QUALITY AND WELL-BEING IN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS: THE ROLE OF SERVICE CLIMATE AND ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE

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This paper reviews the progress in the line of research on Service Organizations at IDOCAL (Research Institute on Personnel Psychology, Organizational Development, and Quality of Working Life, University of Valencia), and its integration with international research efforts. The investigation we have carried out has as a common general objective the compatibility of the well-being and performance of workers (the latter in terms of service quality to users), in accordance with the strategy of the European Union to end the crisis. The main topics covered are service quality, service climate, well-being, and organizational justice. In general, our findings indicate the existence of positive synergies between well-being and performance in the service sector.
Keywords: Well-being at work, Service quality, Service climate, Organizational justice.

Este trabajo revisa los avances en la línea de investigación sobre Organizaciones de Servicios desarrollada por el IDOCAL (Instituto de Investigación en Psicología de los RRHH, Desarrollo Organizacional y Calidad de Vida Laboral, Universidad de Valencia), y la incardinación de la misma con la investigación internacional. La investigación realizada tiene como objetivo general el hacer compatible el bienestar del trabajador y su desempeño en términos de calidad de servicio ofrecida al usuario, ello en consonancia con la estrategia de la Unión Europea para salir de la crisis. Las grandes temáticas que se tratan son: la calidad de servicio, el clima de servicio, el bienestar y la justicia organizacional. En general, los resultados indican la existencia de sinergias positivas entre bienestar y desempeño en el sector servicios.
Palabras clave: Bienestar en el trabajo, Calidad de servicio, Clima de servicio, Justicia organizacional.

The economic crisis has led to the destruction of many jobs. In the European Union unemployment has exceeded 10%, and the situation in Spain is dramatic (over 25%). The European Union has responded with the strategy "EU20 Strategy" (http://ec.europa.eu/ EU2020) which emphasizes, among other things, aspects such as competitiveness and maintaining the levels of quality of life for citizens. This necessarily includes the workplace. Given this situation, in our line of research on Service Organizations (IDOCAL, University of Valencia), we have carried out studies in recent years that explore these two facets (performance and well-being at work) in the service sector. More specifically, we have analyzed the performance variables related to service quality offered by the workers, as well as the organizational processes (service climate, organizational justice) that favor service quality, and the role of the well-being of the worker. In this manuscript, we review the advances made in the above line of research, as well as the links with international research.

QUALITY, SERVICE CLIMATE AND WELL-BEING AT WORK
Service Quality

Service quality has become an important indicator of both the performance of employees in contact with the user and the organization as a whole. It has an influence, directly or indirectly, on the loyalty of users and the economic prosperity of organizations (Anderson, Fornell & Lehman, 1994). The impact of service quality is not restricted to the commercial field or for profit businesses, but also applies to organizations with social objectives (Martínez-Tur, Peiró, Moliner & Potocnik, 2010). Therefore, doing things well in organizations has important advantages.

Although there is consensus in defining service quality as the evaluation of service excellence by users (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985; Sánchez-Hernández, Martínez-Tur, Peiró & Ramos, 2009), there are doubts in relation to its dimensions. In the decades of the 80's and 90's, Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (PZB) (1985; 1994) indicated that service quality could be described using five dimensions: *Tangibles* (includes physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel); *Reliability* (ability to provide service correctly and reliably); *Responsiveness* (willingness to help customers and provide prompt service); *Security* (the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence); and *Empathy* (individualized

attention to customers by the organization). PZB aspired to achieve a universal structure that would describe quality in different types of service organizations. The research, however, has been challenging this idea progressively.

Price, Arnould & Tierney (1995) noted that the structure of service quality that PZB had proposed had very significant limitations when it came to investigating the quality of services with a high emotional content. Price et al. (1995) indicated that there are services in which the interpersonal and emotional aspects play a leading role that is not reflected in the existing measures. In fact, PZB's structure emphasized the aspects related to the functionality of the service. Gradually, researchers began to differentiate between functional service quality (the degree to which workers are able to provide the core service efficiently) and relational service quality (relational-emotional benefits for the user beyond the core service) (Gwinner, Gremler & Bitner, 1998; Peiró, Martínez-Tur & Ramos, 2005). In addition, we have observed that the interpersonal aspects were more relevant in services with high emotional content (Potocnik, Moliner & Martínez-Tur, 2010).

