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The Role of Emotional Labor as a Mediator in the Relationship Between Organizational Climate and Employee Burnout

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Abstract

This research investigated how emotional labor mediates the relationship between organizational climate and burnout in accommodation businesses. A survey was conducted across 19 five-star hotels in Antalya, the region with the highest number of accommodation establishments in Turkey. The study included 976 participants and focused on analyzing emotional labor and its sub-dimensions as the mediating factor. Descriptive statistics were processed with SPSS, while the structural equation model was assessed using AMOS. The findings indicated that organizational climate negatively affected burnout. When emotional labor was added as a mediating factor, emotional effort, and emotional conflict were identified as partial mediators in the relationship between organizational climate and burnout. The study concluded with practical recommendations for industry professionals and future research directions.

Keywords: Accommodation establishments, Organizational climate, Emotional labor, Burnout, Mediation effect

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Introduction

Tourism plays a crucial role in national economies, contributing significantly to foreign currency earnings and employment rates. However, it is also a sector characterized by high employee turnover. Qualified employees dissatisfied with their current workplace can easily transition to other opportunities. Thus, it is essential for management to regularly monitor employee perceptions of the organization and take appropriate actions when necessary. Furthermore, Mumcu [1] emphasizes that organizations should pay special attention to employees whose performance and behavior are inconsistent.

Employees in accommodation establishments form perceptions about their workplace, and these perceptions directly influence the quality of service they deliver. To maintain high service quality, managers must guide the organizational behavior of their staff. The concept of organizational climate becomes crucial in addressing these issues [2]. This study examines the effect of organizational climate on burnout, a critical issue for accommodation businesses, while also exploring the mediating role of emotional labor in the service sector.

Conceptual framework

Organizational climate



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The concept of organizational climate can be traced back to research conducted between 1924 and 1930 by a group led by Elton Mayo and Fritz Roethlisberger at Harvard University, focusing on the relationship between human behavior and psychological conditions in the workplace, specifically the Hawthorne plant of Western Electric [3]. Although the term “organizational climate” itself was not defined at the time, Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939) conducted experiments exploring social climates within groups of young men, marking one of the earliest references. Fleishman [4] also discussed the link between leadership and organizational climate, though without offering a clear definition. Argyris [5] was the first to define organizational climate explicitly, in a study examining the personality, needs, and values of bank employees about organizational policies [5, 6].

Over time, different definitions of organizational climate emerged, based on varying perspectives. Initially, research focused on individual perceptions within industrial settings, which led to the exploration of how these perceptions impacted both the organization and its environment. This led to two distinct approaches to defining organizational climate: the objectivist approach, which attributes shared perceptions to organizational characteristics like size and structure, and the subjective approach, which emphasizes the role of individual interpretations and personal characteristics in forming these perceptions [7]. The ongoing debate regarding whether organizational climate stems from individual perceptions or organizational characteristics remains central to its definition [8, 9].

Burnout

Burnout was recognized as a social issue before it became part of the organizational behavior discourse. Although not explicitly defined, burnout was depicted in works by Shakespeare, Thomas Mann, and Graham Greene, all of whom described individuals experiencing burnout [10, 11]. The first documented psychiatric study on burnout appeared in 1953, written by Schwarz and Will, which outlined the burnout process [11-16].

Maslach is one of the leading scholars in the field, and her definition of burnout has become widely accepted: it is a syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion and cynicism, typically found in individuals working in human services [17]. In another research, Maslach and Jackson [18] expanded the definition to include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Maslach also developed the Burnout Inventory to measure these three dimensions. Burnout is a gradual, insidious process that negatively affects both work and personal life, making early detection of symptoms essential for intervention [19].

Emotional labor

The concept of emotional labor emerged from the need to manage emotions in professional settings. First introduced by Hochschild in the 1980s through her research on stewardesses at Delta Airlines [20], it was later expanded in her book *The Managed Heart*. Hochschild examined how employees in customer-facing roles, such as debt collectors and stewardesses, manage their emotions to appeal to customer feelings [21]. Other research has explored similar themes in various service industries [22-25].

