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## The Role of Flow between Burnout and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) among Hotel Employees in Malaysia.

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### Abstract

Tremendous growth in the Malaysian hotel industry forced hotel operators to focus on enhancing the employee's well-being. The objectives of this study were to assess the relationship of flow on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and investigate flow as the mediating role between burnout and OCB. A cross-sectional study, collected from 293 hotel employees in Sarawak, Malaysia. The study was validated and tested using AMOS version 21. Findings revealed that flow has a significant relationship with OCB. Meanwhile, flow found not significant as mediator in associating between burnout and OCB. The findings could be an important strategy by maximizing the human resources capabilities toward positive service climate.

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*Keywords:* burnout; flow; hotel; organizational citizenship behaviour; mediating.

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### 1. Introduction

The hotel industry's services form a major focus toward organizational success and are often linked with poor performance and high failure toward service climate (Blanck, 2003; Dimond, 2004). Thus, the hotel industry needs to be supported toward service climate; as referred to when the hotels' focal point is the degree to which employees main concentration is directed toward rendering service quality and customer satisfaction (Schneider et al., 2000). Flow is defined as in the state where people are in total concentration in the work activity for their own sake rather than for

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extrinsic rewards (Bakker, 2005). Flow is a positive psychology movement claimed to have a strong influence in making normal life more fulfilling toward positive productivity along with satisfying feelings of achievement coupled with an intense feeling of enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). However, flow is relatively a new construct (Bakker 2005; Demerouti, 2006) and the knowledge about the role of flow as mediator between burnout and OCB in the hotel industry is still limited.

Limited known research on flow has been conducted in Asia (with exception of: Chen et al., (2010) in Taiwan; Moneta (2004) in China; Soltani et al., (2011) in West Malaysia and Paulus (2012) in Indonesia) and so far; there has been no known study conducted on the hotel industry in Sarawak, Malaysia. The second issue is about the less advanced studies in the area of positive psychology in eastern context (Burke, 2010) particularly as a mediating role. Thus, it would be interesting to study the application in developing human resource strengths and psychological capacities for performance improvement (Luthans, 2003). Past studies revealed on the various benefit of flow, this study is considered important to further enhance the human resource development in the hotel industry.

This study was underpinned on the conservation of resources (COR) theory that suggests people lose resources when they encounter stress (Hobfoll, 1989) and thus burnout are derived under high demand and low resources (Demerouti, et al., 2001). These phenomena might lead to loss of energy and motivation. So, when people are actively engaged in their environment to obtain positive reinforcement, this condition could create and maintain the self-esteem, motivation and engagement which will ultimately avoid losses of resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Therefore, this research distinctively examined the correlation of flow on OCB and secondly; the mediating effect between burnout and OCB from a sample of hotel employees in Sarawak. Thus, this present study is in agreement with COR theory as the underpinning theory.

## 2. Literature Review

Based on previous studies, the outcomes of applying flow experience include improved subjective well-being, happiness, life satisfaction and positive effect (Kasa & Hassan, 2013). Flow is also found to be correlated with increased work performance, higher motivation, job engagement and positive mood in organization context. Due to the various benefits of flow application in the organization level, this study is imperative to further enhance the human resource development in the organization. The creation of service climate in the hotel industry is not solely enhanced with psychological capacities, which is deemed necessary (Schneider et al., 2000). Therefore, flow in this present study is a new research area in the Malaysian hotel industry. It is also aimed to evaluate Csikszentmihalyi's (2003) statement that Western employees engaged in a very challenging and complex work would find their work enjoyable and intrinsically valuable, and this would definitely contribute to the improvement in their productivity. In addition, flow was proven to be useful in the context of workplace (Bakker, 2005).

Burnout is a stress reaction found among employees in the world (Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2003) and leads to the depletion of their valuable physical, emotional, and cognitive energies (Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007). Thus, burnout may contribute to negative outcomes for employees (Kahn et al., 2006). On the contrary, flow experience is the synergy between the mind and physical toward positive and desirable outcomes (Bakker, 2008). Therefore, burnout and flow are the antipode of each other (Bakker, et al., 2005). Although burnout and flow are on opposite poles, empirical review revealed that they are negatively correlated (Demerouti, et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

OCB is a role that is related to behaviors that go above and beyond the formal duties (Organ et al., 2006). OCB has been importantly useful for today's organization toward overall organization effectiveness that become the focus in the fields of psychology and management which gain great attention in the organizational behavior literature (Tang & Ibrahim, 1998; LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002). OCB has significant importance in the workplace. A study conducted by Padsakoff and MacKenzie (1994, as cited in Organ et al., 2006) revealed that OCB and sales performance index were both significantly correlated among the insurance agencies.

