

## **Exploring the Emotional Antecedents and Interactions on Nurses' Job Satisfaction, Co-worker Support and Customer Orientation**

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### **Abstract**

This study is based on data collected from 159 nurses at an Australian hospital and examines the impact of emotional states, individual characteristics and co-worker support on job satisfaction and customer orientation. Also, the moderating effects of emotional labour on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction; empathic concern and emotional contagion on co-worker support and customer orientation and job satisfaction and customer orientation are tested. The findings support the conceptual model and suggest complex relationships that contribute towards nurses' customer orientation. The implications for management and further research are discussed.

### **Introduction**

Service staffs are generally required to manage their emotions as part of service delivery and most organisations are explicit about this requirement conceptualised as emotional labour. Furthermore, employees engaged in emotional labour are expected to appear genuine and this may result in acting to achieve the desired impression (Hochschild, 1983). Such inauthentic emotional displays can lead to emotional burnout and in extreme cases, even to employee depression (Erickson and Wharton, 1997). Whether the impacts of emotional labour are generally positive or negative, direct or indirect may depend on a number of factors, which can include service workers' personal characteristics, autonomy at work, and emotional exhaustion connected with the job role (Grandey, 2000; Wharton, 1993). Many studies show negative consequences of emotional labour including job stress and a decrease in job satisfaction. For some, emotional labour sometimes leads to an increase in job satisfaction and feelings of personal accomplishment with reduces negative impacts such as emotional exhaustion (Seery and Corrigan, 2007; Pugliesi, 1999). Surprisingly, some studies show that contrary to the expectation of negative outcomes associated with emotional exhaustion, there can be a nil or positive effect (Bakker, Demerouti and Verbeke, 2004; Seery and Corrigan, 2007). An additional explanation for the varying impacts of emotional labour and exhaustion may lie in organisational factors or employees' attitudes and coping strategies that act as a buffer. For example, job satisfaction is an employee's affective evaluation of their job situation and higher levels of job satisfaction are associated with positive job performance outcomes (Bettencourt, Gwinner and Meuter, 2001; Brown and Peterson, 1993).

Many studies indicate a causal relationship between job satisfaction, attitudes such as self-efficacy and performance outcomes (Judge, Jackson, Shaw, Scott and Rich, 2007). An increase in self-efficacy appears to increase employee effort and subsequent job performance (customer orientation) (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996). Service workers high in self-efficacy tend towards problem solving coping strategies but those low in self-efficacy operate on a more emotional level (Jex and Bliese, 1999) which may have a greater impact on stress and imply a need for more support at the organisational level. In addition, co-worker support is known to potentially affect many organisational, performance and personal outcomes for employees (Duffy, Ganster and Pagon, 2002). Co-worker support has potential for both positive and negative outcomes. Interactions with co-workers can be both encouraging and discouraging in the development of job satisfaction, involvement, organisational commitment and personal performance and be of a direct nature and more complex mediation and moderation

interactions (Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008). Those employees with a high need for social comparison are more influenced by their co-workers. Behaviours and attitudes of co-workers may result in emotional contagion or the ‘catching’ of emotions. This is problematic when stressed or emotionally burned out employees meet others there is a high probability that negative attitudes will be passed on through a conscious ‘tuning in’ to others (Bakker, Le Blanc and Schaufeli, 2005). This is not the same as empathic concern, which refers to positive concern for others but does not necessitate ‘catching’ an emotion (Omdahl and O’Donnell, 1999). Thus, employees’ interactions with co-workers have both positive and negative emotional and behavioural outcomes (Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008). This paper explores the relationships between these issues.

H<sub>1</sub> Self-efficacy has a positive association with a) job satisfaction, b) customer orientation

H<sub>2</sub> Inauthenticity has a negative association with job satisfaction.

H<sub>3</sub> Emotional exhaustion has a negative association with job satisfaction.

