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Emotional Labor as A Mediator Between Organizational Climate And Burnout

Emily Parker[1]*, Michael Reed[1], Olivia Grant[1], Thomas Hughes[1]

1. Department of Behavioral Leadership, School of Business, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, United Kingdom.

Abstract

This research explored how emotional labor serves as a mediator in the relationship between organizational climate and burnout within accommodation establishments. To achieve this, a survey was administered across 19 five-star accommodation establishments located in Antalya, the city with the highest number of such facilities in Turkey. The study involved 976 participants in total, focusing on emotional labor as the mediating variable, which was analyzed through its specific sub-dimensions, and impact assessments were conducted accordingly. Descriptive statistics were processed using SPSS software, while structural equation modeling was performed with AMOS. The findings revealed a detrimental effect of organizational climate on burnout. Upon integrating emotional labor into the model, it was established that emotional effort and emotional conflict, two sub-dimensions of emotional labor, exert a partial mediating influence on how organizational climate affects burnout. Finally, the study concluded with practical and theoretical recommendations for both professionals and scholars.

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

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Corresponding author: Emily Parker
E-mail ✉ emily.parker@gmail.com

Introduction

Tourism plays a crucial role in national economies by generating substantial foreign exchange earnings and creating numerous employment opportunities. Despite its economic importance, the tourism sector experiences one of the highest rates of employee turnover. Skilled personnel who feel dissatisfied with their current workplace can easily seek employment elsewhere. Therefore, it is vital for management teams to actively track employees' views about their workplace and take appropriate steps to address any issues. Furthermore, Mumcu [1] highlights the necessity for organizations to pay special attention to staff who show discrepancies between their behaviors and work performance.

Within accommodation businesses, employees form distinct opinions about their organization, and these opinions directly influence the level of service quality provided. To maintain service excellence, managers must effectively steer their employees' organizational behavior. In addressing these concerns, the notion of organizational climate becomes particularly important [2]. This study focuses on examining the influence of organizational climate on burnout—a significant challenge for accommodation enterprises—while also investigating the mediating role played by emotional labor behavior in the service industry.

Conceptual framework

Organizational climate

The idea of organizational climate emerged between 1924 and 1930, when Elton Mayo and Fritz Roethlisberger led research at the Western Electric Hawthorne plant under Harvard University. Their study examined how psychological and social

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environments affected workers despite difficult physical conditions [3]. The earliest documented mention of social climates appears in the work of Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939), who experimentally explored group atmospheres among young men; however, they did not explicitly define "organizational climate." Fleishman [4] recognized a connection between leadership and climate but stopped short of defining the concept. The first formal definition is attributed to Argyris [5], who analyzed employees' personalities, needs, and values within a banking institution considering organizational policies [5, 6].

Definitions of organizational climate vary widely based on the researchers' perspectives. Initially, the concept was studied as employees' individual perceptions in industrial settings, focusing on how these perceptions affected organizations and their environments. Two main viewpoints have since evolved: the objectivist approach, which suggests that organizational attributes like size and structure shape collective perceptions, and the subjectivist approach, which argues that individual interpretations and personal traits influence how the organization is perceived collectively [7]. The core debate in defining organizational climate is whether it stems from employees' personal perceptions or from the intrinsic characteristics of the organization itself [8, 9]. Definitions vary accordingly.

Burnout

Burnout initially appeared as a social issue before entering academic discourse on organizational behavior. Several historical literary works describe experiences resembling burnout without naming it explicitly, including Shakespeare's The Passionate Pilgrim VII [10], Thomas Mann's Buddenbrooks [11], and Graham Greene's A Burnt-Out Case [12]. The earliest psychiatric article discussing burnout was written by Schwarz and Will (1953), who detailed the stages of burnout without formally defining the syndrome [10, 13–17].

