful tasks (Jang and George, 2012).

Stressor including event, restriction, requirement or opportunities that are perceived as a source of strain by individuals who may show negative reaction to them which is happens when there is no balance between job resources and demands (Beehr, 1991; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Workplace stressors may appear from anything which is perceived as stressful situation like interpersonal conflict, lack of autonomy and forceful job demands (Spector and Fox, 2002). Hotel frontline employees experience a lot of interaction with customer in their workplace every day and close connection between their performance and customer encounters indicates that

customer withdrawal can lead to diminished motivation to provide desired customer services (Won-Moo Hur et al., 2015). Regardless of the fact that customer satisfaction in a consumer-oriented economy is a critical success key for organizations, however too much emphasis on this may result in power gap between service employees and customers (Rafaeli et al., 2012). Empirical evidence suggested that customer incivility is more strongly related to personal and organizational outcomes rather than coworker incivility and have a remarkable cost for the organizations (Sliter et al., 2011). On the other hand, there is a connection between coworker incivility and several negative outcomes, like declined psychological well-being (Lim and Cortina, 2005) and high level of burnout (Laschinger et al., 2009). Fiske (2009) believes that to remain involved, productive and happy, employees as social beings require to be connected with others. In fact, one of the characteristics in many service jobs is reliant on coworkers. Therefore, because of experiencing various sources of incivility, most of service jobs might be considered "at-risk" specifically when employees are reliant on each other for serving customers (Sliter et al., 2012).

According to transactional theory of stress, stress arises from a transaction between a person and his/her environment (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). People, regarding to their well-being, have an evaluation about demands and resources (Lyon, 2012; Judge and Colquitt, 2004). Cavanaugh et al (2000) classified two types of stressors; challenge stressors which create positive emotions, motivating people and required job demands (workloads, time pressure, high level of responsibilities). Employees perceived challenge stressors as an opportunity for personal development and accomplishment.   Also, their job satisfaction may increase. This study focused on hindrance stressors which Cavanaugh et al (2000) define them as harmful stressors (role ambiguity, role overload, daily hassles) that negatively affect employee performance and job satisfaction, and positively affect turnover intention and searching new job. Employees evaluate them as obstacles to their personal growth and goal achievement (Podsakoff et al., 2007).

Job performance is "the level of productivity of an individual employee, relative to his or her peers, on several job-related behaviors and outcomes'' (Babin and Boles, 1998). Excellent employee performance in the hospitality industry has a crucial role since they are significant part of delivering services and forming the main core of customer service experience (Paek et al., 2015). Rich et al.'s (2010) asserted that polychronic frontline employees represent higher customer service delivery and job performance through work engagement.

Based on Conservation of Resources (COR) theory the relationships between stressors and their influence on different job outcomes are understandable (Hobfoll, 1989). Important component of (COR) theory are social resources and one type of social stressor is incivility (Sliter et al., 2012). This theory claims that resources are 'objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual or that serve as means for attainment of these objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies' (Hobfoll, 1989, p.516). As the principle of COR theory, individuals attempt to acquire, maintain, protect and promote resources to use them to cope with stressors (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). Nevertheless, valuable resources are always limited thus employees try to conserve them or avoid losing them. Resources availability may be increased by favorable social interaction with customers (Hobfoll, 1988) while negative interaction is a resource loss. In the dark side of COR theory, employees looking for restore missing resources through decreasing their performance and withdrawing (Sliter et al., 2012).