This present study is underpinned on the conservation of resources (COR) theory that implies a negative work situation could threaten resources such as psychological work-related well-being, health care and even other domains of life. Based on COR theory, individuals are motivated to obtain, retain, foster and even protect the resources that they closely value by preventing it from losses (Westman et al., 2004). If losses of resources occur, the stress level will increase, as hypothesized by Demerouti, et al., (2001). This will cause burnouts which could lead to energy loss and lack of motivation. Thus, flow as a mediator is reflected in the involvement with intrinsically motivating activity

(Nakamura & Csikszentmihayi, 2005) that could benefit the employees as well as enhancing the organizational outcomes (Engeser & Rheinberg, 2008).

### 3. Hypotheses Development

The challenging nature of a career in the hotel industry could determine the objectivity of the sustainability in the business environment. Flow is a good approach to improve motivation levels and contribute to organizational outcomes. The objectives are to investigate the correlation of flow on OCB as well as to evaluate flow as mediating role between burnout and OCB. Taking into consideration the objectives of this study, it is hypothesized that:

H1 There is a significant relationship between flow and OCB.

According to Bakker (2005) and Demerouti (2006), the flow construct is relatively new and the knowledge on its relationship with OCB is still limited. Based on the other similar studies, the nearest to flow construct is job engagement (Bakker, 2005) and was mentioned to have potential predictor in OCB (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010). Therefore, the above hypothesis has been constructed to examine the relationship between flow and OCB.

H2 Flow mediates the relationship between burnout and OCB.

Future study should focus on mediation function of the psychological states with job demand and outcome (Reeves, 2010). Secondly, every occupation has its own demands as each occupation is unique (Bakker et al., 2007). The objective of the work context in hotel industry is toward delivering high quality services which is focused on customer satisfaction and loyalty (Chi & Qu, 2008). Stress can be derived from work overload, underpay, not being appreciated and unrealistic time of duty (Nelson & Burke, 2000) which impacts negatively to the hotel. In past studies, flow experience is a continual force that motivates and promotes positive vibes toward organizational goals (Kasa & Hassan, 2013), which should mediate the relationship between burnouts and OCB. Thus, this hypothesis was constructed to determine the mediating effect of flow between burnout as antecedent and OCB as outcome.

### 4. Research Methodology

A quantitative study with self-administered questionnaire was utilized. Purposive sampling method was chosen because the aim was to sample hotel employees working full time in Sarawak hotels registered under the Malaysian Association of Hotels. A pilot study was conducted to ensure the reliability of the instruments and eliminate potential errors or ambiguities (Ruyter, Wetzels and Kleijnen, 2001). Questionnaires were distributed to the targeted population based on prior approval given by the respective hotel's Human Resources Manager. The confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents' identity and answers were secured. All measures were bilingual (English and Bahasa Melayu). Accordingly, 790 set of questionnaires were distributed throughout Sarawak starting from December 2013, and were collected in a month time from 10 reputable hotels in Sarawak.

#### 4.1 Research Instrument

The experience of flow was assessed with work-related flow instrument (WOLF; Bakker, 2008) which consisted of 13 items. The respondents were required to indicate how often they experience each items during preceding week (0 = never, 6 = everyday). Some of the items include as "when I am working, I forget everything else around me", "when I am working very intensely, I feel happy", and "I get my motivation from the work itself, and not from the reward for it". The OCB scale, developed by Lee and Allen (2002), was adapted to measure the helping behavior that benefits the individual and organization as a whole. The 16 items were scored on a 6-points scale that had a responsiveness range (1 = strongly disagree; to 6 = Strongly Agree). The overall measure of OCB was utilized with items such as "I help others who have been absent" and "I offer ideas to improve the function of the organization". Burnout is measured by adapting the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory which is developed by Demerouti, Mostert, and

Bakker (2010). All items were scored on a 6-points scale, ranging from (1) “Strongly Disagree” to (6) “Strongly Agree”. Items such as “I often do my own work” and “I feel good when I cooperates with others” were part of the items for this measurement. The composite reliability value for burnout, OCB and flow was 0.85, 0.91 and 0.89 in order.

