International Journal of Social Science & Human Behavior Study– IJSSHBS
Volume 2 : Issue 2 [ISSN : 2374-1627]
Publication Date: 19 October, 2015

Emotional Competence on Work-Family Conflict: A Cross-Cultural Study

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***Abstract*— The study focuses on the cross-cultural study of emotional competence and its role on work-family conflict among 437 purposively selected call center representatives (CSRs) from the Middle East, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, India, and the Philippines. The paper aims to establish a baseline literature on the link between emotional competence and work-family conflict and the interplay of each on demographic variables such as age, gender, civil status, work time schedule, and nationality. Moreover, the study leads to an organizational change management program to aid organizations to cope with diversity concerns. The descriptive, comparative-correlational methods were employed as this paper also threshes out whether CSRs differ on emotional competence and work-family conflict based on demographic characteristics. The researchers utilized three instruments, namely: The Demographic Profile Sheet, Emotional Competence Inventory, and Work/Family Conflict Scale. The general findings confirm that with emotional competence, CSRs did not significantly differ in terms of age. But in terms of gender, civil status, work time schedule, and nationality, CSRs demonstrated significant differences in emotional competence. Male CSRs and those who are single are higher in all areas of emotional competence as well as in their overall emotional competence. CSRs whose work time schedules are opposite or have a time difference of more than ten hours with the businesses they serve are likewise higher in all areas of emotional competence and in the overall emotional competence. In terms of nationality, there was a significant difference in social awareness only. As for work-life conflict, the CSRs' gender is the only demographic variable that did not yield differences in emotional competence. Finally, there is a significant relationship between emotional competence and work-family conflict, particularly on the areas of self-management, social awareness and relationship management.**

Keywords—*Emotional competence, work-family conflict, cross-cultural study*

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Introduction

Call centers may be part of the company or otherwise referred to as "in-house" call center. But there are call centers which provide external services for other companies and they are known as "service bureau". Likewise, call centers may either be inbound or outbound. Inbound call centers are restricted to a passive role like handling customers who call if they have questions or complaints concerning products they bought or services they availed. On the other hand, outbound call centers engage in phoning up people such as in telemarketing [1].

An important feature of call center work is the presentation of emotions that are specified by the organization and embodied in the rules of employment [2]. In relation to this [3], found out that since agents are supposed to be always friendly to customers, and because their performance is usually controlled by the organization (e.g. by making test calls), deviations from this norm will easily be detected. Hence, strong requirements to hide or downplay negative emotions and to fake positive emotions during work are present in call center work [2], when encountering customers who are hostile, it is common for employees to be forced to express emotions they do not feel like that of being friendly and happy. It is also common for CSRs to suppress emotions that they genuinely feel such as anger and frustration. This can lead to feelings of inauthentic and emotional dissonance [2]. Hochschild as cited in [1] coined the term "emotional labor" for this kind of job requirement. Zapf, as cited in [1] also referred to it as emotion work, which is defined as the psychological processes necessary to regulate organizationally desired emotions as part of one's job.

Zapf, Vogt, Seifert, Mertini and Isic as cited in [1] differentiated the aspects of emotion work namely (1) the requirement to display positive emotions, (2) the requirement to display negative emotions, (3) the requirement to sense the

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interaction partner's emotions or the "sensitivity requirements", and (4) the dissonance felt between the felt and displayed emotions or "emotional dissonance". In the study of [1], it was proven that CSRs had to express less negative emotions and frequently exposed to emotional dissonance. Emotional dissonance can lead to anxiety and burnout [2].

It may be impossible that CSRs will always be in a good mood during their conversations with customers, especially when some of them are rude. But as expected of them, CSRs must always be friendly, as if they are "smiling" on the telephone, despite of how they really feel. According to [4], emotion work implies emotional dissonance, a stressor that occurs when an employee displays emotions that are appropriate when dealing with customers. However, these emotions are different from what the employee genuinely feels.

