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**A dynamic perspective of employee pride  
and its positive effects on commitment to  
customer service and fluctuation intention**

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# A DYNAMIC PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYEE PRIDE AND ITS POSITIVE EFFECTS ON COMMITMENT TO CUSTOMER SERVICE AND FLUCTUATION INTENTION

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## Abstract

Existing research indicates that service companies can benefit to a great extent from employee pride because it increases commitment to customer service as a precondition to achieve customer satisfaction. Besides, it is assumed that pride has a positive effect on fluctuation intention. Because of the fact that a lot of service industries, like the call center industry, suffer from great fluctuation the reduction of turnover behaviour can be seen as a central driver for business success. In consequence, the stimulation of employee pride is a vital source for improving the service performance and therefore a new objective for service-oriented human resource management.

All of the relevant studies dealing with employee pride focus on one of two possible understandings of pride. First, employees can feel short persistent affective emotions of pride based on the perception of a successful event which is triggered by their own or others' achievements. Second, employees can have a primarily cognitive and more durable attitude of pride based on the perception of the organization they are working for and/or of the job they are performing. These two concepts of pride are not detached from each other. Instead, causal effects are expected in the way that repeating pride emotions can extend to a pride referring to the organization or the profession in general and thus turning into a stable attitude.

In consequence, employee pride is not a static construct but a dynamic one changing over time. Thus, the aim of our paper is to investigate the two concepts of pride as well as their effects on commitment to customer service and fluctuation intention.

**Key words:** Pride emotions, organizational pride, job pride, commitment to customer service, fluctuation intention, Affective Events Theory (AET)

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

In the future, service companies' success will be even more dependent on the ability to create and to sustain long-term customer relationships. Because of this, many service organizations intend to differentiate themselves from competition by offering a high quality customer service. Since numerous services are generated through the interaction between service employees and customers, these company's long-term relationships highly depend on the company's personnel (Bowen & Lawler 1992) and its corresponding service orientation towards the customer (Arnett et al. 2002).

A high service orientation does not only result from the mere ability of offering a premium service. Instead the company's employees need to be motivated and prepared to engage in continuous improvement in order to demonstrate commitment to customer service (Peccei & Rosenthal 1997). A central driver of above-average employee motivation and a key differentiator from competition is employee pride (Katzenbach 2003a).

Furthermore, employee pride is supposed to positively increase employees' decision to stay with a company. Consequently, this is expected to negatively affect employees' fluctuation which in these days is a major challenge, especially within several service industries.

Even though several companies have already attributed a large degree of their sustained success to the high levels of their employee pride (Katzenbach & Santamaria 1999) the construct of "pride" is still a predominantly neglected factor in economic behaviour (Lea & Webley 1997, p.324). Until today this construct has not yet gained broad scientific attention. Many statements about pride can be characterized as being based more on intuition than grounded on empirical findings. According to several studies pride is characterized as a positive emotion. It has furthermore been described as an attitude.

Nevertheless, one has to state that a lot of researchers do not differentiate between pride as an emotion or attitude in their studies but simply refer to attitudes as emotions (Elfenbein 2007).

Hence, focusing on the two concepts of employee pride and its potential as a driving force of commitment to customer service and major inhibitor of fluctuation intention is an issue of managerial interest.

Therefore, in the following sections, the already named perspectives of employee pride are going to be addressed in more detail. Furthermore, they will be brought together into one model. In addition, the positive behavioural outcomes of pride will be presented. For this purpose propositions and the relevant theoretical model will be discussed. Finally, a brief description of the empirical study design will be provided. In conclusion, the paper is going to end with a short research outlook.

## ***THEORY AND PROPOSITIONS***

### **Emotional Pride**

Pride is in most cases defined as a positive emotion (Katzenbach 2003b) which can be described as a discrete and intense but short-lived mental experience (C. D. Fisher & Ashkanasy 2000). Usually, a specific stimulus object or event is required to cause an emotion (Basch & C. Fisher 2000). Emotions obviously show downstream consequences for attitudes, behaviours, and cognitions, as well as facial expressions and other emotionally expressive cues (Elfenbein 2007).