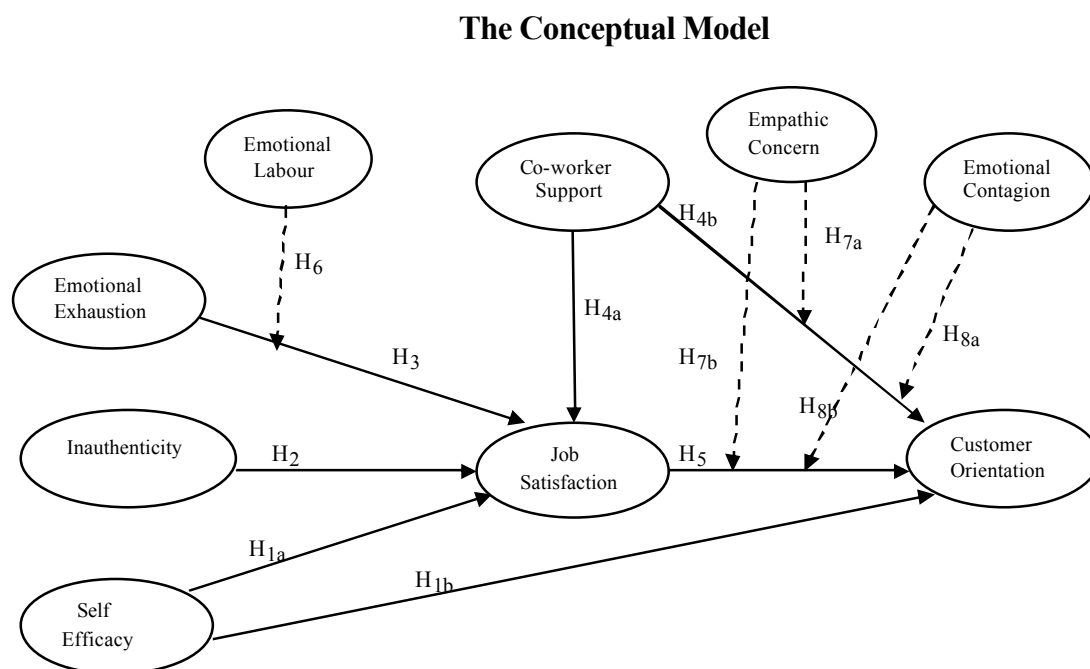
H<sub>4</sub> Coworker support has a positive association with a) job satisfaction, b) customer orientation.

H<sub>5</sub> Job Satisfaction has a positive association with customer orientation.

H<sub>6</sub> Emotional labour moderates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction.

H<sub>7</sub> Empathic concern moderates the relationship between a) co-worker support and customer orientation and b) job satisfaction and customer orientation.

H<sub>8</sub> Emotional contagion moderates the relationship between a) co-worker support and customer orientation and b) job satisfaction and customer orientation.



## Method

## Measures

The study uses the following measures of individual and organisational conditions as discussed: Emotional Labour Scale (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002), Emotional Exhaustion (Wharton, 1993), Employee Self-Efficacy (Jones, 1986), Empathetic concern (Davis, 1983),

Emotional Contagion, Stiff et al. (1988), Job Satisfaction (Brown, and Peterson, 1993), Customer Orientation, and Co-worker Support (Susskind et al, 2003).

### Participants

The participants comprise 159 nursing staff working in the Australian public hospital system. The survey was conducted using self-completion questionnaires. Participants were asked to respond to questions on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. Participation was voluntary and completed anonymously. The questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes to complete. 62% of the respondents are between 36-50 years of age; 60% of the respondents have a supervisory role; most of the respondents (74%) have been working for more than five years in healthcare; and 22% are males and 77% females.

## Results

**Table 1: Means, Correlations, and Cronbach alphas**

Variable	M	SD	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Emotional labour	3.86	1.16	.84	1							
2. Emotional exhaustion	3.25	1.51	.88	.380**	1						
3. Employee self-efficacy	5.27	0.92	.68	-.057	-.245**	1					
4. Emotional contagion	3.63	0.93	.77	.292**	.166**	-.146	1				
5. Empathic concern	5.05	0.81	.73	.168**	.031	-.026	.291**	1			
6. Job satisfaction	5.23	1.18	.81	-.102**	-.475**	.471**	.195**	.162*	1		
7. Customer orientation	6.30	0.90	.90	-.076	-.152	.408**	.173*	.295**	.580**	1	
8. Co-worker support	4.67	1.38	.75	.036	-.163*	.393**	.280**	.221**	.644**	.558**	1

