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Ugur Yavas

East Tennessee State University, raxyavas@etsu.edu

Osman M. Karatepe

Eastern Mediterranean University, null@null.edu

Emin Babakus

University of Memphis, null@null.edu

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Keywords

hotel employees, interrole conflicts, positive affectivity, survey, Turkey

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By Ugur Yavas, Osman M. Karatepe, and Emin Babakus

Abstract

This study investigates the role of positive affectivity as a buffer against the detrimental effects of interrole conflicts on frontline hotel employees' job performance and turnover intentions. Data collected from a sample of frontline hotel employees in Turkey serve as the study setting. Results and their implications are discussed, and directions for future research are offered.

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Introduction

Today's demanding work environment blurs the boundaries between job and home lives and heightens the potential for work-family and family-work conflicts, where participation in one role makes it difficult to participate in the other (cf. Arnold, Flaherty, Voss, & Mowen, 2009; Smith, 2010). The difficulties frontline employees experience in achieving work-life balance (Wong & Ko, 2009) can cause poor morale, undermine their performance, and hinder effective customer service (Netemeyer, Maxham, & Pullig, 2005; Wayne, Musisca, & Fleeson, 2004). Given the detrimental effects of interrole conflicts on the well-being of the employees and the organizations, managing work-life balance is a managerial imperative (Chiang, Birtch, & Kwan, 2010; Wong & Ko, 2009). Against this backdrop, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the relationships among interrole conflicts and frontline employees' job performance and turnover intentions, and the buffering role of positive affectivity in this process using data gathered from a sample of frontline hotel employees in Turkey.

Our study is relevant and significant. First, conflicts in the work-family interface have detrimental outcomes for frontline employees in the hospitality industry. This is widespread both in developed Western countries (e.g., the United States, the United Kingdom) as well as other countries (e.g., Jordan, India, China). Employees experiencing difficulty in managing work and family conflicts have poor job performance and elevated levels of turnover intentions. Therefore, managers strongly desire to retain frontline employees who display effective performance in the workplace. This is important because, due to their boundary-spanning roles, frontline employees should deliver quality services to customers (Yavas, Babakus, & Karatepe, 2008). In addition, turnover is a crucial problem in the hospitality

industry, has substantial tangible and intangible costs for the organization (Kusluvan, Kusluvan, Ilhan, & Buyruk, 2010), and is triggered by turnover intentions. With this realization, managers should make sure that they retain a pool of frontline employees with low levels of turnover intentions.

Second, while a plethora of research in the past examined direct linkages among interrole conflicts and organizationally significant outcomes, there is a paucity of research on the role of personality traits as possible moderators in the hospitality management literature (Karatepe, 2008, 2011). This is a shortcoming. Management can use certain tools, such as employee assistance and training programs, to mitigate the detrimental effects of interrole conflicts on job performance and turnover intentions. However, ultimately, an individual's personality can play a significant intervening role in the process (cf. Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). In this study, we contend that positive affectivity is one such trait.

Finally, besides adding to the compendium of knowledge and serving as a frame of reference for future research, the findings of our study may also prove useful from a managerial perspective, as well. For instance, if found viable, our findings may carry implications regarding the recruitment of the "right" type of individuals for frontline positions in hotels. Consequently, the findings would be useful for hotel managers in the global work environment, where there are intense competitive pressures. The next section presents an overview of the relevant literature. This is followed by presentations of the method and results of the empirical study we undertook among frontline hotel employees in Turkey. We conclude with implications of the results and suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

Interrole Conflicts

Frontline employees in service organizations are often underpaid, typically work long hours and irregular schedules, and carry heavy workloads (Karatepe, 2010; Poulston, 2008). These factors, coupled with dramatic changes in today's social conditions (e.g., the entry of more women into the workforce; the rise in the number of dual-career couples; the increased responsibility of caring for older, infirm parents/relatives); and tighter economic conditions (e.g., downsizing, resulting in "lean and mean" organizations and necessitating that surviving employees work even longer hours) give rise to heightened conflicts between the two universal roles of adult life (Halpern, 2005). These are work-family and family-work conflicts (Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). *Work-family conflict* refers to "a form of interrole conflict in which the general demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the job interfere with performing family-related responsibilities." *Family-work conflict* refers to "a form of interrole conflict in

which the general demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the family interfere with performing work-related responsibilities” (Netemeyer et al., 1996, p. 401).