Hochschild defined emotional labor as the regulation of emotions to create a publicly visible persona. She proposed two primary forms of emotional labor: surface acting and deep acting [21].

Relationships among research variables

Studies exploring the connections between the research variables, as displayed in **Figure 1**, reveal interesting insights. A negative relationship was identified between organizational climate and surface acting, a component of emotional labor, while deep acting was positively correlated with organizational climate [26, 27]. Research also suggests that organizational climate is negatively related to burnout. Specifically, studies in schools [28], community service institutions [29], and the accommodation industry [30] have found that a supportive organizational climate helps reduce burnout. Emotional labor studies have shown that deep acting correlates negatively with burnout, while surface acting has a positive relationship with burnout [31, 32].

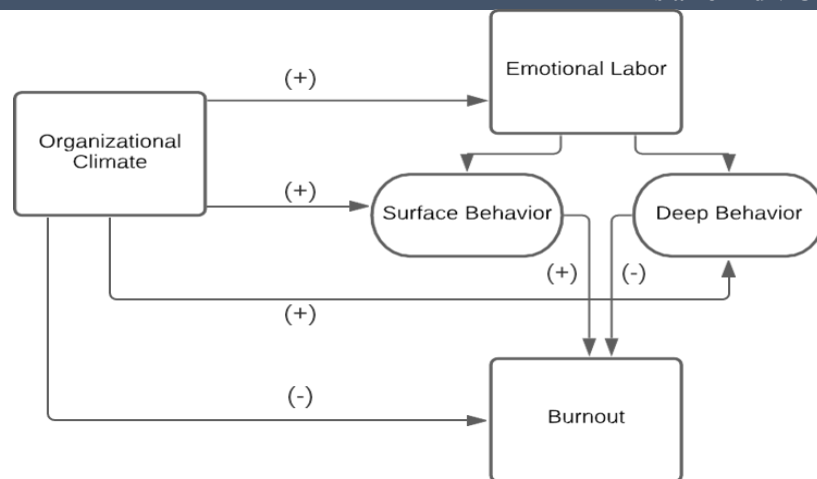


Figure 1. Relationships between research variables literature model

Research purpose and hypotheses

In the tourism sector, which is known for its high competition and reliance on human labor, service quality plays a crucial role in customer satisfaction. To meet both customer and organizational expectations, workers are required to perform at their best. However, to ensure that workers can meet these expectations, it is essential to fulfill their own needs and create a positive organizational climate. Employees working in accommodation establishments, particularly those in direct contact with customers and with unconventional working hours, are more susceptible to burnout. Unlike other industries, the tourism sector necessitates significant emotional effort to maintain customer satisfaction. For accommodation businesses to thrive, managing these factors effectively is vital.

This research primarily aims to examine how emotional labor acts as a mediator in the relationship between organizational climate and burnout in the context of accommodation establishments. An additional goal is to propose an effective behavioral framework for accommodation establishments by analyzing the relationships between the key variables.

The hypotheses that will be tested in this study are as follows:

- H1: Emotional effort serves as a mediator between organizational climate and burnout.
- H2: Emotional contradiction acts as a mediator between organizational climate and burnout.
- H3: Organizational climate has a significant effect on emotional conflict.
- H4: Organizational climate significantly influences emotional effort.
- H5: Organizational climate significantly contributes to burnout.
- H6: Employee perceptions of the research variables vary based on their demographic characteristics.