According to [2], CSRs have found ways to deal with emotional labor which are described to be individual, covert and temporary. The various ways CSRs cope include the following: (1) disregarding management's language of customer care and service quality and ignore the rules set by the organization for the emotional exchange with customers; and (2) employees identify weaknesses in the organization's control systems and deliberately minimize their contact with irritating and offensive customers.

The employees who receive support from colleagues and supervisors are able to cope better and experience less strain. The help they receive provide a bolster on their emotional resources in dealing with their work-related difficulties (House et al., as cited in [2]). This is further proven in the study of Korczynski as cited in [2], [5] that among CSRs, peer support and empathy are important for them to cope with the emotional pain caused by aggressive and abusive customers.

Review of Related Literature

Emotional Competence vis-à-vis Work-Family Conflict

Some studies on demographic data related to emotional intelligence have been explored by [6], [7], [8], [9], [10], [11] when demographic variables and emotional Intelligence were correlated. The baseline literature established the link between demographic variables (such as gender, civil status, work time schedule, and nationality) on emotional intelligence.

The importance of emotions in workplace has been established by many scholars. Many studies [1] investigated the roots of emotional intelligence in organizational environment in classical management theory and practice to understand the abilities of human being. Over three decades of psychological assessment intervention and research has justified the importance of taking social and emotional competencies into consideration when attempting to predict occupational effectiveness. Researchers [9] concluded that interventions targeted at EI-based competencies are effective and tend to enhance such desired outcomes as self-awareness and rapport.

Work-family conflict (WFC) has been defined by Greenhaus and Beutell as a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect [2]. It generally refers to the extent to which work- and family-related responsibilities interfere with each other [5].

In terms of the association between WFC and emotional competence, [15] indicated that EI bears a negative relationship with WFC, indicating that EI tunes down the perception of the role conflict and thereby reduces the stress produced by it.

In a study conducted by [14], the same that EI is negatively correlated with WFC, and WFC is negatively correlated with well-being. However, since EI is positively correlated with well-being, EI acts as a protector variable in the impact of WFC on one's well-being. Those with high EI and low WFC reported the highest well-being while those with low EI and high WFC reported the lowest well-being. Those with low EI and low WFC yielded similar well-being as those with high EI and high WFC. Therefore, possessing high EI is important when facing WFC.

To further strengthen these findings [16], claimed that EI can aid in stress management, particularly with WFC. This is so because EI can be considered as an individual's personal resource when faced with stress. Since WFC is a form of stress, it follows that EI may act as a mechanism to decrease WFC induced stress.

This study aims to establish a baseline literature on the link between emotional competence and work-family conflict and its interplay on demographic variables. In this regard, the researchers postulated that call center workers significantly differ on emotional competence and work-family conflict when grouped according to demographic characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, work schedule and nationality. Likewise, the study provides data on the relationship between the emotional competence and work/family conflict of the selected call center representatives.

Methodology

A total of 437 purposively selected CSRs in Dubai and the Philippines representing different nationalities namely Middle East (Egyptian, Emirati, Syrian, Palestinian, Jordanian, Omani, and Iraqi), Iran, Pakistan, Russia, India and the Philippines were included in this study.

The Demographic Profile Sheet, Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI) and the Work-Family Conflict (WFC) Scale were the research instruments used to gather demographic characteristics, emotional competence and work-family conflict data, respectively. The Demographic Profile Sheet includes items such as age, gender, civil status, work schedule and nationality. The ECI measures 18 competencies (identified by Dr. Daniel Goleman [9], [22]) organized into four clusters: *Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management* while the Work-

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Family Conflict Scale developed by Dawn S. Carlson, K. Michele Kacmar and Larry J. Williams identifies three (3) forms of work-family conflict: *Time Based conflict, Strain Based conflict,* and *Behavioral Based*.

Descriptive statistics were employed to provide quantitative descriptions of the respondents' demographic characteristics such as frequency and percentages distribution and the profile of the respondents in terms of data on emotional competence and work-family conflict. To determine respondents' differences when grouped according to their demographic characteristics on these variables, the t-test independent and one-way ANOVA were used accordingly. Pearson's r was utilized to determine the correlation between emotional competence and work-family conflict.