Both forms of conflict basically result from an individual’s attempts to meet an overabundance of demands emanating from their dual roles. The demands coming from one domain make performance of roles in the other domain more difficult. Research in the extant literature suggests that interrole conflicts decrease employees’ work-related performance and have negative impacts on other outcomes, including employees’ turnover intentions (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Netemeyer, Brashear-Alejandro, & Boles, 2004).

A careful investigation of the hospitality management literature also suggests that work-family conflict or family-work conflict influences managerial and non-managerial hotel employee outcomes (e.g., organizational commitment, job satisfaction, turnover intentions) deleteriously. For instance, the results of a study conducted with hotel employees demonstrated that conflict between work and family domains decreased normative organizational commitment and job satisfaction, whereas family-work conflict positively affected job satisfaction (Namasivayam & Mount, 2004). According to the results of another study in Turkey, two directions of conflict had detrimental effects on service recovery performance and exacerbated turnover intentions among frontline hotel employees (Karatepe & Sokmen, 2006). In Karatepe and Sokmen’s (2006) study, it was shown that conflict between family and work domains reduced job satisfaction, while work-family conflict did not. The results of a study in Jordan also provided support for the positive effects of two directions of conflict on turnover intentions among frontline hotel employees (Karatepe & Baddar, 2006).

Namasivayam and Zhao’s study (2007) revealed that family-work conflict was a significant predictor of job satisfaction for a sample of hotel employees in India, while work-family conflict was not. Recently, Blomme, Van Rheede, and Tromp (2010) reported that work-family conflict intensified turnover intentions among Dutch hotel employees. More recently, in a study of hotel sales managers in China, Zhao, Qu, and Ghiselli (2011) found that two directions of conflict reduced affective reactions to the job, while only family-work conflict weakened the cognitive appraisal of a job. The results of their study also showed that family-work conflict mitigated life satisfaction, while work-family conflict did not.

Positive Affectivity

Affectivity, defined as “the dispositional tendency to experience certain affective states over time” (Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & De

Cherment, 2003, p. 915), is a personality variable that manifests itself in terms of negative affectivity and positive affectivity. Negative affectivity and positive affectivity are not opposite points on a continuum but rather two independent forms of affectivity (Cropanzano, James, & Konovsky, 1993). In this study, we focus on *positive affectivity*, or the dispositional tendency to experience pleasurable engagement with the environment (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). This is because the preponderance of management research in the past has centered on negative affectivity and ignored positive affectivity (Karatepe & Uludag, 2008; Zellars, Perrewé, Hochwarter, & Anderson, 2006) and calls are made to incorporate positive affectivity into research (Zellars et al., 2006). Such a gap in the extant literature has also been highlighted in Eby, Maher, and Butts's (2010) review.

Overlooking positive affectivity in prior studies is a shortcoming considering the contemporary movement towards positive psychology/positive organizational behavior (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Positive psychology focuses on human strengths, optimal functioning, and positive experiences at work rather than weaknesses and malfunctioning (Mauno, Kinnunen, & Ruokolainen, 2007; Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002; Seligman & Csikzentmihalyi, 2000). Likewise, positive organizational behavior, which is an extension of positive psychology, encourages and promotes the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities to improve performance in today's workplace (Luthans, 2002).

Positive affectivity increases intuition and creativity, widens the scope of attention, triggers happiness (Barsade & Gibson, 2007; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Individuals who are high in positive affectivity fully concentrate on their tasks; they are energetic and determined (Fogarty et al., 1999; Watson et al., 1988). They tend to perceive events and individuals in a generally more positive manner (Iverson, Olekalns, & Erwin, 1998). Individuals with low positive affectivity, on the other hand, are more likely to experience feelings of fatigue and apathy (Cropanzano et al., 1993). Research suggests that positive affectivity can reduce absenteeism and turnover intentions (cf. Barsade & Gibson, 2007) and can increase job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005; Thoresen et al., 2003). As can be inferred from a statement of its objective, in this study we contend that positive affectivity can potentially mitigate the negative effects of interrole conflicts on employees' job performance and turnover intentions.

Method

Sample and Procedure

Data for the study were gathered via self-administered questionnaires from full-time frontline employees of three-, four-, and five-star hotels in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey. These respondents were employed as front-desk agents, bell attendants, food and beverage servers, concierges, guest relations representatives, door attendants, and bartenders and had frequent face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions with customers.