Maslach, a leading figure in burnout research, defined it as a syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion and cynicism in human service professions [18]. In a subsequent study, she and Jackson described burnout as comprising emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment in individuals working closely with people [19, 20]. These components form the basis of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, a tool designed to assess burnout levels. Burnout develops gradually and stealthily, severely impacting both the professional and personal lives of workers [21]. Timely detection and intervention are therefore essential.

Emotional labor

Emotional labor refers to managing feelings deliberately to meet professional requirements. Hochschild introduced the concept during research on Delta Airlines stewardess training in the early 1980s [22], which she later elaborated in her book The Managed Heart. She illustrated how service workers, including flight attendants and debt collectors, regulate their emotions to affect customers' feelings [23]. Other studies have explored similar themes [24–27].

According to Hochschild, emotional labor involves managing visible emotional expressions, such as facial and bodily gestures, to conform to workplace expectations. She conceptualized emotional labor as a commodifiable skill that can be bought and sold, and identified two dimensions: surface acting (modifying outward expressions) and deep acting (modifying inner feelings) [23].

Relationships between research variables

Various studies have examined the interplay between the core variables, as presented in **Figure 1**. Research indicates a negative association between organizational climate and surface acting (a subtype of emotional labor), while a positive link exists between organizational climate and deep acting [28, 29]. Additionally, multiple studies have found that organizational climate negatively correlates with burnout. For example, Lavian [30] observed this negative relationship in schools; O'Driscoll and Schubert [31] reported similar findings in community service organizations; and Vallen [32] demonstrated the same in accommodation businesses. Regarding emotional labor and burnout, studies show that deep acting correlates negatively with burnout, whereas surface acting correlates positively [33, 34].

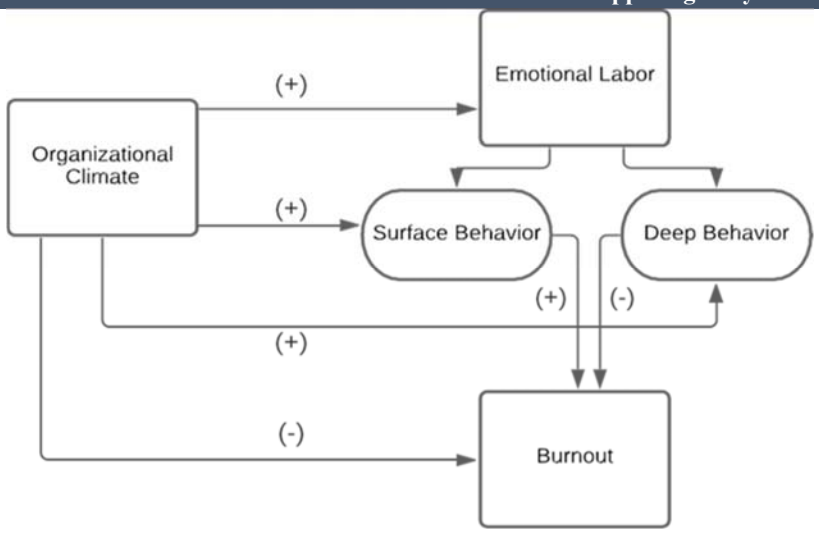

Figure 1. Relationships Between Research Variables Literature Model

Purpose and hypotheses of the research

In the highly competitive and labor-intensive tourism industry, the caliber of service delivered plays a pivotal role in shaping customer satisfaction. Employees are tasked with fulfilling both customer and organizational expectations. Achieving this, however, depends largely on meeting the needs of the workers themselves and fostering a supportive organizational climate. Staff members in accommodation facilities often face elevated burnout risks due to continuous direct interaction with customers and atypical working hours compared to other sectors. Unlike many fields, tourism requires significant emotional exertion to ensure customer satisfaction. For tourism enterprises to thrive, it is essential to monitor, regulate, and effectively manage these interrelated factors.

Against this backdrop, the primary aim of this study is to explore the mediating role of emotional labor within the relationship between organizational climate and burnout in accommodation settings. Additionally, the research seeks to establish a behavioral framework for accommodation providers by analyzing the interactions among these variables.