The following hypotheses were drawn:

H1: The demographic variables such as age, gender, civil status, work time schedule, and nationality have significant differences based on emotional competence.

H2: The demographic variables such as age, gender, civil status, work time schedule, and nationality have significant differences based on work-family conflict.

H3: Emotional competence significantly relates with work-family conflict.

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study is to provide baseline literature on the role of emotional competence on work-family conflict among CSRs. In addition, the interplay of these two variables on a number of demographic characteristics is also revealed.

The Demographic Profile of the CSRs

CSRs are mostly female (69.8%), single (68%) and with ages ranging from 20 to 29 (78.5%) years old. More than 50% of the respondents represent the United Arab Emirates. Most of the respondents follow real time work schedule (53.8%).

Significant Differences on Emotional Competence based on Demographic Variables

There are differences on emotional competence based on demographic variables. CSRs do not seem to differ on all clusters of ECI as well as the *overall emotional competence* when grouped according to age. There are gender differences on overall emotional competence but not in any of the four clusters of emotional competence. On *Social Awareness*, *Relationship Management* and overall emotional competence, CSRs differ when grouped according to civil status and work time schedule. Only in *Social Awareness* cluster, however, that there is a significant difference among CSRs based on nationality. Based on these findings, it can be said that single and married CSRs differ on how they handle relationships as well as their level of awareness of other's feelings, needs and concerns. Likewise, CSRs' work time schedule and nationality seem to contribute to differences in the way they handle relationships and their awareness of others' feelings and perspectives. The same result has been found in terms of the CSRs' skills or adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others. Single and married differ in this aspect in the same manner as those CSRs working on real and opposite time.

In the study conducted by [10], they found that there is a significant difference on the emotional intelligence between married and unmarried respondents.

Malik, Khatoon and Khursid said married prospective teachers had higher level of emotional intelligence than unmarried ones. Significant difference was also observed in emotional intelligence among student teachers when they were grouped according to marital status [19].

Differences on Work-Family Conflict based on Demographic Variables

The results show that there are no gender differences in WFC. However, in terms of CSRs' age, civil status, work schedule and nationality, there are significant differences in the WFC forms/directions.

In particular, CSRs have significant differences in strain based and behavioral based WFC on both directions. It appeared that CSRs with an age range of 20 to 29 years old appeared to have a higher mean score in strain based WIF, strain based FIW, behavior based WIF and behavior based FIW. It could be because younger workers are the ones mostly in call centers. Furthermore, according to [21], experts said that as compared to older workers, the younger ones are more stressed because they have more expectations on their shoulders and are more aware of the signs of stress than older people.

Single and married CSRs differ only in three forms/directions namely time based FIW, strain based WIF and behavior based WIF. CSRs who are single have a higher mean score compared to those who are married. This result is in contrast with the findings of [18] that married men tend to experience higher WFC than single men and that among females, WFC is triggered by factors such as having children at preschool age. Likewise, it has been said that women irrespective of their marital status are expected to take care of their aging parents for reason of filial piety, and the care of elderly parents trigger family-work conflict as identified by [15].

There are also significant differences in the WFC of CSRs when it comes to their work schedule. Those working in opposite time had a higher mean in time based FIW and strain based WIF. As discussed in the 2008 study of [19], there was significantly greater sleep disturbance and anxiety among CSRs in international call centers (working in opposite time) compared to those in domestic ones (working in real time). In this case, the time based WFC can be attributed to their night or graveyard shifts that disrupt their circadian rhythms. Among the many psychosocial problems attributed to this, disruption in family life was identified by [19], which supports the finding of the researchers on the existence of strain based WIF among the CSRs.

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In terms of nationality, there are significant differences in all WFC forms/directions except time based WIF. Filipino CSRs had the highest mean scores as compared to CSRs of other nationalities. Compared with call center workers in other countries, Filipino CSRs are said to earn less considering that the Philippines is a preferred location for outsourcing jobs because of Filipinos' fluency in the English language and their ability to copy Western culture [20]. The findings are also closely supported by [8].