Materials and Methods

The study's population includes employees from various accommodation businesses in Turkey, with the sample focusing on employees from five-star hotels in the Antalya region, where a significant number of these establishments are located. According to data from the Ministry of Tourism in 2019, Turkey had 4,038 tourism business certificates, 7,238 tourism investment certificates, and 8,104 municipal business facilities, with 847 five-star hotels. The Antalya region alone houses 407 five-star hotels and luxury resorts, which were selected for the study due to the large number of employees working in these establishments. A random sampling method was applied to gather responses from employees of 19 five-star hotels, resulting in the distribution of 1,200 survey forms. Out of these, 1,142 responses were collected, with 166 surveys discarded due to incomplete data, leaving 976 valid responses for analysis. This makes the study one of the most extensive in this field. The research survey was divided into four sections: demographic data, organizational climate, burnout, and emotional labor. The organizational climate was measured using a scale developed by Koys and DeCotiis [33], consisting of five sub-dimensions and 15 items. Burnout was measured with the Maslach Burnout Inventory [17], comprising three subscales and 22 items. Emotional labor was assessed using a scale developed by Chu and Murrmann [34] and validated in Turkish by Avcı and Boylu [35], which includes two sub-dimensions: emotional effort and emotional conflict. During confirmatory factor analysis, three items from the emotional labor scale were excluded due to inadequate factor loadings. The results of the analysis confirmed the validity of the two-factor structure with the following goodness-of-fit indices: $\chi^2/df = 4.2$, RMSEA = 0.069, NFI = 0.967, CFI = 0.972, and GFI = 0.980, all at a significance level of $P < 0.01$.

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 20.0. SPSS was used for frequency analysis, t-tests, variance analysis, and other descriptive statistics, while AMOS was employed for testing the mediation effects.

Results and Discussion

In this section of the study, the findings derived from the analyses are presented and interpreted. The demographic details of the participants in the research are provided in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Findings of demographic characteristics of research participants

		Frequency	Percent			Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	339	34.7	Marital status	Married	547	56
	Male	637	65.3		Single	429	44
Age (years)	17-25	178	18.2	Education	Primary school	238	24.4
	26-32	292	29.9		High school	451	46.2
	33-40	295	30.2		Associate degree	141	14.4
	41-50	181	18.5		Bachelor's degree	140	14.3
	≥ 51	30	3.1		Master's degree	6	.6
Business unit	Front desk	65	6.7	Working year	1- 3 years	259	26.5
	F/B	258	26.4		4- 7 years	218	22.3
	Kitchen	239	24.5		8- 11 years	198	20.3
	Housekeeping	219	22.4		12- 15 years	128	13.1
	Human resources	35	3.6		> 15 years	173	17.7
	Technical	78	8.0				
	Security	48	4.9				
	Animation	14	1.4				

From the analysis of **Table 1**, it is clear that 34.7% of participants are women, while 65.3% are men. A significant portion of participants (46.2%) have completed high school, and the majority fall within the 26-40 years age bracket. When selecting participants for the survey, the distribution of employees across different departments was considered. The food and beverage, kitchen, and housekeeping departments in accommodation establishments have the highest representation, as indicated by the survey results.

The reliability of the scales used in the study was assessed through Cronbach's alpha, with acceptable values found across all measures. The reliability coefficients are as follows: organizational climate (0.796), burnout (0.852), emotional labor (0.699), emotional conflict dimension (0.849), and emotional effort dimension (0.622). The findings suggest that the burnout and emotional conflict scales exhibit high reliability, while the organizational climate and emotional effort scales show moderate reliability.

To examine the differences in participants' perceptions based on demographic characteristics, a one-way variance analysis (ANOVA) was conducted. The results revealed significant differences in all research variables based on the departments and operations studied. Additionally, perceptions of organizational climate and emotional labor were notably influenced by marital status and age, confirming that demographic characteristics impact employee perceptions.

Thus, the hypothesis “H6: Perceptions of research variables differ according to the demographic characteristics of employees” was supported.

To test the research hypotheses, a structural equation model was created. The model's goodness-of-fit indices, based on the observed variables method, were as follows: $\chi^2/df = 3.942$, RMSEA = 0.052, NFI = 0.926, CFI = 0.962, and GFI = 0.960 at $P < 0.001$. These indices suggest a good model fit. The regression estimates were found to be significant ($\beta = -0.468$, standard error = 0.030, standardized estimate = -0.445). The analysis indicated a negative and significant effect of organizational climate (the independent variable) on burnout (the dependent variable), supporting the hypothesis “H5: Organizational climate significantly affects burnout.”