According to the information we received from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 11 five-star, 27 four-star, and 38 three-star hotels were operating in the research location at the time of our study. These hotels had a total of 6,432 rooms. The ownership structures of the hotels ranged from international/national chain hotels to independently/family owned and operated hotels. The managements of the hotels were contacted to receive permission for data collection. The managements of 32 three-star, 22 four-star, and 10 five-star hotels granted permission. The total number of frontline employees in these hotels was 1,339. The research team distributed the questionnaires to all these frontline employees. Each questionnaire included a cover letter promising complete anonymity and confidentiality to the respondent. Six hundred twenty questionnaires were returned, for a response rate of 46.3%, which is comparable to the response rate obtained in another study conducted among frontline hotel employees in the same locality (Yavas et al., 2008).

As shown in Table 1, about 45% of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 27, 39% between 28 and 37, and the rest were older than 37. Approximately 55% of the respondents were male. Approximately 48% of the respondents had secondary and high school education, 2% had primary school education, 24% had vocational school (two-year college) education, 24% had college degrees, and the rest had graduate degrees. About 47% of the respondents had tenures of 1-5 years, 30% had tenures of 6-10 years, and 7% over 10 years. The rest of the respondents (16%) had been with their hotels less than one year. The majority of the respondents (52%) were single or divorced, while the rest were married. About 52% of the respondents had no children, and nearly 46% had 1 or 2 children. The rest had more than two children.

Measurement

Multiple item indicators from well-established scales were used to operationalize the constructs of the study. As shown in the Appendix, work-family conflict and family-work conflict were measured via five (5) items from Netemeyer et al. (1996) and Boles, Howard, and Donofrio (2001).

Positive affectivity was measured via three (3) items from Agho, Price, and Mueller (1992). Job performance was measured via five (5) items adapted from Babin and Boles (1998), and turnover intentions via three (3) items from Singh, Verbeke, and Rhoads (1996).

Responses to all these items were elicited on 5-point scales ranging from 5 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). Composite scores were generated by adding items comprising each construct. Because of the scoring method used, higher scores consistently indicated higher levels of each construct (e.g., higher work-family conflict, positive affectivity, turnover intentions). With the exception of the family-work conflict construct ($\alpha = .66$), all internal consistency reliability coefficients exceeded the .70 benchmark.

The survey instrument was initially prepared in English and then translated into Turkish via the back-translation method (Malhotra, 2007). To ensure that the item contents were cross-linguistically comparable and generated the same meaning, two faculty members of a Turkish university fluent in both languages further checked the questionnaire. Prior to administering in the field, the questionnaire was pre-tested with a pilot sample of 30 frontline hotel employees, and no changes in the wording of the questions were deemed necessary.

Results

Measurement Results

The entire set of 21 items comprising the measures of study constructs was initially subjected to an exploratory factor analysis (principal component analysis) using oblique rotation since the underlying factors were expected to correlate. The analysis produced a five-factor solution with eigenvalues larger than 1.0, accounting for 63% of the total variance. The first factor explained 20.5% of the variance. All items loaded heavily (.48 or stronger) on their intended factor, while the cross-loadings remained small (largest cross-loading was .187).

The scale items were also subjected to confirmatory factor analysis using the sample covariance matrix as input to LISREL 8.80 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993). The confirmatory factor analysis results indicate that the five-factor measurement model fits the data well ($\chi^2_{166} = 421.21$, $p = .00$, RMSEA = .050, GFI = .94, CFI = .96, NFI = .94, NNFI = .96) and the median value of the standardized factor loadings was .80 with a range of .42 to .94. The average variance extracted (AVE) consistently exceeded shared variance (Φ^2) between the constructs, which suggests that the measures exhibit discriminant validity. With the exception of family-work conflict, all AVEs were larger than .50, an indication of convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

We checked the potential problem of common method variance by Harman's one-factor test (McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992). The initial five-factor confirmatory factor analysis above was followed by a one-factor measurement model ($\chi^2_{176} = 2272.33$, $p = .00$, RMSEA = .140, GFI = .73, CFI = .71, NFI = .69, NNFI = .65). A χ^2 difference test indicated that the single-factor model fit is considerably worse than the proposed five-factor measurement model ($\Delta\chi^2_{10} = 1851.12$, $p < .01$), suggesting that common method bias may not be a problem in this study (Boyer & Hult, 2005).