In figure 1, the model of this study which examines the effect of polychronicity on employees' job performance, is presented. Simultaneously, the moderating effect of customer and coworker incivility in this relationship is investigated.
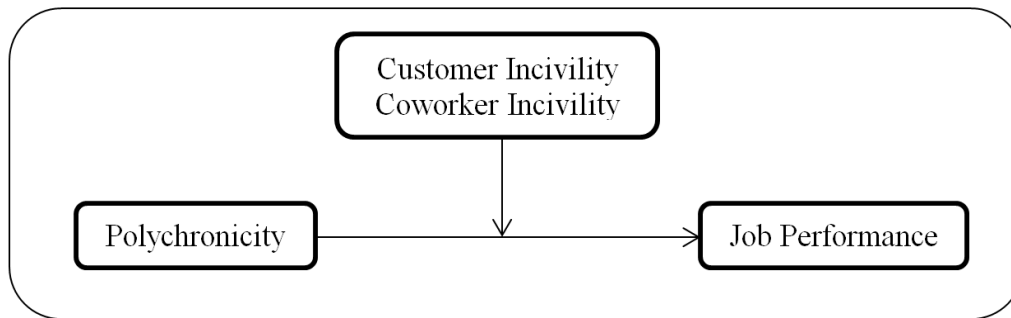
Figure 1: Model of the study

1.1. Hypotheses

Polychronic employees are problem-focused and controlling challenging service encounters is easy for them. Prior empirical studies reveals that polychronic employees experienced high job satisfaction (Daskin, 2015), higher job performance (Conte and Gintoft, 2005), show lower turnover intention (Jang and George, 2012; Arndt et al., 2006), high creativity innovative performance (Madjar and Oldham, 2006), and higher in-role and extra-role performances (Karatepe et al., 2013). Therefore the first hypothesis is

Hypothesis 1: Polychronicity is positively related to job performance

Due to manage multiple tasks within a given period of time (Arndt et al., 2006), polychronic employees are work engaged (Karatepe et al., 2013). According to Schaufeli et al (2002, p. 74) work engagement refers to "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption". Vigor in this definition means high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, investing a lot of efforts in work, and persisting when dealing with problems. COR theory asserts that FLEs are always dealing with incivilities especially customers incivility in service workplace so they try to protect their personal resources (time, high energy, multitasking, or engagement) to reach their performance goals and remain in their organizational positions. Customer incivility is employee perception of low-quality interpersonal treatment from customers (Wang et al., 2011) which can negatively influence employee well-being, job and life satisfaction, and their performance. Thus the following hypothesis was proposed:

Hypothesis 2: The relationship between polychronicity and job performance will be moderated by customer incivility, such that higher customer incivility will weaken the positive relationship

Frontline employees, particularly in service jobs, need social acceptance and support from their colleagues. Thus, when coworkers' treatment is unpleasant, social respect and support are broken which lead to imbalanced network (Andersson and Pearson, 1999). In turn, the results are employees' exhaustion and health problems (Kobayashi et al., 2008; Whitaker, 2001). Interpersonal conflict between coworkers is one of the most significant stressors (Keenan and Newton, 1985) because of the nature of service job and its inherent stress, coworker incivility causes additional stress for frontline employees. Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

Hypothesis 3: The relationship between polychronicity and job performance will be moderated by coworker incivility, such that higher coworker incivility will weaken the positive relationship

2. METHODOLOGY

Convenience sampling was used in current study and data collection was done among frontline employees in the four and five-star hotels in Northern Cyprus. The hotel managements were contacted for permission before collecting data. Firstly, an English version of the questionnaire was developed and then back-translated to Turkish by two linguistic experts based on suggestion of Perrewe et al (2002). 350 questionnaires were distributed with 84% response rate (295 valid retuned questionnaires) and prior pilot study was conducted as well. Completed questionnaires were sealed in envelopes to decrease the potential threat of common method bias.

2.1. Measurement

Polychronicity was measured via 7 items adopted from Bluedorn et al (1999), Customer incivility via 7 items (Sliter et al., 2012), Coworker incivility via 3 items (Sliter et al., 2012), and Job performance via 5 items (Babin and Boles, 1998). Gender, age, education, department and tenure were used as demographic variables.

All measures were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to provide support for the issues of dimensionality, convergent and discriminant validity. The result showed that the model conforms and all Cronbach's alphas were above the benchmark of .60. Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations of Study Variables and regression weights were checked. Additionally, the interaction term for the moderating effect of customer and coworker incivility were illustrated.

