THE IMPACT OF PERCEIVED TOP MANAGEMENT SUPPORT ON JOB PERFORMANCE THROUGH JOB BURNOUT: EVIDENCE FROM THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to examine the importance of job burnout when mediating the relationship between perceived top management support (TMS) and the dependent variables of job dedication and guest empathy deficiency.
Methodology/Design/Approach – The study gathered data from hotel employees in Opatija who directly interact with guests. A total of 108 valid questionnaires were obtained through an on-site survey. The study employed the partial least squares method within the SmartPLS 4 programme to analyse causal relationships between independent and dependent variables.
Findings – The results show that perceived TMS has a significant impact on employees' empathy towards guests and their dedication to work only in the case when job burnout mediates this relationship, emphasizing the importance of further examining the consequences of burnout in high-intensity interactive service professions.
Originality of the research – This paper offers new insights into the mediating role of burnout in the workplace. It is the first paper to examine direct and indirect relationships between perceived TMS and the impact on work engagement in both positive (job dedication) and negative (guest empathy deficiency) directions.
Keywords top management support (TMS), job dedication, guest empathy deficiency

INTRODUCTION

Despite being an important driver of economic growth and employment (Seyitoğlu & Costa, 2022), the hospitality industry is currently struggling with a labour shortage that casts doubt on its ability to maintain the expected quality of service. After the COVID-19 crisis, in 2022, there was an average labour shortage of 10%-20% in the hospitality sector in the EU compared with 2019 figures (Hotrec, 2022). Among the reasons commonly cited for hospitality work being associated with a negative context are the adverse features of work that persistently recur, such as inadequate working schedules, insecure employment contracts, low wages, long working hours, low job security, and the lack of opportunities for advancement (Baum, 2015; Lindsay & McQuaid, 2004; Zopiatis & Constanti, 2010).

Notwithstanding visible improvement in working conditions for employees in direct contact with customers (Eurofound, 2021), hotel employees often find themselves in a difficult psychosocial position, where they have to respond to the varying needs and wants of guests, while at the same time bearing in mind the expectations of top management. The majority of jobs in hospitality are jobs in "a people business", in which interactions with managers or guests determine the employees' feelings of integration and connection to the organization. Hence, as pointed out by Eurofound (2019), the quality of the social environment is an essential aspect of job quality as it can balance the negative impact of high job demands. Indeed, Eurofound (2021) highlights a concerning trend: more than 50% of interactive service workers (ISWs) facing high emotional demands report experiencing stress, exhaustion, and fatigue in their work. Alongside these emotional demands, work intensity also emerges as a significant concern.

Previous authors have revealed the importance of support from higher organizational levels in keeping workers satisfied and motivated. In particular, Kim & Park (2020) reported that employees' positive perception of top management support (TMS) positively affects employee commitment and job satisfaction via organizational culture. Perceived supervisor support has also been confirmed to be an important antecedent of the behavioural outcomes of workers (Gordon, 2020; Gordon et al., 2019; Tang & Tsaur, 2016). Other authors have pointed out the importance of colleague support (emotional and work) as an important predictor of a higher level of dedication to an organization (Bae, 2023).

There are a number of studies in the hospitality literature that cover the topic of organizational support and its impact on job satisfaction and commitment (Colakoglu et al., 2010), creativity (Chand & Ambardar, 2020), conscientiousness and courtesy (Obiora & Jaja, 2015), and burnout (Walters and Raybould, 2007) relatively well. There is little literature, however, that addresses perceived TMS and its impact on workers' positive and negative behavioural outcomes.

A recent study by Wallace and Coughlan (2023) shows that burnout plays an important role as a mediator in the relationship between employee-manager relations and counterproductive work behaviour. In particular, when workers' relationships with their managers are weaker, burnout is more pronounced and associated with negative work behaviour. Following the authors' call for further research into the negative effects of burnout on employee wellbeing, this study provides an opportunity to extend this research and gain new insights into the importance of burnout for the relationship between top management and their employees in the context of the employees' commitment to work and ability to empathise with guests.