Regression Analysis Results

In examining the relationships among interrole conflicts and job performance and turnover intentions, and determining whether positive affectivity moderates these relationships, a two-step procedure was followed. In the first step, two regression models were run by using work-family conflict and family-work conflict as the independent variable, and job performance and turnover intentions as the dependent variable. As can be seen from Table 2, both models proved to be viable (marginally significant in the case of job performance). The independent variables collectively were more effective in explaining the variance in turnover intentions ($R^2 = .08$). A closer scrutiny of the results showed that work-family conflict was the only significant predictor of job performance. In the case of turnover intentions, family-work conflict was the only significant predictor.

In the second step, we used sub-group analysis (cf. Kohli, 1989) to determine whether positive affectivity moderates the interrole conflict-outcome relationships. Sub-group analysis, which examines significant differences in regression coefficients across sub-groups (Arnold, 1982), depicts the pattern of results more clearly than would be the case in an examination of interaction effects in analysis of variance. Specifically, we repeated ordinary least squares regression analysis in sub-groups reflecting low and high scores on the moderator variable (positive affectivity). In forming a pair of sub-groups representing low and high sub-groups, the respondents were arrayed according to their positive affectivity scores, and the two sub-groups were then formed by selecting approximately the top and bottom quartile of the cases. The accepted procedure in sub-group analysis is to drop the middle cases from subsequent analysis so as to increase the contrast between sub-groups (Arnold, 1982; Kohli, 1989). As a result, 165 respondents were classified into the low positive affinity group, and 136 respondents into the high positive affectivity group.

The Chow test (Dougherty, 2007) was then performed to establish the significance of the difference in the form (intercept and slope) of each regression model across the two sub-groups. Chow's test is defined as:

$$F = \frac{[\text{SSR}_N - (\text{SSR}_1 + \text{SSR}_2)]/k}{(\text{SSR}_1 + \text{SSR}_2)/N - 2k}$$

where:

- SSR_N = Residual sum of squares for the combined data set
- SSR₁ = Residual sum of squares for the high group
- SSR₂ = Residual sum of squares for the low group
- N = Number of observations in the combined data set
- k = Number of parameters in the model (i.e., k-1 slope coefficients and one intercept)

A statistically significant Chow test would suggest that the estimates of the structural parameters corresponding to the two data sets (i.e., high positive affectivity and low positive affectivity groups) are different and, therefore, positive affectivity is a moderator. The Chow tests of the individual regression estimates for high and low positive affectivity groups were statistically significant in the cases of both outcome measures (turnover intentions: $F=264.04$, $p=.0000$; job performance: $F=298.29$, $p=.0000$), showing that positive affectivity is a significant moderating variable. Further, independent samples t-tests confirmed that the turnover intentions of low positive affectivity employees and job performances of high affectivity employees were significantly higher than for their counterparts.

Discussion

Using data obtained from frontline hotel employees in Turkey, this study investigated the effects of interrole conflicts on job performance and turnover intentions. This study also examined the buffering role of positive affectivity in this process. There are useful results that contribute to the existing knowledge base in the hospitality management literature.

First, results of our empirical study indicate that family-work conflict is a significant determinant of turnover intentions, while work-family conflict is not. Such results are partially consistent with other empirical studies (Karatepe & Baddar, 2006; Karatepe & Sokmen, 2006). Results suggest that employees who are unable to allocate sufficient time to their family responsibilities have intentions to leave the organization. On the other hand, the non-significant finding between work-family conflict and turnover intentions can be attributed to the fact that other constructs, such as burnout or job satisfaction, might have mediated this relationship. Results of our study reveal that there are unexpected findings regarding the effects of two forms of conflict on job performance. Specifically, work-family conflict positively influences job performance, while family-work conflict does not have any bearing on job performance. These results are not in line with

Allen et al.'s (2000) and Netemeyer et al.'s (1996) studies. As discussed by Yavas et al. (2008), frontline employees who experience conflict between work and family roles tend to concentrate on their work roles more to protect themselves from additional stress and exhibit elevated levels of performance in the workplace. Possibly, constructs such as job satisfaction or organizational commitment might have mediated the effects of work-family conflict and family-work conflict on job performance.