Another area in which PZB's structure has also been questioned is that of Tangibles (installations, physical space, etc.) These authors gave little importance to this dimension (Parasuraman et al., 1985). However, we must bear in mind that PZB studied quality especially in certain types of services (banking, insurance) where the physical or tangible aspects (e.g., facilities) should be relatively unimportant to the user. In contrast, in other types of services, the physical aspects could have much more relevance. Martínez-Tur, Peiró and Ramos (2005) found that the physical aspects of the service (e.g., spaces) in sports facilities, were much more relevant than social ones in predicting user satisfaction. Subsequently, we have been able to confirm again, in a different sample of sports services (Mañas, Giménez, Muyor , Martínez-Tur & Miller, 2008) and in restaurants (Potocnik et al., 2010), the importance of tangibles for users. It is therefore concluded that PZB paid more attention to rather *pure* services where the functional interaction with the worker is emphasized. In these cases, the tangible aspect is less relevant. By contrast, when we move away from such pure services and investigate services where the client uses the facilities and remains there for a considerable time (e.g. hospitals), things change and the tangible aspects are much more relevant.

Having reached this point, and in contrast with the structure proposed by PZB, we suggested and tested in a cross-cultural study (Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2009), an alternative service quality structure. In this proposal, there would be three second-order dimensions (*functional, relational*, and *tangible*) that would enable us to have a definition and parsimonious measure of service quality. In turn, each of these second order dimensions would be formed by first-order dimensions that would enable

the evaluation of more specific aspects of service quality. The data from two different samples confirmed the accuracy of this structure.

Service Climate and Quality

The research has focused not only on service quality *per se*, but also on factors that promote it. One of these factors is the *service climate*. The most common definition of service climate is the one by Schneider, White and Paul (1998): "the perceptions employees have of the practices, procedures and behaviors that are rewarded, supported and expected with regard to customer service and the quality of service provided" (p. 151). Thus, the service climate describes the degree to which employees perceive that the efforts in terms of quality of service to the user are recognized and supported by the organization and its leaders. Schneider et al. (1998) found that the service climate had four facets or dimensions: *General Service Climate* (general summary of the service climate in the organization), *Use of User Feedback* (the degree to which an organization requests and uses customer feedback regarding the quality of service offered), *Customer Orientation* (the degree in which the organization is able, through various means, to meet the expectations and needs of customers in terms of service quality) and *Supervisory Practices* (actions of immediate supervisors designed to support and recognize the provision of service quality by employees). We have confirmed in a sample of 152 working groups in hotels that these four dimensions reflect the different facets of service climate (Carrasco, Martínez-Tur, Peiró & Moliner, 2012).

The service climate is therefore a specific climate that is strategic in service sector organizations. Groups and work units are capable of producing shared insights about how important service quality is for the organization. Its strategic value is based on the fact that the service climate has established itself as the link able to make the connection between what happens in the organization and evaluation by external users (Wiley, 1996). In fact, it has been observed repeatedly for more than 25 years that the service climate retains statistically significant relationships with user evaluations (e.g., Gracia, Cifre & Grau, 2010; Salanova, Agut & Peiró, 2005; Schneider et al., 1998).

Recently, we have checked this connection through a demanding test of service climate (Martínez-Tur, Tordera, Peiró & Potocnik, 2011). In the cited article we collected two different traditions which, for over two decades and independently, had tried to predict user satisfaction. On one hand, there is the confirmation of expectations model. This model has been traditionally used in consumer behavior research. It is based on the idea that users develop certain expectations prior to using a service. Later, when they use it, they compare the service they have received with their

previous expectations. When the service conforms to earlier expectations, or exceeds them, the user will be satisfied (Hsu, Yen, Chiu & Chang, 2006). On the other hand, there is the service climate. The user can develop prior expectations before using the service. However, the very characteristics of service can make it difficult for everything to be described a priori. Services are characterized by the uncertainty and the heterogeneity that results from the interaction between the worker and the user (Larsson & Bowen, 1989). A reality emerges during the interaction that cannot always be anticipated, so a good service climate must ensure user satisfaction even in a context of uncertainty where it is difficult for prior expectations to play a relevant role.

In the abovementioned work (Martinez -Tur et al., 2011), we simultaneously tested the predictive power of confirmation of expectations and service climate. It was a difficult test for service climate. Confirmation of expectations and user satisfaction are measured through a single informant, the user. Furthermore, the two variables were defined at the same level of construct and analysis: the individual. This facilitates the appearance of statistically significant relationships. On the other hand, the informant on service climate was the worker and the level of construct and analysis was the working group as a whole. This makes it difficult to obtain statistically significant relationships with another variable (satisfaction) measured by another informant and defined on another level. In spite of this, we observed, with a cross level analysis involving 105 working groups in hotels and over 1,000 clients served by these groups, that the service climate explained a statistically significant amount of variance in satisfaction that the confirmation of expectations was not able to predict alone.