1. METHODOLOGY

1.1. Sample characteristics and data collection

The research took place in Opatija, Croatia from March 2023 to May 2023 through paper and pencil administrated questionnaires. In this study, stratified random sampling was chosen as the most appropriate data collection technique to gather data that best represents the target group. According to Marušić et al. (2019), the results of stratified sampling are generally more accurate than the results of simple random sampling. The first step of research was the selection of the basic characteristics that are important for achieving the research objective. These characteristics were place of work (only hotels in the Opatija Riviera, Croatia, were included in the sample) and job position (only employees with direct guest contact in non-managerial positions). After obtaining permission from the managers to conduct anonymous field research, the selection of individuals within the defined groups was randomised. Out of 180 distributed questionnaires, 124 were returned, out of which 108 (60%) were fully completed and proceeded to further analyses.

Table 1: **Respondents' profile**

Characteristics		Total	Share (%)
Gender	Female	56	52
	Male	52	48
Age	18 -25	43	39.9
	26-39	36	33.3
	40-60	24	22.2
	60+	5	4.6
Marital status	Married	35	32.4
	Divorced	11	10.2
	None of the above	62	57.4
Education	Lower professional degree	10	9.3
	Secondary	84	77.7
	Higher professional degree (Bachelor or Master)	14	12.9

Source: Authors' research

1.2. Measurements and measurement model

The measurement instrument adopted a 5-point Likert scale to measure four constructs. First, *TMS* was measured with 8 measurement items adopted from Gillet et al. (2020). The sample item was "My organization cares about my opinions". As the outer loadings were lower than 0.7 for 2 items, "If given the opportunity, my organization would take advantage of me" (reversed item) and "My organization shows very little concern for me" (reversed item), the authors decided to remove them to improve the construct variability and reliability. After these adjustments, Cronbach's α of the construct was 0.886. The construct *Guest empathy deficiency* was measured with 3 items, e.g. "I feel I am unable to be sensitive to the needs of the guests", adopted from Gillet et al. (2020) and adjusted to the target group - guests. Cronbach's α was 0.817, implying good factor reliability. The construct *Job burnout* included 6 measurement items, e.g. "I often feel burnout because of my job", adopted from Kristensen et al. (2005). In this construct, there was one questionable item with a lower outer loading of 0.2. After the item "I often feel tired after working days" was removed, Cronbach's alpha improved and was 0.898. The fourth construct *Job dedication*, adopted from Tsaur et al. (2019), was measured with 3 items: "I am enthusiastic about my job", "My job inspires me", and "I am proud of the work that I do". Cronbach's α was 0.825.

Figure 1: **The measurement model**
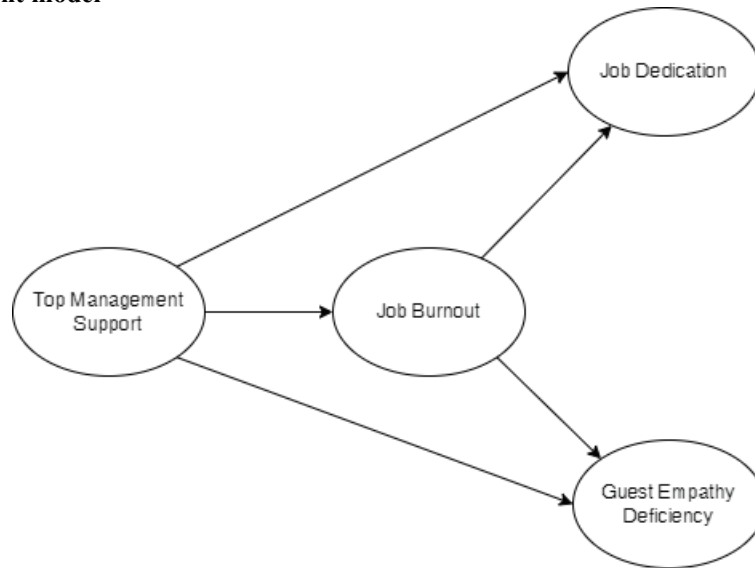
Source: Authors' research

The measurement model shows adequate discriminant validity since all HTMT values (heterotrait-monotrait ratio) are lower than the 0.85 threshold (Hair et al., 2021). The AVE values range from 0.638 to 0.733, suggesting acceptable convergent validity (Dijkstra and Henseler, 2015).

