

---

Volume 5

---

2020

## Not All Job Stressors Are Harmful: The Role of Employees' Psychological Capital

Hyounae (Kelly) Min  
*California State Polytechnic University Pomona*

Hyun Jeong Kim  
*Washington State University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://via.library.depaul.edu/ichrie\\_rr](https://via.library.depaul.edu/ichrie_rr)



Part of the [Hospitality Administration and Management Commons](#), and the [Human Resources Management Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Min, Hyounae (Kelly) and Kim, Hyun Jeong (2020) "Not All Job Stressors Are Harmful: The Role of Employees' Psychological Capital," *ICHRIE Research Reports*: Vol. 5 , Article 1.  
Available at: [https://via.library.depaul.edu/ichrie\\_rr/vol5/iss1/1](https://via.library.depaul.edu/ichrie_rr/vol5/iss1/1)

This article is brought to you for free and open access by the International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education (ICHRIE). It has been accepted for inclusion in *ICHRIE Research Reports* by an authorized editor of DePaul University School of Hospitality Leadership. For more information, please contact [rr@depaul.edu](mailto:rr@depaul.edu). The compilation of the journal issue is copyrighted by ICHRIE, but authors retain the copyright for their article.

## **Not All Job Stressors Are Harmful: The Role of Employees' Psychological Capital**

### **Job stress in the hospitality industry**

Human resources are undoubtedly one of the most important assets for the hospitality industry (Tracey & Nathan, 2002). The success of a hospitality company is heavily affected by employees who have close contact with customers around the clock (Chan & Wan, 2012). However, long working hours, low pay, and demanding customers are known to increase hospitality employees' job stress (Pavesic & Brymer, 1990). Work stress makes employees feel less satisfied with their job, causing a high turnover rate in the hospitality industry. Thus, it is critical for hospitality practitioners to understand work-related stressors and aid employees in coping with their stress.

### **Are job stressors always harmful?**

Work-related demands are the major causes of job stress. Often called "stressors," they increase employees' psychological and/or physical strain. Traditionally, it is argued that organizations should strive to diminish work-related demands to alleviate employee stress. Recently, burnout scholars offer a different point of view. Although job demands generally increase the level of stress, some demands may help employees to grow and succeed in their workplace. For example, people with a high level of job responsibilities tend to be more fully engaged in their work, which in turn produce higher performance. A similar outcome is shown when employees are under time pressure. According to these observations, job demands are divided into two types: challenge vs. hindrance. Challenge stressors (e.g., time pressure, job responsibilities, and workload) are work-related demands or circumstances that can benefit employees with positive results. Employees often think that challenge stressors will bring them opportunities for learning and achievement (Yap & Tong, 2009). Hindrance stressors (e.g., hassles, politics, and role conflict), however, are work-related demands or circumstances that seemingly hurt any possible gains for employees.

### **Who will embrace challenge stressors?**

Are challenge stressors going to be equally beneficial to everyone? It depends. Individuals are inherently different. Some people believe in human strengths and positivity while others focus on weaknesses and negativity. The tendency to lean towards positivity and human strength is called “psychological capital”. People high in psychological capital are optimistic, confident, and resilient to failure. Through a survey of 232 hotel employees, we examined the role of psychological capital in the association between job stressors and employee burnout and engagement<sup>1</sup>. We found that employees who are high in psychological capital embrace challenge stressors as opportunities rather than simple, stressful situations. This positive mindset towards challenge stressors helps employees to concentrate on their work. At the same time, psychological capital reduces the feeling of job stress. People high in psychological capital experience much slower growth in stress when facing various types of job demands. In other words, they are more resilient to work stress.

### **Hiring and training**

Great service performance may be achieved by hiring those who have sought-after innate dispositions, such as extraversion or agreeableness (Kim, Shin, & Umbreit, 2007). Hospitality companies are in the people business. That is why hiring a right person with a right personality has been one of the essential human resources responsibilities. However, employees’ smile may slip soon after they encounter the tough realities of many stressful situations. As revealed in our study, employees with “psychological capital” respond to stressors in more optimistic, confident, and resilient ways. Unlike a personality trait that people are born with, psychological capital is a developable, state personality. Therefore, besides hiring hospitality-fit employees with suitable personality traits, management should consider offering official companywide training with appropriate activities in order to bolster their employees’ personal resource, “psychological capital”, and monitor the effectiveness of their training on a regular basis. Hospitality practitioners also should explicitly communicate with subordinates about possible benefits such as promotions when they successfully meet challenge stressors. This indicates

that hospitality companies must ensure that such promises or benefits are available to deserving employees.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>This research report is based on the study conducted by Min, Kim, and Lee (2015).

### References

- Chan, K.W., & Wan, E.W. (2012). How can stressed employees deliver better customer service? The underlying self-regulation depletion mechanism. *Journal of Marketing*, 76, 119–137.
- Kim, H. J., Shin, K., & Umbreit, T. (2007). Hotel job burnout: The role of personality characteristics. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 26(2), 423-434.
- Min, H., Kim, H. J., & Lee, S. B. (2015). Extending the challenge–hindrance stressor framework: The role of psychological capital. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 50, 105-114.
- Pavesic, D.V., & Brymer, R.A. (1990). Job satisfaction: what’s happening to the young managers? *The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 30, 90–96.
- Tracey, J.B., & Nathan, A.E. (2002). The strategic and operational roles of human resources an emerging model. *The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 43, 17–26.