The Correlation between Emotional Competence and Work-Family Conflict

Table 1 illustrates the correlation between emotional competence and work-family conflict. Self management or the ability to manage one's internal states, impulses and resources has a negligible and negative relationship with WFC, in all its forms and in both of its directions. Meaning, as CSRs are not able to recognize their emotions and its impact on them, the strengths and limitations they have and their self-worth, the more they will not be able to handle stress that comes from the need to balance the demands from their family and work.

TABLE 1: CORRELATION BETWEEN EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE AND WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

Emotional Competence		Time Based WIF	Time Based FIW	WFC Strain Based WIF	Strain Based FIW	Beh. Based WIF	Beh. Based FIW
Self-awareness	r	.009	-.022	-.035	-.041	-.035	-.067
	p	.859	.644	.465	.389	.460	.160
Self-management	r	-.069	-.121	-.142	-.135	-.083	-.129
	p	.148	.012	.003	.005	.084	.007
Social awareness	r	-.065	.123	.075	.005	-.035	-.037
	p	.175	.010	.117	.910	.467	.445
Rel. mgt.	r	.016	.024	.099	.058	.034	-.049
	p	.742	.618	.039	.228	.480	.302
Overall	r	-.031	.003	.004	-.031	-.034	-.088
	p	.516	.948	.925	.518	.474	.066

Social Awareness or how people handle relationships and awareness of others' feelings and needs has a negligible but positive relationship with WFC, that is, with time based FIW to be exact. It goes to show that the more a call center worker can show empathy, recognize the emotions of their work group, as well as anticipate, recognize and meet the needs of the customers, the more they will be able to experience WFC. This is so because call center work is a form of emotional labor and it is a highly stressful job. If CSRs absorb the negative emotions of their co-workers who experience the same work stressors as they do, in addition to experiencing emotional dissonance from their encounters with rude customers, then they become more vulnerable to WFC.

Relationship Management which concerns the skill or adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others also possesses a negligible and positive relationship with WFC, particularly with SBWIF. It is so because a CSR whose work is stressful in so many ways still needs to show teamwork and concern for others' need as they pursue their collective goals, manage change and resolve conflicts. These same elements give them additional strain at work. Thus, a high EI is likely to help deal with WFC.

In general, previous studies proved that a negative correlation exists between emotional intelligence and work-family conflict. In the research findings of [14] and [16], both found that a negative relationship exists between EI and WFC. Likewise [14], as well as [13] discovered that EI can moderate WFC since EI can be considered as personal resource against stressful situations and WFC is a form of stress.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that emotional competence plays an important role in handling the demands of work and family among CSRs.

CSRs who are male, younger, and single, as well as those whose work time schedule is opposite are more emotionally competent that their counterparts. Filipino CSRs were found to be emotionally competent in handling relationships, conscious of others' feelings and needs as well as skilled at inducing desirable responses in others. Russians, on the other hand, were found to be emotionally aware, self-confident, and capable of assessing self accurately as well as good at managing the self.

Findings also revealed that younger CSRs experience all forms and directions of work-family conflict. Male CSRs are likewise confronted with this conflict except Time-Based Work Interference with Family type of conflict which females often face. CSRs who are single are more likely to be confronted with all forms and directions of work-family conflict. CSRs whose work schedule is either real or opposite experience some forms and directions of work-family conflict.

Emotional competence is not influenced by age. However, gender, marital status, nationality and work schedule all appear to have an impact on emotional competence among CSRs. On the other hand, work-family conflict has been found to be affected by age, marital status, nationality and work schedule but not gender. This is supported by the study of [7] in their study of Middle East and managers that the demographic profiles stated above have significant differences on the emotional competence of the respondents.

The researchers believe that the organizations involved in the study are constantly changing its practices depending on its response to markets conditions, process improvements, among others and these have impact on the internal customers' work-family conflicts. The emotional competencies required in coping with conflicts that involve in work and family remains to be a concern.

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