## 5. Findings

In the actual study phase, 9 cases are were deemed usable because the 9 cases identified as multivariate outlier (Mahalanobis distances;  $p1 < .05$ ). Therefore, the final sample is made up by 293 respondents (37%), considered as a sufficient sample size for the purposed of confirmatory factor analysis and structural model testing. Demographic data revealed 194 (66.2%) respondents were male. The majority of the respondent’s age ranged between 20-29 years, which consisted of 154 (52.6%) respondents. And in terms of ethnicity, 101 respondents (34.5%) were Iban. The majority of the respondents derived from the housekeeping department with 72 respondents (24.2%). The majority of the respondents were single at 160 responses (54.6%) while majority of the length of service ranges between 1 to 3 years is 121 (41.9%). The highest education level of most of the respondents is Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia which is 189 (64.5%).

This present study utilized Amos version 21 and SPSS version 20 to conduct the data analysis. Amos utilized specifically for the two-stage approach to minimize the changes in avoiding any interaction between the measurement models in the first stage and in the second stage the structural models (Hair et al., 2006). First for validity testing, the construct validity was met with each indicator variables surpassed the value of 0.5 for standardized regression weight, average variance extracted (AVE) value exceed 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, the scale has a good convergent validity (Gefen et al., 2000), discriminant validity requirement been well fulfilled (Kline, 1998). For reliability, Cronbach alpha value were above .70 indicated the internal consistency not an issue (Nunnally, 1978), while composite reliability also surpassed the value of .70 (Raykow, 1997).

The second stage was to examine the structural model to test the research hypotheses (Anderson and Gebing, 1988). All three variables were tested using various goodness-of-fit index that provide the unidimensionality of the model. However, not all fit index is utilized when assessing the model as long as some of the model reach the fit level, the model is considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2010). The result of the factor loading for all variables revealed that the models met the level of goodness-of-fit. Table 1 summarized the goodness-of-fit index for the model.

Table 1. Goodness-of-fit index of the hypothesized model

Goodness-of-fit	Benchmark	Overall Measurement Model Index Value	Acceptance of Index Fitness Category
Chi Square/Degrees of Freedom (Chisq/df)	< 5.0 Marsh & Hocevar (1985)	2.484	Parsimonious fit
Root Mean Square of Error Approximation (RMSEA)	<.08 Browne & Cudeck (1993)	.071	Absolute fit
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	>.90 Joreskog & Sorbom (1984)	.902	Absolute fit
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	>.90 Bollen (1989b)	.913	Incremental fit
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	>.90 Bentler (1990)	.946	Incremental fit
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	>.90 Bentler & Bonett (1980)	.933	Incremental fit

It is concluded that common method variance was not present; all variables were tested utilizing Harmon’s single factor to determine there was no general factor accounted for majority of variance.

## 6. Hypotheses Testing

The objectives of this present study were to investigate the relationship of flow with OCB and secondly to examine the mediating effect of flow between burnout and OCB.

H1 proposed that flow is significantly related with OCB; the result revealed that flow is correlated with OCB ( $\beta = .412, p < .05$ ).

H2 proposed that flow mediate the relationship between burnout and OCB. Inter-correlation among burnout, flow and OCB area all yielded not significant at  $p > .05$  with standardized indirect effect of burnout-flow-OCB is smaller than standardized direct effect of burnout-OCB (indirect = 0.026; direct = .039,  $p > .05$ ). Hence, tests on the significance of this effect, using bootstrapping procedures computed with 95% confidence interval, revealed that there is no mediating effect of flow.

In sum, the result revealed that flow has a significant relationship with OCB. On the contrary, flow experience have been found no mediating effect between burnout and OCB.

## 7. Discussion

The first assumption was supported that flow has a significant relationship with OCB. The reason for significance of the result is because of the dimension between flow and OCB is interconnected with each other. Flow is defined as in the state that people is in total concentration in the work activity for their own sake rather than seeking for extrinsic reward (Bakker, 2005). Thus, flow construct share the same affinity with OCB which defined as behaviors that indicate employees are in deep concerns by having utmost interest in work related activities or in the life of the organization (Law, Wong & Chen, 2005). Both construct explained that employees are engaged in work related activities with utmost interest. In addition, flow encouraged the hotel employees to perform extra roles beyond the scope of the formal duties which also induce the well-being and engagement in the workplace (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003).