The three main components of emotions are arousal, valence and quality. Arousal refers to the existence of emotions without distinguishing between their different shapes. Valence describes the degree of attraction or aversion that an individual feels towards the stimulus object or event. The quality of emotion assists the individual to distinguish between emotions (Is the felt emotion pride, happiness or something else?).

In general, one differentiates between primary and secondary emotions. Primary emotions, such as fear, joy, sadness or anger, are grounded instinctually and most are likely genetically conditioned. Pride emotions are assigned to the group of secondary or self-conscious emotions (SCEs). In comparison to primary emotions SCEs (such as shame, guilt and embarrassment) emerge under different and more complex conditions.

Individuals experience pride emotions if they meet or exceed social standards and expectation (Lewis 2000). The causing stimulus object eliciting a pride emotion can be one's own or others' achievement/performance.

Consequently, the development of the pride emotion, as with SCEs in general, requires that individuals be able to see themselves as single entities distinct from other people, a capacity referred to as self-evaluation. This cognitive ability develops in most human beings between the second and fourth year of childhood. Furthermore, the formation of the pride emotion implies that individuals develop as well as internalize certain standards, rules and goals. Originating from the individuals' culture and/or own values they serve as principles of comparison. One can conclude that there are no general rules of behaviour causing the experience of a specific SCE such as the pride emotion. The evaluation of SCE causing events highly varies from individual to individual (Lewis 2000, p.623).

The individual's self-evaluative capacity allows to reflect upon achievements and to ascribe performances to own personal capabilities and efforts. The principle of referring achievements to own performances is called internal attribution (Weiner 1985).

Furthermore, it is possible that a pride emotion elicits by the achievements of close reference persons or objects (Katzenbach 2003b). Precondition for this is the individual's strong need for relatedness towards another person, group or organisation (Gold 1982) as well as the individual's pride of the reference person's or object's achievement. The phenomenon of an individual's pride emotion elicited by another person's or reference group's achievement, as distinct originator, is also called external attribution (Weiner 1985).

In the work context, emotions have been, and in many places they still are, kept out of organizations. The common slogan representing this position is: "It's not personal. It's business. Don't be emotional" (Rafaeli & Worline 2001).

Nevertheless, in work life pride is characterized as one of the most intensively felt emotions. Employee pride especially emerges if a specific job performance is evaluated as success and furthermore contributed to internal abilities and efforts (Katzenbach 2003b).

Thus, the initial trigger responsible for the experience of pride is a cognitive comparison between one's actual achievement and one's previous expectations of how the task should be fulfilled correctly. The experienced success, as a specific stimulating event, in turn activates pride emotions and also goes along with a positive sense of self-worth (Eccles & Wigfield 2002). Hence, according to the principle of external attribution, employees can be proud of the achievements of their colleagues, their working group or the company in general.

The intensity of experienced pride depends on a frame of reference against which the event is assessed. This frame can be made up of own expectations or of another reference person (Frijda 2007). Nevertheless, research indicates that pride emotions are of stronger intensity if perceptions of high individual achievement are compared with those of other reference persons such as colleagues (Webster et al. 2003).

In the work context, the pride is grounded in the employees' inner impulse to offer high quality products or services. According to a study carried out by Gouthier and Walter continuous service improvement could be identified as important source of pride (Gouthier & Walter 2006).

The lasting of pride emotions, as with all emotions, is relatively short (C. D. Fisher & Ashkanasy 2000). If employees are staying in the same company for a certain period of time, pride emotions in the workplace can be experienced not only uniquely but repeatedly.

In the work context, there have been made first attempts to analyze the downstream consequences of pride. In this sense, it could be proven that pride emotions have an effect on work attitudes (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996). Furthermore, pride emotions have been identified to directly result in externally visible behaviours (Elfenbein 2007). It was shown that pride emotions increase the commitment to customer service as affect-driven behaviour (Gouthier & Walter 2006).