Researchers have not only been interested in studying the effects of service climate. They have also conducted research into its precursors. Schneider et al. (1998) observed the existence of two major types of antecedents. Firstly, there was the internal service quality that existed in the relationship between departments or units of an organization. This internal service quality had to promote the service climate, since workers in contact with the user would receive support from other parts of their organization. Secondly, there were the general facilitating conditions, including the removal of obstacles at work, supervisory behaviors (e.g., sharing information), and human resource policies. Salanova et al. (2005) also confirmed that the facilitators (or resources) at work, of various kinds, remained positive and statistically significant relationships with the service climate. Also, both leadership and how conflicts are managed (Benítez, Medina & Munduate, 2012) seem to have an important role to play in stimulating the service climate in organizations (Schneider, Ehrhart, Mayer, Saltz, & Niles-Jolly, 2005).

On our part, we have investigated the factors that may contribute to the existence of a strong service climate, i.e. broad consensus among members of the same work unit, in other words, what makes workers in the same group or unit show consensus in their interpretation of the service climate. In an international master's thesis (Erasmus Mundus program), with co-supervision between the universities of Valencia and Bologna, we tested two different approaches to understanding the creation of the service climate as consensus (Brhanu, 2013). On the one hand, the composition of the group may influence the consensus. If the group is composed of people who differ in their characteristics (age, gender, experience, etc.), then it is less likely for there to be consensus in their perceptions. On the other hand, when there is good communication between group members it is more likely that they will end up developing consensus views on the service climate. The concept of informational justice among peers ("peer informational justice") mostly covers this communication between group members (Li, Cropanzano & Bagger, 2013). In the master thesis we mentioned above, we were able to confirm the important role of informational justice among peers when it comes to creating a strong service climate, using a sample of 95 work centres caring for people with intellectual disabilities.

But why study the consensus of the groups of workers in contact with the user regarding the service climate? The study of consensus of these workers largely responds to the fact that consensus has been proposed as a moderator in the relationship of the level of service climate with the evaluations of users (Schneider, Salvaggio & Subirats, 2002). These authors based their work on the concept of situational strength by Mischel (1973). The argument that enables consensus to be used as a moderator is very logical. In a typical service organization, users can interact with different workers. For example, it is not unusual for the same user to interact with one hotel receptionist for check-in and a different one for check-out. When there is consensus on service climate, it is to be expected that the service is consistent and that the end-user receives the same service regardless of the worker in attendance at all times. Therefore, the consensus -or the strength of the service climate– serves to amplify the relationship between the level of service climate and the user evaluations. Schneider et al. (2002) confirmed this hypothesis in the banking sector, but only in the case of the dimension of service climate corresponding to *Supervisory Practices.*

In a recent study, we attempted to replicate these results in Spain (Potocnik, Tordera, Martínez-Tur, Peiró & Ramos, 2011). We confirmed the moderating effect of the strength of the service climate (consensus), but the results behaved differently. The level of agreement need not always promote a positive relationship between service climate and service quality perceived by users. Contrary to the arguments outlined before, the theory of

"groupthink" (Janis, 1981) warns about the dangers of consensus. In groups that are too cohesive, alternative actions to the dominant ones are unlikely to be contemplated. The decisions made can be of poor quality, because the benefits of alternatives are not considered (Ahlfinger & Esser, 2001). Although the theory of *groupthink* is associated with decision making, it is useful in understanding what may be happening in the work units regarding the service climate. When the agreement is too broad, a closed and cohesive view of the service may develop, which prevents other innovative options from being seen. In such a scenario, it would not be unusual for complacency and remoteness from user expectations to arise. This is a phenomenon that we already diagnosed in a previous study (Peiró et al., 2005).

However, in our study it was confirmed that indeed the *Supervision Practices* facilitated the positive relationship between service climate in work units and perceived service quality by users, in line with the observations of Schneider et al. (2002). However, things were very different with respect to the dimension of *Customer Orientation*. In this case, a high consensus produced results in the opposite direction, i.e. the relationship between service climate in this dimension and perceptions of service quality by users was negative. We also confirmed the existence of a curvilinear relationship -in the form of an inverted "U"- between consensus regarding customer orientation and quality perceived by users. Consensus among the workers increased the quality perceived by users, but, after a certain point, a reduction was produced (Potocnik et al., 2011). It is not surprising that this result occurred in the dimension of *Customer Orientation*. Good customer orientation requires, to a certain extent, questioning one's own guidelines for action and being alert to the concerns and demands of users. Too much consensus may hinder the consideration of the users, and therefore decrease their perceptions of quality.

