

The Role of Emotions In Service Businesses

Dr Stephen Langhorn recently submitted his thesis on the role of emotions in service organisations, and in particular the restaurant sector. This research extensively used the Bar-on Eqi in determining the links between emotional competence and key performance outcomes.

His research outputs are summarised briefly below.

The research addressed one central question, what role do emotions play in the service encounter? This question has been explored from three distinct angles, that of the general manager, the server and ultimately the customer.

Firstly, the study investigated the contribution of the General Managers Emotional Intelligence as measured by the Bar-On Eqi, to the overall performance of the outlets under their direct control.

Secondly, the concept of Emotional Labour was used alongside the Eqi to understand the influence these two factors might have on the quality of service quality offered by the servers in the restaurants.

Finally, a survey was used with the customers to understand how they responded emotionally to a range of service stimulants. This data was used to understand both the relationship of the customer emotions to the service stimulants, but then further utilised to examine the relationship between the emotional responses of the customer to the emotional competence and presence of emotional labour in the server sample.

The Key Findings relating to Emotional Intelligence are outlined below:

- ◆ Managerial Emotional Intelligence is positively related to employee satisfaction
- ◆ Managerial Emotional Intelligence is positively related to customer satisfaction
- ◆ Managerial Emotional Intelligence is positively related to profit performance

- ◆ Particular emotional competencies are positively related to delivery of positive emotional response in customers
- ◆ There will be a positive relationship between the emotional expression of the customer and a range of service cues
- ◆ The emotional competencies of the server will be positively related to the positive emotional expression of customers in regard to a range of service cues

General Managers and Emotional Intelligence

The key question here was, does the emotional competence of the General Manager have any impact on the performance of the outlets under their control.

Consistent with the literature the study demonstrated that the emotional intelligence of the individual, in this case the General Manager, had an impact on their key performance outputs.

The differences were significant and presented a range of performance outputs (team satisfaction, team turnover, customer satisfaction and profit performance) against which differing emotional competencies from the Eqi related differently to the key performance measures.

There was no significant relationship between performance and overall Eqi scores, which suggests there is not a quick fix in terms of using total Eqi as a predictive performance instrument.

The emotional attributes that appear to come through consistently are those around interpersonal skills, general mood and adaptability. All of these would have an impact on the team around the manager, the very people who ultimately interact with the customer directly.

So what does this mean for the future development of General Managers in this business, and what are the wider implications for the management of similar service businesses?

There would certainly seem to be opportunities to utilise a measure of Emotional Intelligence in the recruitment and development of General Managers in these roles in the future. Success in these roles is so dependent on the quality and motivation of the team working below the management level who directly face the customer on a day-to-day basis that recruiting and developing the right kind of leaders with the right emotional competencies would seem to be critical.

Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Labour in the Team Member Population

The approach of using the Bar-On Eqi as a measurement of Emotional Intelligence was extended to the server sample, but in addition to this, the concept of Emotional Labour was introduced to this population

This study explored the relationship of the various Emotional Intelligence competency sets in the server and management population, and then went on to examine the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (Eqi) and

Emotional Labour in order to explore if in some way these two concepts are linked. Significant relationships were established between deep acting and emotional intelligence in particular, which has not been evident in the literature.

The two constructs of Emotional Labour and Emotional Intelligence were examined to explore the relationship between them. Significant positive and negative relationships were found between Eqi and ELS in both the focus areas of Surface Acting and Deep Acting. These were more apparent in Deep Acting and consistently in a more positive direction, that is, the better the Eqi score the more inclined that individuals would be to Deep Acting. Whilst the results above do not suggest that this would naturally lead to better service quality delivery, there are advantages in reducing the risk of emotional dissonance.

Over and above these benefits, service operators may want to consider the potential employee fit in service roles, where a more genuine style of service might be more aligned to their brand proposition, and that Deep Actors may well deliver this more effectively.

The Role of Emotions in the Customer Experience

The final area of investigation in this study was to look at the emotional response of the customers in the service experience

The study found there to be significant relationships between all aspects of the service cues under review in the research:

These relationships were particularly evident at the Delighted level on a scale ranging from 'Delighted to 'Disappointed'. As the study was seeking out the antecedents of superior service quality delivery, the focus was on the expressions of delight and the potential drivers of these Delighted expressions.

Conducting regression analysis on the results in this section revealed a strong relationship between perceptions of Value, Overall Service, Interaction and other contributing service cues.

Summary

The findings in this study would call for a much more integrated approach, we are dealing with emotions in the broad context in these service situations.

The emotional expression of the manager would appear to impact the performance of the team and concomitantly the service offered to their customers. The (positive) emotional expressions of customers are tied up inextricably with their surroundings, product quality, pace, company and perceptions of value particularly. Ultimately all of these directly impact the profitability of the outlets.

Service organisations need to plan the emotional content and context of their operations or brands and decide how the environment and personal interactions will look and feel in pursuit of that design. This is not necessarily by creating rigid scripts and routines but more by creating awareness of desired outcomes