To incorporate the mediating effect of emotional labor, the model was further tested using AMOS software. The final version of the model, including the mediation effect, is depicted in **Figure 2**.

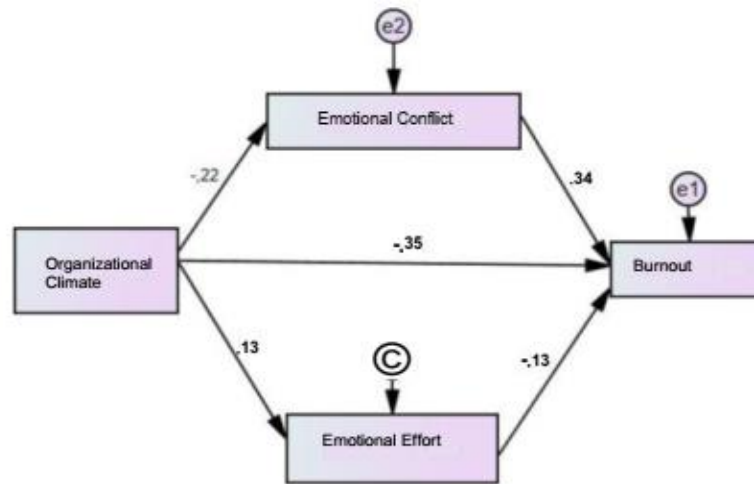


Figure 2. Research model

The fit indices for the research model, as presented in **Table 2**, indicate that the model demonstrates a satisfactory level of fit.

Table 2. Research model structural equality model compliance good values

	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	NFI	CFI	GFI
Research Model	37.493	12	3.124	0.071	0.942	0.954	0.892

The model was tested to identify the mediation effects of emotional labor sub-dimensions on the relationships between the research variables. The path values representing these relationships are provided in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Regression weights for meaningful relationships between research model variables

Tested Path	Estimate (β)	Standard error	Critical rate	Standardized estimate (β)	P
Emotional effort <--- Organizational climate	0.380	0.089	4.250	0.135	***
Emotional conflict <--- Organizational climate	0.448	0.063	-7.064	-0.221	***
Burnout <--- Organizational climate	-0.371	0.029	-12.965	-0.353	***
Burnout <--- Emotional effort	-0.048	0.010	-4.818	-0.128	***
Burnout <--- Emotional conflict	0.177	0.014	12.701	0.342	***

The data reveals that the independent variable, organizational climate, negatively impacts the emotional conflict variable ($\beta = -0.22$), which serves as a mediator in the model. Thus, the hypothesis “H3: Organizational climate significantly affects emotional conflict” is confirmed. Another hypothesis proposed in the study, “H4: Organizational climate has a meaningful impact on emotional effort,” is also supported, as the data shows that the organizational climate positively influences the emotional effort mediator ($\beta = 0.13$). After determining the regression weights using the AMOS program, the relationships between the independent, dependent, and mediating variables were examined, with the results of these analyses presented in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Results of analysis of effects between variables

Independent variable	The dependent variable								
	Burnout			Emotional conflict			Emotional effort		
	Direct	Indirect	Total	Direct	Indirect	Total	Direct	Indirect	Total
Organizational climate	-0.353	-0.093	-0.445	-0.221	-	-0.221	0.135	-	0.135
Emotional conflict	0.342	-	0.342	-	-	-	-	-	-
Emotional effort	-0.128	-	-0.128	-	-	-	-	-	-

The model analysis used to assess the mediation effect showed both direct ($\beta = -0.353$) and indirect ($\beta = -0.093$) effects between organizational climate and burnout. Direct effects were observed between the organizational climate and the mediating variables, emotional effort ($\beta = 0.135$) and emotional conflict ($\beta = -0.221$). In mediation models, a relationship must exist between the independent and dependent variables; without it, mediation is not applicable. Additionally, a connection must be present between the independent and mediator variables to facilitate the mediation effect. If adding the mediator weakens or renders the relationship between the independent and dependent variables insignificant, full mediation

occurs. If the mediator only partially explains the relationship, partial mediation is seen [36]. The analysis indicated a partial mediation effect between the variables, thus confirming the hypotheses “H2: Emotional conflict mediates the impact of organizational climate on burnout” and “H1: Emotional effort mediates the impact of organizational climate on burnout.”