Table 2: **Measurement model values**

| Constructs	Measurement items	Outer loadings	Cronbach Alpha	AVE	CR
Job burnout (JB)	I feel no energy for going to work in the morning	0.832	0.898	0.665	0.922
	I feel like every extra hour at work makes me more tired	0.846			
	I have enough energy for my family and friends during my free time. (RC)	0.735			
	I would rate my job as emotionally exhausting.	0.719			
	Work often frustrates me.	0.901			
	I often feel "burnout" because of work.	0.845			
Guest empathy deficiency (GED)	I feel I am unable to be sensitive to the needs of guests	0.833	0.817	0.733	0.891
	I feel I am not capable of investing emotionally in guests	0.906			
	I feel I am not capable of being sympathetic to guests	0.827			
Job dedication (JD)	I am enthusiastic about my job	0.864	0.825	0.740	0.895
	My job inspires me	0.923			
	I am proud of the work that I do	0.789			
TMS (TMS)	TM really cares about well-being	0.882	0.886	0.638	0.913
	TM considers goals and values	0.827			
	TM offers help if there is a problem	0.843			
	TM forgives mistakes	0.654			
	TM is willing to help (special favour)	0.735			
	TM cares about opinions	0.830			

* CR – composite reliability (rho_c)
Source: Authors' research

1.3. Structural model

The structural model was tested by applying the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 iterations. The R^2 for job dedication was 0.262, meaning that 26% of the variance was explained by TMS and job burnout. The R^2 for guest empathy deficiency was 23% of the variance and was explained by TMS and job burnout. Job burnout as a mediator (independent and dependent variable) contains 9% of the explained variance.

Figure 2: **Structural model**
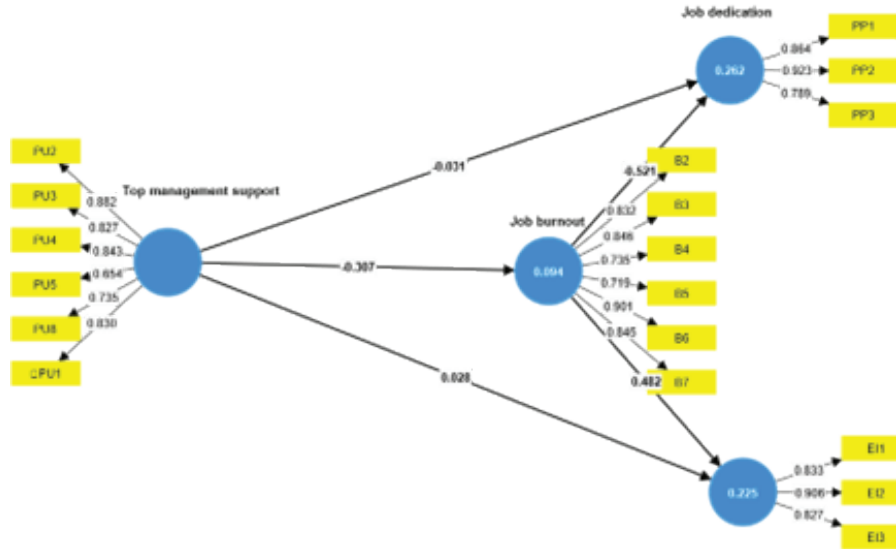
Source: Authors' research

Table 3 shows the results of the collinearity test of the structural model. The inner VIF values in the structural model range from 1.000 to 1.104, indicating that all variables have satisfied the threshold level < 5 (Hair et al., 2021) and confirming the absence of multicollinearity. The results of VIFs below 3.3 also indicate that the model is considered free of common method biases (Kock, 2015).

Table 3: **Collinearity test**

Paths	VIF
JB -> GED	1.104
JB -> JD	1.104
TMS -> GED	1.104
TMS -> JB	1.000
TMS -> JD	1.104

Source: Authors' research

Table 4: **Direct, indirect and total effects**

Paths	Direct effects			Total effects		
	B	T value	*p* value	β	T value	*p* value
JB-> GED	0.482	5.629	0.000	0.482	5.629	0.000
JB-> JD	-0.521	7.077	0.000	-0.521	7.077	0.000
TMS -> JB	-0.307	3.214	0.001	-0.307	3.214	0.001
TMS-> GED	0.028	0.241	0.809	-0.120	0.988	0.323
TMS -> JD	-0.031	0.285	0.776	0.129	1.080	0.280
Mediation through JB						
TMS->GED	-0.148	2.743	0.006			
TMS->JD	0.160	2.962	0.003			