Second, the finding indicates that flow has no mediating effect on burnout and OCB. This finding is consistent with past studies that flow is not influenced by the feeling of burnout and has no effect on OCB among hotel employees (Xiao-Fu's et al., 2010; Jamali et al., 2009; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Hakanen, Bakker & Schaufeli., 2006). This present study revealed that majority of the hotel employees still experience flow in the workplace ( $n = 201$ ; 68.6% at high level) even though they experienced burnout ( $n = 184$ ; 62.8% at medium level), while at the same time a majority possessed medium level of OCB ( $n = 140$ ; 47.8%). The second reason is due to gender factor. Male gender is prone to tasks that involve high level of challenges, such as attracting potential business, expanding business opportunity, and completing projects in short time frame. Male respondents represented 66.2% and are the majority group that responded to this study. The job context in the hotel industry did not really capture the attention from the male employees. Thus, due to the nature of the job in the hotel industry, flow experience can still be experienced among the male employees in the hotel industry either they experience or neither of experiencing burnout (Hallberg et al., 2007) toward effecting the OCB experience in the hotel industry. Third possible explanation is related to the personality characteristics of the hotel's employees. The personality characteristics, such as their need and want, values and motives, career preferences and attributes of the organization is deemed related to individual behavioural outcomes such as low commitment and motivational level, turnover intention, poor job performance (Coetzee, Schreuder & Tladinyane, 2007; Hoffman & Woehr, 2006). Hence, it had been revealed that burnout employees have no influence on flow experience at work and have not influence on OCB.

## 8. Limitation and Future Research

This present study has several limitations; first, the cross-sectional research design may result in difficulties to confirm the direction or pattern of change in a specific timeframe of the relationship between the variables. Second, due to the nature of work in the hotel; the task are mainly routine work that often limited involvement in cognitive

domains or involve in challenging situations and only 14.2% derived from 293 of total respondents are from non-operation departments such as Sales & Marketing, Account and Human Resource department. Thus, this finding may not reflect the overall result from both operation and non-operation department or between the demand in cognitive domain from both categories type of departments in the hotel. Hence, context is an important determinant for flow and it is necessary to examine the effect of different job characteristics in different departments within the hotel industry (Neilsen & Cleal (2010).

This study has laid the foundation with regard to the issue of flow experience in Sarawak. Future research should consider a longitudinal study method to further investigate in describing as well as to explain the pattern of change of the relationship between the variables in the context of hotel industry. Flow is a state, which by itself is difficult to measure and to be operationalized (Nielsen & Cleal, 2010). This is detrimental to the flow experience because flow can only be realized in a stable, balanced, and proper situation (Sharmma, 2007).

## 9. Implication and Conclusion

This finding indeed is unique in relation to the understanding of Eastern context; hotel industry in Sarawak, Malaysia. There are some interesting differences as compared to the findings in the Western context, as this finding contradicted with the empirical findings reported by Kasa and Hassan (2013). Investigating the antecedents and outcome of flow is necessary if organizations wanting high work performance within the team. This study enables hotel employers to better understand the nature of flow, and thus, is able to implement strategies that can promote the state of flow. In this way, organizational performance can be enhanced. Burnout as antecedent is an important variable in human resource discipline. This is because, it is a negative phenomenon that increases organizational costs and reduces organizational productivity. Understanding the nature of burnout and its outcomes will help the managers to organize tasks that can reduce the potential of burnout, and thus, increases organizational effectiveness. Therefore, managers need to fully understand that psychological demands may lead to both chronic job strain such as burnout and to deterioration of positive outcomes such as health, job satisfaction as well as productivity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). From the organizational perspective, employees who experience flow are likely to find their work intrinsically motivating and enjoyable, and thus, encourage the hotel employees to perform extra role behaviors beyond the requirement of formal duties. This phenomenon can reduce the turnover intention while promote positive vide among the hotel employees (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). This could be an important strategy to ensure that the hotels could stay competitive in the industry and the hotel employees can have rewarding experience, while delivering quality customer service to the customers.

To conclude, new finding revealed the relationship between flow and OCB and flow acted as mediator between burnout and OCB in Sarawak context was explained. There is still a great need to understand the mean through which employee's positive manner can be enhance and further promote in ensuring that they are remain committed, have high sense of enjoyment at the same time intrinsically satisfying while working in the organization. Therefore, the flow experience could be further enhanced through job tasks that incorporate skills enrichment and enhancement strategies with considerable amount of challenging problems and issues among the hotel employees.

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