Second, results of our study reveal that positive affectivity can be a potent antidote to the detrimental effects of two forms of conflict on frontline employees' job performance and turnover intentions. That is, positive affectivity reduces the detrimental effects of work-family conflict and family-work conflict on job performance and turnover intentions. Consistent with Eby et al.'s (2010) review, the deleterious effects of two directions of conflict on job performance and turnover intentions are weaker among employees with higher positive affectivity.

An immediate implication of our results is that managers should consider the level of affectivity of the candidates during employee selection and hiring. Candidates high in positive affectivity should be given priority in hiring (cf. Rego & Cunha, 2008), since such employees can better cope with interrole conflicts. Screening of candidates with positive affectivity can be facilitated by objective and standard tests that utilize dispositionally based factors and variables. In addition, the extent of positive affectivity of employees can be considered in periodic appraisals.

Management should also consider devising proactive strategies to retain employees high in positive affectivity in the organization. On one hand, retention of suitable employees (e.g., those with high positive affectivity) enhances the reputation and image of the organization and attracts other high-performing employees to the organization (Redman & Mathews, 1998). On the other hand, employees depicting positive affectivity can help create a positive work environment, may serve as role models to their colleagues, and may generate a demonstration effect among existing employees with negative affectivity.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this study expands the knowledge base, it has limitations that future research can address. First, the study focuses on a single service sector in a single country. Replications of the study in the same sector in the same locality, as well as other service sectors and countries, would expand the data base for generalizations and also show whether the propositions tested here are viable in other contexts. Second, the single-source nature of the data makes the construct measures vulnerable to common method bias. Future studies could benefit from collecting information from alternate

sources (e.g., performance data from supervisors). Third, the cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow causal inferences. Longitudinal studies could enrich the findings and generate a deeper understanding.

Fourth, the marginally significant finding in our study pertaining to interrole conflict-job performance relationship can be partially attributed to the nature of our performance measure (Babin & Boles, 1998), which operationalizes performance relative to coworkers. Therefore, better job performance measures are needed in the future. As stated before, constructs such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment might have played a mediating role in this process. Fifth, in this study, we showed that positive affectivity can serve as a buffer against the detrimental effects of interrole conflicts on job performance and turnover intentions. Our understanding would be enriched by an investigation of the possible roles of other variables (e.g., self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, agreeableness, proactive personality) as antidotes to the detrimental effects of interrole conflicts not only on in-role job performance and turnover intentions but also on other organizationally valued job outcomes (e.g., organizational commitment, extra-role performance). Thus, we culminate with a call for additional research on these intriguing issues.

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Ugur Yavas is Professor, Department of Management and Marketing, College of Business and Technology, East Tennessee State University; **Osman M. Karatepe** is Associate Professor, School of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Eastern Mediterranean University; **Emin Babakus** is First Tennessee Professor and Professor of Marketing, Department of Marketing and Supply Chain Management, The University of Memphis.

Appendix

Study measures

Work-family conflict

1. The demands of my work interfere with home, family, and social life.
2. Because of my job, I can't involve myself as much as I would like in maintaining close relations with my family, spouse, relatives, or friends.
3. Things I want to do at home do not get done because of the demands my job puts on me.
4. I often have to miss important family and social activities because of my job.
5. There is a conflict between my job and the commitments and responsibilities I have to my family, spouse, relatives, or friends.

Family-work conflict

1. The demands of my family, spouse, relatives, or friends interfere with work-related activities.
2. I sometimes have to miss work so that family and social responsibilities are met.
3. Things I want to do at work don't get done because of the demands of my family, spouse, relatives, or friends.
4. My home and social life interfere with my responsibilities at work such as getting to work on time, accomplishing daily tasks, and working overtime.
5. My coworkers and peers at work dislike how often I am preoccupied with my family and social life.

Positive affectivity

1. For me life is a great adventure.
2. I live a very interesting life.
3. I usually find ways to liven up my day.

Turnover intentions

1. It is likely that I will actively look for a new job next year.
2. I often think about quitting.
3. I will probably look for a new job next year.

Job performance

1. I am a top performer.
 2. I am in the top 10 percent of frontline employees here.
 3. I get along better with customers than do others.
 4. I know more about services delivered to customers than others.
 5. I know what my customers expect better than others.
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