\*\* Sig. at .01 \* Sig. at .05

Moderating regression analysis was used to analyse the dataset. As shown in Table 2 by step five emotional exhaustion has a direct relationship with job satisfaction ( $\beta = -.304$   $p < .000$ ) as do inauthenticity ( $\beta = -.127$   $p < .05$ ) and employee self efficacy ( $\beta = .375$   $p < .000$ ).  $H_{1a}$ , 2 and 3 are accepted. The interaction between emotional exhaustion and emotional labour on job satisfaction is significant ( $\beta = -.122$   $p < .05$ ). Emotional labour at one standard deviation below the mean results in the following relationship between emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction ( $-.264$ ,  $p < .000$ ), at the mean ( $-.372$ ,  $p < .000$ ), and at one standard deviation above the mean ( $-.480$ ,  $p < .000$ ).  $H_6$  is accepted.

**Table 2 Regression Results for the Moderating Model: Job Satisfaction as the Dependent Variable**

Variables	$\beta$	b	$\tau$	p	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1						
Emotional exhaustion	-.368	-.475	-6.76	.000	.23	
Step 2						
Emotional exhaustion	-.241	-.310	-3.79	.000		
Inauthenticity	-.246	-.293	-3.58	.000	.28	.02
Step 3						
Emotional exhaustion	-.233	-.300	-3.91	.000		
Inauthenticity	-.139	-.166	-2.05	.042		
Employee self-efficacy	.369	.331	4.78	.000	.37	.15
Step 4						
Emotional exhaustion	-.256	-.330	-4.13	.000		
Inauthenticity	-.147	-.175	-2.15	.033		
Employee self-efficacy	.363	.325	4.70	.000		
Emotional labour	.094	.088	1.28	.202	.38	.01
Step 5						
Emotional exhaustion	-.304	-.392	-4.71	.000		
Inauthenticity	-.127	-.151	-1.87	.053		
Employee self-efficacy	.375	.336	4.91	.000		
Emotional labour	.026	.025	.336	.738		
Emotional exhaustion x Emotional labour	-.122	-.174	-2.316	.022	.40	.02

Dependent variable: Job Satisfaction

As shown in Table 3 co-worker support has a direct relationship with job satisfaction ( $\beta = .577, p < .000$ ); Employee self-efficacy has a direct relationship with customer orientation ( $\beta = .351, p < .000$ ) as does job satisfaction ( $\beta = .447, p < .000$ ).  $H_{1b}$ ,  $H_{4a}$ , and  $H_{4b}$  are accepted.

**Table 3: Regression Results**

Variables	$\beta$	b	$\tau$	p	$R^2$
Co-worker support (a)	.577	.644	10.53	.000	.41
Employee self-efficacy (b)	.351	.408	5.597	.000	.17

Dependent variable: (a) Job Satisfaction; (b) Customer Orientation

Table 4 shows the moderating influence of emotional contagion and empathic concern with co-worker support on customer orientation. The interaction between emotional contagion and co-worker support on customer orientation is significant ( $\beta = .138, p < .05$ ). Emotional contagion at one standard deviation below the mean results in the following relationship between co-worker support and customer orientation (.301,  $p < .000$ ), at the mean (.398,  $p < .000$ ), and at one standard deviation above the mean (.495,  $p < .000$ ). The interaction between empathic concern and co-worker support on customer orientation is significant ( $\beta = -.215, p < .05$ ). Empathic concern at one standard deviation below the mean results in the following relationship between co-worker support and customer orientation (.503,  $p < .000$ ), at the mean (.361,  $p < .000$ ), and at one standard deviation above the mean (.208,  $p < .000$ ).  $H_{7a}$  and  $H_{8a}$  are accepted.