3. RESULTS

As predicted, according to Table 1, all correlations among the study variables were significant except correlation between customer incivility and coworker incivility which is not significant (-0.07). As predicted the relationship between polychronicity and job performance was positive and significant ($r = .19$, $p<.01$). Thus, this provides a preliminary support for hypothesis 1.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Polychronicity	-			
2. Coworker Incivility	.18**	-		
3. Customer Incivility	-.21**	-.07	-	
4. Job Performance	.19**	.20**	.516**	-
Mean	2.4	2.5	3.4	4.1
Standard deviation	1.10	1.18	.93	.75

Notes: Composite scores for each variable were computed by averaging respective item score.
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed test)

The regression co-efficient in Table 2, indicates that as expected in hypothesis 1, polychronicity has positive and significant impact on job performance (β =.126, p<.01, t=3.30), and polychronicity explains $R^2_{(job\ performance)}$ = 34% variance. Thus, it provides a collateral evidence for hypothesis 1.

Table 2: Regression Weights

Variables (Polychronicity)	β	t	β	t	β	t
Step 1: (Direct effect)						
Job Performance	.126	3.30**	.133	3.51**	.138	3.62**
Step 2: (Interaction Terms)						
Polychronicity* Coworker Incivility	-	-	.050	1.15	.040	.99
Step 3: (Interaction Terms)						
Polychronicity* Customer Incivility	-	-	-	-	-.144	-3.39**
F			10.87**		6.10**		7.98**
R^2			.34		.38		.73
$\Delta R2$			.00		.04		.35

Notes: ** Correlations are significant at the .01 level. ** p < .001

The second hypothesis states that customer incivility will moderate the relationship between polychronicity and job performance, the relationship is negative and significant (β =-.144, p<.01, t=-3.39), and polychronicity explains $R^2_{(job\ performance)}$ = 35% variance. Thus, it provides support for hypothesis 2.
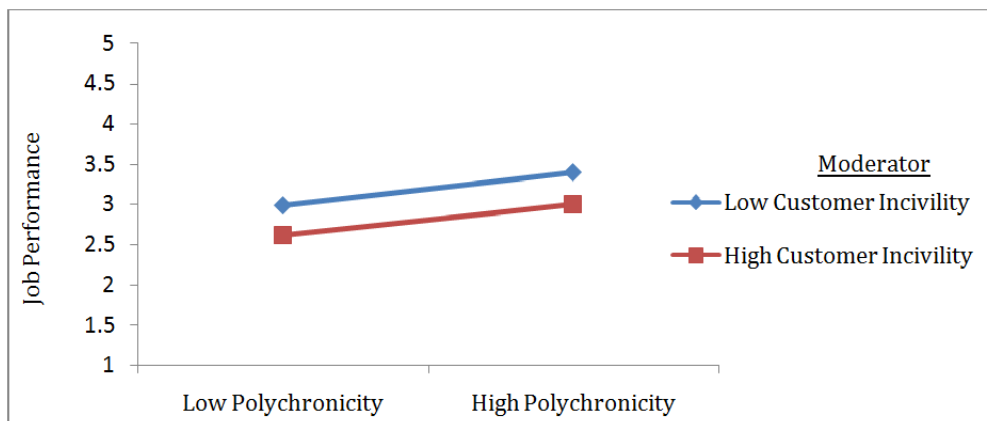
Figure 2: Interaction term for hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 3 states that coworker incivility will moderate the relationship between polychronicity and job performance, the relationship is not significant (β =.133, p=.25, t=1.15) and only explains $R^2_{(job\ performance)}$ = 4% variance. Thus, hypothesis 3 was rejected.
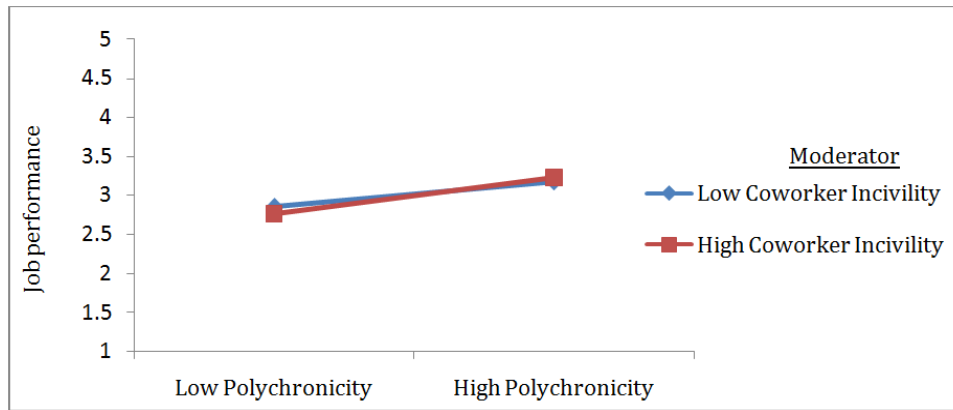