Source: Authors' research

The obtained results (Table 4) show that there are three significant direct relationships and two significant indirect relationships

mediated by job burnout. According to the results, job burnout has a significant effect on guest empathy deficiency (ß = 0.482, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that the more burnout employees feel, the greater their emotional exhaustion, which manifests itself in a lack of empathy towards guests. In addition, job burnout negatively impacts job dedication (ß = -0.521, $p < 0.01$). TMS directly affects job burnout (ß = -0.307, $p < 0.05$); in other words, the higher the support from the top, the lower the feeling of job burnout. With regard to indirect relationships, TMS has shown to be an important predictor of guest empathy deficiency (ß = 0.148, $p < 0.05$) and job dedication (ß = 0.160, $p < 0.05$) through job burnout. This result indicates that job burnout negatively mediates this relationship and changes a positive relationship into a negative one. Essentially, even if employees hold positive perceptions of TMS, when they experience burnout, they may struggle to emotionally connect with guests. Furthermore, even in cases where employees are experiencing burnout, maintaining a positive perception of TMS still positively influences job dedication. This underscores the significance of fostering mutual trust in top management to enhance the working atmosphere and employee commitment.

2. DISCUSSION

This paper highlights the importance of understanding the feelings within an organization, as this can make a difference in the work performance of the interactive service workforce. In this context, top managers should understand the role they play in supporting their workers and how job burnout changes both workers' willingness to empathise with guests and their work commitment. The current findings demonstrate that job burnout indeed plays an important mediating role in changing the relationship between perceived TMS and its impact on job dedication but also on empathy when interacting with guests. This highlights the need to consider burnout as a pivotal variable in future models examining job performance and the dynamics of employee-guest interactions.

Due to the nature of work in the hospitality industry, it is difficult and almost impossible to avoid burnout (Casserly and Megginson, 2008). Therefore, managers should focus on better understanding and providing adequate support to employees to help them achieve a work-life balance. To this end, organisations should collaboratively brainstorm the causes of burnout and develop solutions to alleviate it. Using frameworks such as LUMA can be an effective approach to understanding and communicating these issues within the organization. Furthermore, the results of the current study show that a positive perception of support from top management mitigates burnout in the workplace. Moreover, if employees feel burnt out and at the same time perceive TMS positively, they will continue to perform their tasks with commitment. For managers, this result emphasises the importance of their presence and support, which may consist of leading by example: advocating for mental health and work-life balance, addressing workplace conflicts promptly and fairly to prevent stress and anxiety among employees, public recognition, etc. This adds to the previous findings that emphasise the importance of employees being supported by their organizations to increase their commitment to the organizations' goals and values (Aladin & Ibrahim, 2020). However, this does not apply to situations in which workers suffering from burnout are willing to provide a service that involves emotions. In this case, the perceived support from top management does not affect the willingness of workers to provide a service with empathy. The results highlight the necessity of understanding the conditions under which workers are willing to engage emotionally with guests. In particular, what is the price of emotionally delivered services for guests? Since emotions (affective domain) play as important a role in creating memorable experiences as do cognitive processes (Rašan & Laškarin Ažić, 2023), managers interested in providing memorable experiences should pay special attention to solutions that help employees in direct contact with guests to overcome stress and still be able to empathise with guests.

Given that this study is the first in the hospitality industry to address the impact of TMS on workers' job dedication and guest- related emotional exhaustion, it lays the foundation for future research. We encourage future researchers to follow the suggested avenues for further research that emerge from the findings of this study. First, as there are multiple dimensions of burnout (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2010), future studies should determine whether different types of burnouts have different mediating effects on the relationship between TMS and job performance. The authors suggest that future research should include both quantitative and qualitative investigations of solutions that mitigate the effects of burnout on the previously examined relationships. Specifically, future research should provide answers on the nature of solutions to mitigate burnout and their effects on the relationship with guests (empathy for guests). In other words, what solution would be more effective: financial added value, emotional support from top management or something else?

Although we endeavour to be as rigorous as possible, certain limitations should be acknowledged. *First*, the removal of certain items from the measurement constructs due to low outer loadings may affect construct comprehensiveness. Future research should explore alternative measures to maintain construct validity while preserving item inclusiveness. *Second*, due to the relatively small sample size, the generalisability of the results to other contexts within the hospitality industry is limited. *Third*, as this study adopted a cross-sectional research design, which limits the comprehensive understanding of the mediating role of burnout, we suggest conducting a longitudinal study to confirm these findings. Since the current study did not include control variables, future research should provide answers to how, for example, the type of hotel (independent or chain-affiliated), year-round employment or seasonal employment, external economic conditions, organisational culture, etc., affect emotional exhaustion or job dedication in relation to burnout and TMS.

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