The hypotheses proposed for examination in this study include:

H1: Emotional effort mediates the relationship between organizational climate and burnout.

H2: Emotional contradiction serves as a mediator in the effect of organizational climate on burnout.

H3: Organizational climate significantly influences emotional conflict.

H4: Organizational climate significantly affects emotional effort.

H5: Organizational climate has a significant effect on burnout.

H6: Perceptions of research variables differ according to employee demographic characteristics.

Materials and Methods

The population targeted in this study consists of employees working at accommodation facilities throughout Turkey. The sample comprises employees from five-star accommodation establishments located in the Antalya region, chosen due to the high concentration of such facilities there. According to 2019 data from the Ministry of Tourism, Turkey hosts 4038 tourism business certificates, 723 tourism investment certificates, and 8104 municipally licensed tourism establishments. Among these, 847 are classified as five-star accommodations nationwide, with Antalya alone home to 407 five-star hotels and first-class resorts. Given the substantial workforce within these establishments, this group was selected for the study.

Data collection involved administering surveys via a random sampling method to employees across 19 five-star hotels. Out of 1200 distributed questionnaires, 1142 were returned. After excluding 166 incomplete or invalid responses, 976 surveys were included in the final analysis. Considering the scale of participation and number of establishments involved, this study represents one of the most extensive investigations in this field.

The research instrument comprised four sections: demographic data, organizational climate measurement items, burnout measurement items, and emotional labor measurement items. To assess employees' perceptions of organizational climate, the study utilized the scale developed by Koys and DeCotiis [35], which includes 15 items across five sub-dimensions. Burnout was measured using the Turkish adaptation of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, originally developed by Maslach and Jackson [18], consisting of 22 items covering three sub-dimensions. Emotional labor levels were evaluated through the scale designed by Chu and Murrmann [36] and validated in Turkish by Avcı and Boylu [37], which features 10 items divided into two sub-dimensions: emotional effort and emotional conflict. This study analyzed emotional labor through these two components.

During secondary-level confirmatory factor analysis, three items failed to meet the required factor loading threshold and were removed from the analysis. The confirmatory factor analysis for construct validity showed good model fit for the two-factor structure, with fit indices reported as $\chi^2/df = 4.2$, RMSEA = 0.069, NFI = 0.967, CFI = 0.972, and GFI = 0.980, all significant at $p < 0.01$. These indices fall within acceptable ranges for model fit ($\chi^2/df \leq 4$-5).

Data analyses were performed using IBM SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 20.0 software packages. SPSS was employed to conduct frequency analyses, t-tests, skewness and kurtosis tests, and one-way ANOVA, while AMOS was used for mediation analysis.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the interpretation of the data analyses. **Table 1** provides the demographic profile of the study participants.

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	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				

An analysis of **Table 1** reveals that female participants constitute 34.7% of the sample, while males make up 65.3%. The largest educational group among the respondents are high school graduates, accounting for 46.2%, and most employees fall within the 26 to 40 age range. In determining the survey participants, consideration was given to the number of employees working in various departments, with food and beverage, kitchen, and housekeeping departments having the highest staffing levels in accommodation operations, a distribution that is reflected in the survey data.

The reliability of the scales applied in the study was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with all results indicating acceptable internal consistency. Specifically, the organizational climate scale scored 0.796, burnout 0.852, overall emotional labor 0.699, emotional conflict sub-dimension 0.849, and emotional effort sub-dimension 0.622. Based on these findings, the burnout and emotional conflict scales exhibit high reliability, whereas the organizational climate and emotional effort scales demonstrate moderate reliability.

To identify significant variations in participants' perceptions of organizational variables across different demographic groups, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. The findings revealed that perceptions across all research variables varied significantly depending on the specific operations and departments represented. Additionally, differences emerged in organizational climate perceptions based on marital status, while age influenced perceptions related to emotional labor.