To assess the significance of the mediation effect, various tests like Aroian and Goodman, MacKinnon and Dwyer, and Sobel tests can be used. The Sobel test was employed in this study to evaluate the mediation effect, with results shown in **Table 5**. The Sobel test revealed that all mediation effects were statistically significant ($P < 0.05$).

Table 5. Sobel test results of mediation significance values

Path relationship	Sobel test (z value)	Sobel test (p significance value)
Emotional effort => Burnout	-3.19	0.001
Emotional conflict => Burnout	-3.29	0.000

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore whether there were notable differences in employees' perceptions based on their demographic characteristics and how they viewed the research variables. Through t-tests and ANOVA, the findings revealed that single employees had a higher perception of organizational climate than their married counterparts. This can be attributed to several factors. Married employees, due to their social roles, may demand more respect and autonomy from their organizations. Accommodation establishments tend to have an autocratic organizational structure, where job tasks and definitions are clear, and employees are excluded from decision-making processes. In contrast, married employees, bearing family responsibilities, may seek more involvement and respect for their opinions. Significant differences were also found in emotional labor perceptions between employees aged 17-25 years and those aged 26-32 years, with the latter group displaying higher perceptions of emotional labor. This suggests that employees in this age range, having more experience in the sector, develop emotional labor behaviors over time. Additionally, the results indicated significant variation across all research variables according to the establishments studied, with notable differences in perceptions within the same company group. This highlights the impact of management style on these variables.

Surprisingly, the highest levels of burnout were observed among technical department employees, which contrasts with existing literature suggesting that burnout is more prevalent among employees who interact directly with customers. This discrepancy warrants further investigation to understand the factors contributing to burnout in employees not working face-to-face with customers.

The study also found a significant negative effect of organizational climate on burnout ($\beta = -0.45$). This suggests that the organizational climate plays a crucial role in influencing burnout levels. In the accommodation sector, where employee performance directly affects customer satisfaction, high levels of burnout can lead to turnover, which is particularly concerning in industries that struggle to find qualified workers. Thus, fostering a positive organizational climate could help reduce burnout in these establishments.

Regarding emotional labor, two sub-dimensions were examined. Results showed that the organizational climate negatively impacted emotional conflict, while it positively influenced emotional effort. Emotional labor, which involves managing emotions following organizational and customer expectations, is vital in accommodation establishments. Positive emotional effort can enhance customer satisfaction, whereas emotional conflict, often linked to surface acting, can have negative consequences. Deep acting, on the other hand, helps align employees' emotions with the desired behaviors, thus reducing emotional dissonance. This aligns with existing literature [26, 27, 37], confirming the positive impact of organizational climate on emotional effort and the negative effect on emotional conflict. These results underline the importance of an organizational climate that meets employees' expectations, especially in accommodation settings, where emotional effort significantly impacts organizational outcomes.

The structural equation model developed to assess the mediation effect of emotional labor found that emotional labor partially mediated the relationship between organizational climate and burnout. Emotional conflict was found to exacerbate burnout, while a positive organizational climate reduced emotional conflict. Conversely, emotional effort was shown to mitigate burnout among employees.

Recommendations for practitioners

Managers in accommodation establishments should focus on identifying and addressing the root causes of burnout, as it can have serious consequences. The findings suggest that a favorable organizational climate can help reduce burnout, making the regulation of this climate a key strategy. Management should ensure clear communication of business goals and policies, define job roles and responsibilities, implement a reward and punishment system, provide support for employees, and foster a friendly work environment.

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