Figure 3: Interaction term for hypothesis 3

CONCLUSIONS

Data analysis showed empirical support for hypothesis 1 consistent with Cochrum-Nguyen, (2013) which suggests that polychronicity can encourage job performance in the hotel industry). Therefore, having polychronic FLEs is an advantage because of their higher job performance in service delivery process.

Hypothesis 2 was supported, due to the result indicated that customer incivility can moderate the relationship between polychronicity and job performance and the existence of high customer incivility in the organization weakens the performance of polychronic frontline employeess.

Furthermore, hypothesis 3 was rejected and coworker incivility failed to moderate the positive relationship between polychronicity and job performance which means that it was not perceived as an important social hindrance stressor by polychronic frontline employees. One reason may be because peer-to-peer incivility is weaker than customer incivility (Folger, 2001). Second reason is that customers are more irritant source of stressors at workplace rather than coworkers (Totterdell and Holman, 2003).

In order to fill the gap in tourism management literature, this study linked incivility to performance. Based on COR theory, this paper emphasizes on the crucial role of polychronic frontline employees in delivering superior performance in hotel industry. Regarding applicability and validity of polychronicity concept, incivility construct and importance of conducting such studies in different industries and geographies, this study was conducted in hotel industry in North Cyprus. Further, this paper provides useful managerial implication to help hotel managers to be able to minimize the effect of incivility in the hotel industry.

Hotel management must put extra effort to maintain polychronic employees by offering both monetary and non-monetary incentives like attractive career opportunities, appropriate HR policies, fair payment and benefits, effective rewarding system, and clear feedback mechanism. Managers should provide an appropriate recruitment system to employ right candidates via background checks, interviews concerning previous polychronic behaviors by superiors, practical test and given scenarios in order to consider their potential abilities, interpersonal relationship, knowledge, skills, multiple tasks handling, and forceful workload dealing capability.

Hotel management can commit current polychronic employees to the organization by job enrichment and job enlargement and they can also implement policies like zero-tolerance policy that balance the support for both parties (their customers and employees) as van Jaarsveld et al (2010) and Yagil (2008) have warned against the one-sided policy "customers are always right".

Managers should also empower these employees and delegate authority to them to motivate them to be innovative and improve service delivery processes. They should establish collaboration spirit throughout the organization; especially for frontline employees. The essential role of team working in hotels should be fostered in training and retraining programs in order to keep the harmony among group members to raise productivity.

Based on this study, polychronicity improves frontline employees' job performance. Customer incivility moderates the linkage between polychronicity and job performance such that higher level of customer incivility weakens the positive relationship. But coworker incivility did not show any moderating effect. Accordingly, there should be more attention to customer incivility in order to have excellent employees' performance in the hotel industry.

For Future, the similar researches should be conducted in other countries and in other service sectors using bigger sample size, Cross-sectional data, and longitudinal approach. It is also suggested to examine the effect of supervisor incivility as well and investigate the joint moderating effect of supervisor, coworker and customer incivility as three significant social hindrance stressors on frontline employees in the hotel industry.

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