These outcomes provide support for the hypothesis H6: that perceptions of the research variables vary according to employee demographic characteristics.

In order to test the study's hypotheses, a structural equation model (SEM) was theoretically constructed using the observed variables approach. This model demonstrated strong fit indices, with $\chi^2/df = 3.942$, RMSEA = 0.052, NFI = 0.926, CFI = 0.962, and GFI = 0.960, all statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. The regression results indicated significant paths at $p < 0.001$, including a standardized estimate (β) of -0.445 (standard error = 0.030), reflecting a negative relationship. The SEM findings confirmed a significant inverse effect of organizational climate, the independent variable, on burnout, the dependent variable ($\beta = -0.45$), thereby supporting hypothesis H5: that organizational climate significantly influences burnout.

Subsequently, the mediating role of emotional labor was integrated into the model using the AMOS software. The finalized model incorporating mediation effects is illustrated in **Figure 2**.

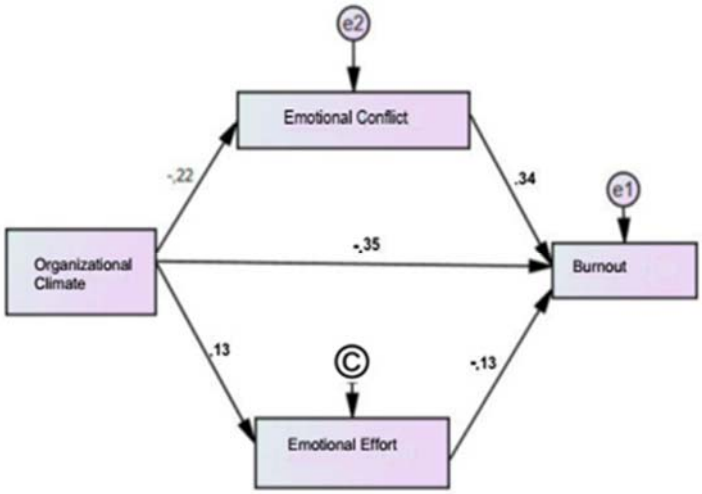

Figure 2. Research Model

Based on the fit indices presented in **Table 2** for the research model, the model demonstrates strong compliance with the expected goodness-of-fit criteria.

Table 2. Research Model Structural Equality Model Compliance Good Values

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

Through the model testing, the mediating roles of the emotional labor sub-dimensions within the research variables were identified. The path coefficients illustrating these relationships are detailed 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	,380	,089	4.250	,135	***
Emotional Conflict <--- Organizational Climate	,448	,063	-7.064	-,221	***
Burnout <--- Organizational Climate	-,371	,029	-12.965	-,353	***
Burnout <--- Emotional Effort	-,048	,010	-4.818	-,128	***
Burnout <--- Emotional Conflict	,177	,014	12.701	,342	***

The findings indicate that the independent variable, organizational climate, negatively influences emotional conflict (β: -0.22), confirming the hypothesis "H3: Organizational climate significantly affects emotional contradiction." Additionally, the hypothesis "H4: Organizational climate significantly influences emotional effort" is supported, as the data reveal a positive impact of organizational climate on emotional effort (β: 0.13). Following the calculation of regression weights between variables using the AMOS program, the relationships among the independent, dependent, and mediating variables were further examined, with the results of this effects analysis 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	-,353	-,093	-,445	-,221	-	-,221	,135	-	,135
Emotional Conflict	,342	-	,342	-	-	-	-	-	-