### **Attitudinal pride**

In addition to the definition of pride as an emotion, one can distinguish a further concept of positive employee pride which is not covered by the previously presented understanding (Lea & Webley 1997).

Both, organization science and practice primarily conceive employee pride less as an emotion but more as a construct which is grounded in an employee's membership of a certain group (Arnett et al. 2002). In order to experience this type of pride the evaluation of a certain achievement or performance as stimulus object is of minor importance. This pride construct is detached from single achievements. Consequently, the emotional understanding of pride, as mentioned above, does not seem to be valid in order to adequately depict this form of employee pride. Instead, an attitudinal understanding of employee pride towards a reference group or object is necessary.

Attitudes are described as psychological tendencies that result from the evaluation of a certain person or object with some degree of either favour or disfavour (Eagly & Chaiken 1998). In the case of organizational pride, it is assumed that the individual has a high degree of favour towards the company.

A typical characteristic of attitudes is that they result from experiences. Furthermore, attitudes are learnable and are, in comparison to mere emotions, relatively long-lasting (Fairfield & Wagner 2004). In contrast to pride emotions, attitudinal pride can be characterized as a collective pride resulting from the employees' need for affiliation to a specific group, such as the organization (Lea & Webley 1997). Consequently, employees can have a pride attitude towards the company they are

working for in the sense of an organizational pride. Concurrently, employees can be proud of their profession in general in terms of job pride.

Job pride does not only depend on the learned profession. It also depends on further aspects, such as the possibility of further training, the position within the company. Furthermore, job pride is determined by the perception of how employees perceive their contribution within the manufacturing or service process (Tope et al. 2005).

According to current literature, organizational pride is primarily based on external determinants which are not directly related to the individuals' own contributions but which help the company to successfully differentiate itself from competition (Böhm 2008). In this sense, several external aspects encouraging the employees' organizational pride can be identified. One of the potential pride sources can be seen in a successful company history. Besides past achievements organizational pride can also be based on present and future outcomes. An employees' consciousness about the company's key competences, current business fields and extraordinary services can also be named as key drivers of pride. Furthermore, economic characteristics such as market position, company growth, image as well as the enterprises' brands are potential sources of organizational pride. In addition, the company's culture, values, traditions and code of conduct form other pride activators (Böhm 2008). The management's leadership style presents another precondition affecting employees' identification with and pride of the company (Katzenbach 2003b). The creation of a challenging and varied work environment does also positively contribute to organizational pride (Howell 1966).

According to Katzenbach and Santamaria, organizational pride impacts employee commitment towards the organization. In turn, the increased commitment is contributing to the achievement of company objectives (Allen & Meyer 1990).

## **Interactions between emotional and attitudinal pride on the basis of the Affective Events Theory (AET)**

After considering emotional and attitudinal pride as well as their varying preconditions, the question is raised how the two dimensions can be brought together.

It is assumed that the two types of employee pride are no contrary or mutually exclusive concepts. Instead, both perspectives seem to be highly connected with each other. A basis for this assumption seems to be the already mentioned fact, that emotions have downstream consequences for attitudes. Furthermore, since attitudes result from the evaluation of a person or object with a certain degree of favour or disagree, attitudes are by definition connected with emotions. Concretely, the emotional dimension of valence, the association with an object, seems to underline the interrelation between emotional and attitudinal pride (Elfenbein 2007).

In this sense it is supposed that attitudinal pride can be the result of repeated pride emotions over time.

Pride emotions attributed to specific achievements, resulting from either own performances or that of close reference persons can extend to a rather generalized feeling of pride referring to the work in general but also to the entire organization (Frese 1990).

More precisely, it is assumed that pride emotions resulting from external attribution are contributing to the development of an attitude in the sense of an organizational pride.