**Table 4: Regression Results for the Moderating Model: Customer Orientation as the Dependent Variable and Co-worker Support as the Independent**

Variables	$\beta$	b	$\tau$	p	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1						
Co-worker support	.386	.558	8.43	.000	.56	
Step 2						
Co-worker support	.382	.553	7.99	.000		
Emotional contagion	.014	.018	.264	.792	.56	.00
Step 3						
Co-worker support	.363	.525	7.65	.000		
Emotional contagion	-.022	-.028	-.404	.000		
Empathic concern	.165	.187	2.72	.687	.59	.03
Step 4						
Co-worker support	.412	.597	7.62	.000		
Emotional contagion	.023	.030	.391	.696		
Empathic concern	.157	.178	2.61	.010		
Co-worker support x Emotional contagion	.095	.157	1.86	.065	.60	.01
Step 5						
Co-worker support	.446	.646	8.52	.000		
Emotional contagion	.055	.072	.978	.330		
Empathic concern	.037	.042	.572	.568		
Co-worker support x Emotional contagion	.138	.229	2.77	.006		
Co-worker support x Empathic concern	-.215	-.281	-3.98	.000	.65	.05

Dependent variable: Customer Orientation

Table 5 shows the moderating influence of emotional contagion and empathic concern with job satisfaction on customer orientation. The interaction between emotional contagion and job satisfaction on customer orientation is significant ( $\beta = .124, p < .01$ ). Emotional contagion at one standard deviation below the mean results in the following relationship between job satisfaction and customer orientation (.331,  $p < .000$ ), at the mean (.447,  $p < .000$ ), and at one standard deviation above the mean (.563,  $p < .000$ ). The interaction between empathic concern and job satisfaction on customer orientation is significant ( $\beta = -.150, p < .01$ ). Empathic concern at one standard deviation below the mean results in the following relationship

between job satisfaction and customer orientation (.521,  $p < .000$ ), at the mean (.401,  $p < .000$ ), and at one standard deviation above the mean (.280,  $p < .000$ ).  $H_{7b}$  and  $H_{8b}$  are accepted.

**Table 5: Regression Results for the Moderating Model: Customer Orientation as the Dependent Variable and Job Satisfaction as the Independent**

Variables	$\beta$	b	$\tau$	p	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1						
Job satisfaction	.447	.580	8.93	.000	.34	
Step2						
Job satisfaction	.438	.568	8.57	.000		
Emotional contagion	.047	.062	.939	.349	.34	.00
Step3						
Job Satisfaction	.421	.546	8.40	.000		
Emotional contagion	.005	.007	.107	.915		
Empathic concern	.180	.205	3.07	.003	.38	.04
Step 4						
Job Satisfaction	.471	.611	8.77	.000		
Emotional contagion	-.009	-.011	-.169	.866		
Empathic concern	.165	.188	2.85	.005		
Job Satisfaction x Emotional contagion	.111	.161	2.37	.019	.40	.02
Step 5						
Job Satisfaction	.460	.597	8.77	.000		
Emotional contagion	.024	.032	.478	.633		
Empathic concern	.131	.149	2.27	.024		
Job Satisfaction x Emotional contagion	.121	.177	2.66	.009		
Job Satisfaction x Empathic concern	-.169	-.196	-3.09	.002	.44	.04

Dependent variable: Customer Orientation

### Discussion

The findings indicate the expected positive relationships between self-efficacy and a) job satisfaction, and b) customer orientation. Emotional exhaustion and inauthenticity have negative relationships with job satisfaction and emotional labour moderates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction. The higher the emotional labour, the greater the relationship between emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction, which is to be expected. . Self-efficacy has a positive direct effect on customer orientation which is in keeping with other studies. Co-worker support seems to play an important role for nurses and has a significant relationship with both job satisfaction and customer orientation. However, whether the relationship is positive or negative seems to depend on the individual's level of empathic concern and susceptibility to emotional contagion. The moderating regression results suggest that those with higher susceptibility to emotional contagion have a greater need for co-worker support whereas those high in empathic concern for the patients are more independent. This is an important finding as negative consequences of nurses' emotional labour such as burnout contagion and reduced job satisfaction have been found in other studies (Bakker et al., 2005). Similarly, research has shown an association with empathic concern and independence Kluger et al, 2002; also with higher responsiveness and lower emotional contagion (Omdahl and O'Donnell, 1999). Further research should help to increase understanding of the complex issues found in emotion work in hospital staff. For example, training that helps to increase self-efficacy and empathy may reduce some of the deleterious effects of emotional exhaustion, inauthenticity, emotional labour and contagion. Co-worker support has benefits but clearly there can be a downside, which needs to be understood. The subtle complexities may be associated with individual differences and organisational culture and management and have implications for nursing staff education and training and organisational support.

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