Emotional Effort	-,128	-	-,128	-	-	-	-	-	-

The model results examining the mediation effect revealed both a direct effect (β: -0.353) and an indirect effect (β: -0.093) between organizational climate and burnout. Additionally, direct effects were identified between the organizational climate and the mediator variables emotional effort (β: 0.135) and emotional conflict (β: -0.221). For mediation to be valid, a relationship must exist between the independent and dependent variables; without this, mediation cannot be established. Similarly, a connection must also be present between the independent variable and the mediator for mediation to occur. In mediation analyses, it is crucial to distinguish between full and partial mediation effects: full mediation occurs if, after including the mediator, the relationship between the independent and dependent variables weakens or becomes nonsignificant, indicating the mediator accounts for part of the effect [38]. The analysis suggests a partial mediation effect among the variables. Based on these findings, the hypotheses "H2: Emotional conflict mediates the relationship between organizational climate and burnout" and "H1: Emotional effort mediates the relationship between organizational climate and burnout" are supported. The significance of mediation effects can be assessed by various tests such as those by Aroian and Goodman, MacKinnon and Dwyer, or Sobel. In this study, the Sobel test was used to evaluate mediation significance, with results shown in **Table 5**, confirming 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 explored whether employees' perceptions of the research variables vary significantly based on their demographic characteristics. The results of t-tests and ANOVA indicated that single employees reported a higher perception of organizational climate compared to their married counterparts. One possible explanation is that married employees may expect greater respect and autonomy within their organizations due to their social roles. Given the typically autocratic organizational climate of accommodation businesses, where job roles and responsibilities are predefined and employee participation in decision-making is limited, married employees with family obligations might seek more responsibility and acknowledgment for their opinions. Emotional labor perceptions significantly differed between the age groups 17-25 and 26-32, with those in the 26-32 bracket exhibiting stronger emotional labor perceptions than younger employees just starting in the profession. This suggests that, over time, employees develop greater emotional labor skills, a reflection of sector-specific characteristics. The establishments analyzed represented various company groups, and significant differences emerged in employees' perceptions within the same company group, underscoring the influence of management style across all variables. Burnout was notably highest among employees in technical departments, a finding that contradicts existing literature, which typically associates burnout with frontline employees interacting directly with customers. This unexpected pattern calls for further investigation alongside other researchers.

The study confirmed a negative relationship (-0.45) between organizational climate and burnout, highlighting the substantial influence of organizational climate on burnout levels. Burnout poses a serious threat to businesses, especially in the accommodation sector, where service quality heavily depends on employee performance. Employees experiencing burnout can detrimentally impact customer satisfaction and may eventually leave their jobs, which presents a challenge for accommodation establishments already facing difficulties in recruiting qualified personnel. Therefore, enhancing the organizational climate through positive interventions could effectively reduce burnout levels.

Emotional labor was examined via two sub-dimensions in the study, revealing differing impacts. Organizational climate was found to negatively affect emotional conflict while positively influencing emotional effort. Emotional labor, defined as employees managing their emotions in line with customer and organizational expectations, plays a critical role in accommodation services. Proper emotional effort leads to beneficial outcomes such as increased customer satisfaction. Emotional labor manifests as surface acting and deep acting: surface acting often generates emotional conflict and adverse effects for employees, whereas deep acting aligns employees' emotions with required behaviors, mitigating emotional dissonance. Positive emotional effort, fostered by deep acting, benefits the organization and is the desired emotional labor approach. The findings on organizational climate's negative impact on emotional conflict and positive effect on emotional effort align with previous research [28, 29, 39], emphasizing how a well-structured organizational climate that meets employee expectations influences emotional labor in accommodation settings, where emotional effort is especially vital.

Structural equation modeling revealed that emotional labor partially mediates the relationship between organizational climate and burnout. Emotional conflict was shown to exacerbate burnout, while a positive organizational climate reduces emotional conflict's negative effects. Moreover, emotional effort was found to alleviate burnout among employees.

Recommendations for practitioners

Managers of accommodation establishments should actively identify and address factors contributing to burnout. The study's findings suggest that fostering an appropriate organizational climate is a crucial strategy to mitigate burnout. To achieve this, management should communicate business goals and policies clearly with employees, define job roles and responsibilities explicitly, implement effective reward and disciplinary systems, offer employee support, and cultivate a positive and collaborative work environment.

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