Service climate and well-being at work

As seen, the service climate has been mainly studied with respect to its relationship with user evaluations. This is logical, since service climate as a concept emerged in attempts to understand the connection between the internal processes of organizations and the evaluations of external customers. However, the service climate also has the potential to predict the well-being of workers in the service sector. In a doctoral thesis which we recently developed, we have highlighted this (Carrasco, 2012). There were few antecedents on the subject. The work of Martin (2008) could be considered an exception. This author noted that service climate provided resources in a sample of university workers, reducing their stress at work and improving their satisfaction.

Based on this previous study, we developed the connection

between service climate and wellbeing at work. To do this, we placed the emphasis on the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989). According to this theory, workers try to obtain resources to compensate their efforts at work and the "wearing down" that is produced over time. One of the peculiarities of the service sector is that often this wearing down comes from the continued interaction with clients. In these interactions, the contact worker must carry out adequate emotional work. The worker is required to be able to express the emotions that provide good service to customers (Hochschild, 1983). In many cases, the worker is forced to simulate emotions. This emotional regulation results in the experience of emotional dissonance, i.e. the workers express emotions that they do not really feel, which leads to negative stress (Gracia, Martínez, Salanova & Nogareda, 2007). The service climate could offset this somewhat by providing a way, according to the Conservation of Resources Theory, for the worker to obtain resources. Through the service climate, workers perceive that they have available the support, recognition and resources they need to carry out their jobs and serve users (Lam, Huang & Janssen, 2010). The service climate, therefore, has a positive impact on the well-being of contact workers. Our results supported this argument. In a cross level analysis, we found that the service climate of 152 work units maintained statistically significant relationships with the individual well-being of their workers, reducing burnout and increasing their engagement (positive association with work). Furthermore, the magnitude of these relationships was greater than that observed in the case of workers' emotional dissonance (Carrasco, 2012).

JUSTICE IN THE ORGANIZATION
Justice, well-being at work and worker performance

Organizational justice refers to the degree to which an element of the environment of the organization is perceived as fair, according to a certain rule or standard (Cropanzano, Rupp, Mohler & Schminke, 2001). In their study, initially, the focus was on *Distributive Justice*, i.e., how fair the distribution of resources is, taking into account the contribution made by members of an organization (Adams, 1965). Subsequently, the researchers observed that justice could not be limited only to the distribution of resources. There was a further element that led to *Procedural Justice* (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). This dimension covered the degree to which the decision-making processes in the organization are perceived as fair. The distribution of resources may be fair, but that does not necessarily mean that the decision-making procedures have been perceived as fair. The third dimension, *Justice of interaction*, places emphasis on the treatment of workers from their immediate supervisor (Bies & Moag, 1986). This third dimension has, in turn, two facets: *Interpersonal Justice* (the treatment received by the worker in terms of respect, dignity, etc.) and *Informational Justice* (the

degree to which the supervisor shares information with the worker). Colquitt (2001) confirmed the validity of an organizational justice model with four dimensions: distributive justice, procedural justice, interpersonal justice and informational justice. We also validated this four-factor structure using a sample of 329 Spanish workers (Moliner, Martínez-Tur & Carbonell, 2003). The four-factor structure showed a better fit than the other possible alternatives.

The research indicates that workers who receive fair treatment by the organization and their superiors perform better. In a recent paper, Devonish and Greenidge (2010) confirmed that organizational justice, in its different facets, increased both the performance in the assigned task and the contextual performance (voluntary behaviors beyond the assigned task that have a positive effect on the functioning of the organization). Likewise, justice reduced (counter-productive) negative behaviors. Justice appeals to the norm of reciprocity: workers are willing to perform their tasks better and to involve themselves in voluntary tasks to improve and reduce counter-productive tasks.

Justice also has statistically significant relationships with well-being at work, improving psychological well-being and reducing negative stress (Cropanzano, Goldman & Benson, 2005) and burnout (Moliner, Martínez-Tur, Peiró & Ramos, 2005). Cropanzano et al. (2001) refer to three reasons to explain this relationship. First, injustice prevents workers' contributions from being valued appropriately and makes it difficult for them to obtain valuable resources. Second, the perception of injustice is a signal indicating that the worker is not valued by the group. Finally, injustice implies a violation of well-established and important social norms.