Furthermore, it is expected that short persistent pride emotions resulting from internal attribution have the potential to strengthen themselves and turn into a further type of attitudinal pride, namely job pride, referring to the work in general and in the sense of one's own profession.

Consequently, single job events should not be evaluated in isolation from each other and past pride emotions may play an important role. It is assumed that employee



work events. Experiencing such events is likely to result in the sudden appearance of positive or negative emotions (Basch & C. Fisher 2000). Both, work environment features as well as work emotions directly affect employees' work attitudes. A typical work attitude considered in this model has been the overall job satisfaction which is based on a comparison of the actual and expected work environment (Smith et al. 1992). Furthermore, work emotions have a direct influence on affect-driven behaviours whereas work attitudes impact judgment-driven behaviours (Wegge et al. 2006).

Judgment-driven behaviours can be characterized as employees' cognitive decisions, such as intentional absenteeism from work. Affect-driven behaviours such as employees' problem-solving behaviour towards colleagues or customers as well as acting of good or bad citizenship are directly motivated through emotional experiences (Wegge et al. 2006). In sum, one can conclude that the AET unifies emotional and attitudinal dimensions of human work behaviour. Emotions are considered to be a mediating mechanism by which stable features of the work environment impact work attitudes and behaviour (C. D. Fisher & Ashkanasy 2000).

According to AET, the occurrence of emotions is influenced by employees' individual dispositions (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996) and therefore depends on the individuals' beliefs about their competence and efficacy. In this sense, the concept of self-efficacy might play an important role. In the work context, self-efficacy would refer to employees' confidence in their ability to fulfil their work such as to organize and accomplish a given course of action to solve a problem or execute a task. Consequently, people with a strong sense of self-efficacy have the belief that they can deal with complex situations and fulfil the most difficult tasks. Employees with a weak sense of efficacy in turn do not believe in their efficacy to a great extent. Accordingly, they think that they can only deal with easier tasks (Bandura 1997). However, even though personal dispositions, such as the employees' self-efficacy, might play a considerable role in experiencing pride they are not going to be considered in this study.

The AET has already been applied to emotional pride of service employees elicited by internal attribution and its effect on job satisfaction under the retention of the

models' fundamental components and causal relationships. Employees' autonomy turned out to be one the most important work environment features in services (Gouthier & Walter 2006). If employees are allowed to work within an increased scope of action the possibility of contributing a successful performance to their own abilities and efforts is increased. Furthermore, the employee's participation as well as the supervisor's and team's support could be identified as further environment features provoking the occurrence of pride producing work events. Several work events were identified which result in emotional pride such as the supervisors' and customers' recognition or perceived success resulting from one's performance (Gouthier 2006). Moreover, the AET's adaptation to pride emotions proved its direct impact on job satisfaction as work attitude. In this context, job satisfaction in turn was determined as a significant influencer of judgment-driven behaviours such as fluctuation, intentional absence from work and average performance. Pride emotions were also identified to directly increase the commitment to customer service as affect-driven behaviour (Gouthier & Walter 2006).

Consequently, the AET's causality between affective reactions and work attitudes, using the example of emotional pride and job satisfaction, serves as a basis for the following investigation. Pride emotions, based on internal and external attribution, as affective reactions will be linked together with employees' attitudinal pride, namely organizational and job pride, as an additional work attitude. As a result, the following proposition can be alleged:

*Proposition 1a: Repeating pride emotions ascribed to own achievements are assumed to expand thereby encouraging the development of the work attitude job pride.*

*Proposition 1b: Repeating pride emotions ascribed to the achievements of close reference persons or objects are expected to expand thereby triggering the work attitude organizational pride.*