A few years ago, we published a paper on the relationships of justice with well-being and performance, which has had quite an impact internationally (Moliner, Martínez-Tur, Ramos, Peiró & Cropanzano, 2008). Two contributions were made. On one hand, the study integrated justice, well-being and performance. It developed a model in which the relationship between organizational justice and performance was mediated by worker well-being. Thus, organizational justice had a positive effect on the well-being of workers, reducing burnout and increased their engagement. Well-being, in turn, improved worker performance. Additionally, the study focused on the uniqueness of service workers. In fact, performance was evaluated based on extra-role, user-oriented behaviors, i.e., behaviors which are positive for the user but are not formally reflected in the obligations of the worker (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997). The results confirmed the mediating role of well-being. This, to some extent, prompted a rethink of the previous investigation: justice impacted on the performance of workers, but it did so because it improved their well-being at work. Furthermore, it was not the reduction of burnout that had the most impact on the extra-role behaviors of workers; it was

engagement that had the most impact. This result gave substantial support for a positive approach to health at work. Worker performance, in service quality or care provided to the user, has more to do with the positive promotion of well-being than with a reduction in discomfort.

Justice climate and peer justice: the collective approach

Research in recent years has seen the birth of a relevant approach to the study of organizational justice: shared perceptions of justice within a group or collective. This is a new specific climate, whose official date of birth is often associated with work Naumann and Bennett (2000). These authors renounced the individualistic approach used in previous research in the study of organizational justice. The social dynamics of groups allows the development of a consensus view about the justice with which they are treated by the organization and its leaders. They called this collective level of justice "*Justice Climate*". Since the work of Naumann and Bennett, research on justice climate has been fruitful (e.g., Whitman, Caleo, Carpenter, Horner & Bernerth, 2012) and has been able to go beyond the individualistic vision that had been shown to be clearly limited.

We have contributed in our small way to this field of research (Moliner, Martínez-Tur, Peiró, Ramos & Cropanzano, 2005). In our paper we investigated the relationship between justice climate in 108 working groups and the burnout experienced by their members. We tested three ways of connection. First, we tested the direct relationship between justice climate and collective burnout. We observed that the justice of interaction had a central role. When the group as a whole received good treatment from the supervisor, group burnout was reduced. Second, we tested the moderating effect of the strength of the justice climate (the degree of agreement among workers in the group in relation to the justice with which they are treated) on the relationship between justice climate and collective burnout. Again it was interactional justice that played a relevant role. When there was consensus in the group on the treatment of the supervisor, the ability of justice climate to reduce burnout increased. Finally, we investigated the relationship between the strength of the justice climate and the strength of burnout (the degree to which members of a group experience similar levels of burnout). Once again, it was interactional justice that was able to predict group burnout. When groups showed consensus on the treatment received by the supervisor, burnout contagion occurred and the groups had similar levels of this syndrome. In conclusion, this study highlighted the importance of justice of interaction with the supervisor (within climate justice) in understanding burnout in work teams (collective burnout) and the spread of this syndrome within the teams.

Before concluding, we would like to make a brief reference to another collective approach to justice that has emerged recently: *peer justice*. Traditionally, research has emphasized an authority external to the individual or group as the source of justice; it was the organization and/or the supervisor who, by their behavior, affected the perceptions of fairness for workers. However, Russell Cropanzano and his colleagues in the U.S. have begun to show the scientific community that there is at least one other source of justice: equals or peers. In their daily work, employees perceive the degree to which peers treat them with respect, share information, etc. This is another kind of collective justice, within a group or work unit, which can affect performance and well-being at work. The research is still in its infancy (Li et al., 2013). In our research institute (IDOCAL), a doctoral thesis is being completed which looks promising (Molina, in press), because the results indicate that peer justice may have a differentiating role in predicting service quality and well-being of workers in service organizations.

CONCLUSION

The results we have found in recent years in this line of research enable us to conclude that well-being at work and performance can go hand in hand in the service sector. The service climate is not only an incentive to increase the efforts of workers in their customer service, but it is also a source of resources to improve their well-being. Similarly, dealing fairly with workers not only improves their well-being but it also becomes a precursor to approaching excellence in customer service (extra-role behaviors aimed at the user). It is very important that research finds these synergies, since well-being and productivity are two challenges and two legitimate interests that are not always in harmony in our society and in our organizations. The achievement of these two objectives enables us to envision a possible sustainable model for coming out of the crisis, in line with the European Union's strategy (Europe 2020) for this decade, which respects European values and encourages our competitiveness in an environment that is increasingly globalized.

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