## **Commitment to customer service**

According to the broaden and built theory positive emotions, such as pride, have the potential to expand employees' thought-action repertoires, encouraging them to consider a wider range of thoughts and actions that is typical (Fredrickson 2001). Pride emotions can contribute to the employees' open-mindedness for absorbing new information and thus lead to the further absorption and deepening of know-how (Fredrickson 1998). Extended thought-action repertoires due to pride emotions can cause an employees' inner attempt to offer a high customer service (Arnett et al. 2002). Therefore, one can conclude that pride employees are resulting in an enhanced commitment to customer service. It is the "relative propensity of an individual to engage in continuous improvement and to exert effort on the job for the benefit of customers" (Peccei & Rosenthal 1997). Employees committing themselves to their customers strive for the provision of a high-quality service as an important work goal. From an affective perspective, commitment to customer service does not involve that employees act from a calculative approach. Instead, they are voluntarily improving and making efforts on behalf of their own wish because they perceive serving customers as a satisfying experience (Peccei & Rosenthal 1997). Consequently, the concept of commitment to customer service presents a major concept of interest for service companies in order to secure high service quality and thus to stabilize long-term customer relationships.

Therefore, another proposition can be devised:

*Proposition 2a: Pride emotions elicited by own achievements influence the commitment to customer service of the service personnel.*

Furthermore, it is expected that pride emotions elicited by achievements of other reference persons or the company might positively contribute to the commitment to customer service. Because of the sense of belongingness the company and its achievements become part of the employee's self-esteem.

That is why one can assume:

*Proposition 2b: Pride emotions ascribed to the achievements of close reference persons or objects influence the commitment to customer service of the service personnel.*

According to AET, there is no direct causal effect of work attitudes on affect-driven behaviours. Nevertheless, since organizational pride and job pride are supposed to be affected by pride emotions, it is expected that there will be a direct impact of both constructs of attitudinal pride on the commitment to customer service. This assumption leads to the original model's amplification by an additional path, from work attitude to affect-driven behaviour. In contrast to AET, this assumption results in the following proposition:

*Proposition 3a: Organizational pride as work attitude influences the commitment to customer service of the service personnel.*

*Proposition 3b: Job pride as work attitude influences the commitment to customer service of the service personnel.*

### **Fluctuation intention**

In these days, a lot of service companies, such as call centre companies, are facing fluctuation as one of their major managerial problems. Fluctuation usually goes along with added costs as resulting vacancies have to be filled again. Quite often these costs originate from the recruiting of new personnel and the required on-the-job training (Mukherjee & Maihotra 2006). Furthermore, the resulting understaffed situation is causing stress to the remaining colleagues (Hacker 2003). Consequently, companies are seeking new ways of ensuring employees' affiliation to the organization. Attitudinal pride as a stable and long-term construct is, as job satisfaction, assumed to have a negative effect on fluctuation intention. The intention of leaving the organization is less affectively influenced. Due to extreme implications related to the change of job fluctuation, an employees' intent to leave an organization

can be described as a cautious and strongly cognitive decision (C. D. Fisher 2002). Consequently, if employees are proud to be part of the organization then this positive work attitude negatively influences judgement-driven behaviours such as fluctuation intention. It is therefore assumed that:

*Proposition 4a: Organizational pride has an impact on fluctuation intention.*

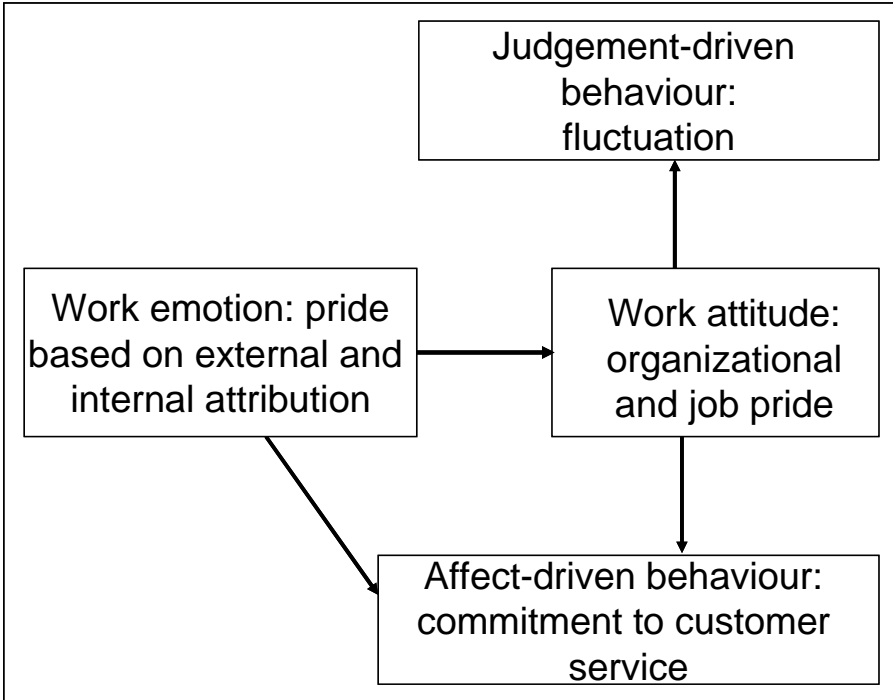
*Proposition 4b: Job pride has an impact on fluctuation intention.*

It is not expected that the job pride also negatively contributes to the intention to quit the company since this attitude seems to be, at least to a great extent, detached from the belongingness to the own organization but rather related to the own professional group.

**RESEARCH MODEL AND STUDY DESIGN**

Referring to our propositions the AET has been modified and an adapted research model, which is concentrated on emotional and attitudinal pride, was developed.

Figure 2: Research model



Source: own consideration according Weiss and Cropanzano (1996)

Based on literature review and the operationalization of pride according to the AET the empirical survey design has been developed. A longitudinal panel study has started at the beginning of February 2010 respectively. For this, an online questionnaire has been completed by 1117 employees. The sample is exclusively composed of service employees in Germany without any leadership responsibilities. The respondents are coming from different branches of industry. During our attendance at the 11th International Research Seminar in Service Management we would like to present the results of the first wave of investigation and thus to talk about the causal effect that pride emotions have on attitudinal pride. Furthermore, we are interested in the effects of both types of pride on commitment to customer service and fluctuation intention.

### ***RESEARCH OUTLOOK***

The dynamic interactions between pride emotions and attitudinal pride are going to be tested with the help of an annual longitudinal panel study. Within one year there are going to be six waves of investigations at intervals of two months. The survey intends to approach a representative amount of employees. In total it is expected that at least 200 respondents will take part in all 6 waves. In sum, our empirical study is supposed to be the first that investigates the interactions between the emotional and the attitudinal pride perceptions. Furthermore, it is the first study that makes an attempt to explore the different concepts over time.

From the analysis of the different waves according to the latest research methods, it is expected to finally deduce recommendations about the interference and maintenance of emotional and attitudinal employee pride in order to provide researchers and practitioners with a comprehensive framework.

Subsequent to this research project, it would be also important to turn the attention to the analysis of false pride, also called hybris.

Even though, several academic disciplines and business practice have regarded pride as a positive rather than a negative quality, social psychology indicates that if there is an origin for proper pride, there is also the basis given for false pride.

Consequently, one has to distinguish between proper pride associated with genuine achievements and false pride, also called hybris. Pride, in the sense of hybris, is comparable to vanity or conceit and used to be one of the traditional Seven Deadly Sins (Lea & Webley 1997, p.323).

Hybris can be described as the result of an inaccurate perception of one's own performances or responsibilities since perceived successes are not ascribed to specific achievements or efforts but to the person in general. The individual perceives the total self as successful. Consequently, hybris results in a global attribution which is in turn likely to lead to erroneous or apparently irrational decisions. False pride is causing interpersonal conflicts since other people perceive individuals having hybris with certain disrespect (Lewis 2000).

Since this construct has received only little attention it would be interesting to find out if there is the danger of proper pride to turn into false pride.

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