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# Emotional Exhaustion and Company Culture

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Emotional Exhaustion and Company Culture

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## **Primary Research Methods**

The focus of the primary research portion of this project was to answer the question, “How do people within the retail sector feel about their jobs and the work environment they are in?” To answer this question, the primary research focused on emotional exhaustion and company culture, both of which were heavily researched for the Secondary Research portion of the project. Emotional exhaustion was shown to have the highest correlation to turnover intentions. In addition, some company cultures are shown to be more effective than others, causing different employee reactions. To gather data about company culture, the Competing Values Framework was used to see which culture was most effective in a retail environment.

To gather information regarding these topics, a survey was created through Qualtrics. From March 20 to April 10, the survey was given to a wide variety of individuals, as well as some employees of Sherwin-Williams. This allowed for insight to be gathered from various companies and allowed us to compare the retail survey responses to the overall survey responses. The survey consisted of three main sections: demographics, emotional exhaustion, and company culture. The demographics section sought to find information about the survey participant, by asking questions about their gender, age range, place of employment, position at their company, and full-time/part-time status. The next section was focused on emotional exhaustion. In this portion of the survey, the participant was asked questions to gauge how they felt about going into work every day and if they feel like their work is valued. In addition, they were asked open-ended questions regarding what ways their work experience could be improved and how they heard about employment opportunities at their company. Lastly, survey participants were questioned about their company culture. The questions in this section were gathered from an online survey by OCAI online (Bremer, 2017). The goal of these questions was to determine

what culture currently exists at the organization, compared to what culture the employee desires for their company.

To gather more primary research, a focus group was formed to determine the opinions of fellow students. The focus group was held on April 16th for a one-hour session in Bierce Library. Several questions were asked of the participants to create conversation. Some of the questions asked included how the participants felt about sales positions, competitive work environments, relocation during the first two years of employment, and being assigned a job in a retail store. The participants were then asked how the possibility of an employer paying for continuing education factor into their decision when searching for their career. By listening to all of the students in this focus group we were able to draw conclusions about what the average college student thinks about these various topics.

### **Statistical Testing of Data Collected**

Data was exported from Qualtrics into an Excel file. The data was first cleaned of any unusable data. Unusable data consisted of any respondent who was under the age of 18 and who filled out the survey completely. The data was then gathered and sorted to look for any trends in the areas of emotional exhaustion in relation to culture or age range. The data from the excel file was then moved into Jmp Pro, a statistical software. The tests that were ran include: general distributions, contingency analysis, and multiple regression models.

### **Primary Research Findings**

To begin the survey analysis, the team looked at some demographics. We measured gender and age as our demographics. The survey respondents were majority female. This is to be expected as the surveys primary distribution was to social media. "Facebook users are predominantly female, with 83% of internet users who are women and 75% of internet users who

are men active on the social networking site” (Charello, 2018). This was actively represented by survey participants who were 72% female. In regards to age, the hope was to receive the majority of feedback from the primary group of individuals that Sherwin Williams would ideally be recruiting, ages 18-24. This age group is the age group that would be ideal candidates for the Management Training Program as they are either in college or freshly out of college and looking for that full time position. This age group made up 62% of survey respondents.

The survey respondents were also asked what position they held at their current job. The majority of survey respondents were in lower level jobs such as interns, sales associates, and assistants. This was beneficial to the primary research because it showed the amount of emotional exhaustion and the desired culture for the target age. Lastly, the participants were asked if they were full time or part-time. The majority of the respondents were part-time which also makes sense because the target age group is just starting to look for full-time work.

A series of contingency models were conducted to determine any differences between individuals working in retail compared to other industries. There was a nearly identical percentage of individuals between all industries working full-time and part-time; 46.15% full-time and 53.85% part-time in retail, and 46.65% full-time and 54.35% part-time in other industries. Responses differed a bit when individuals were asked if they had worked a different position with their current company. 61.5% of individuals in retail had, compared to 31.52% of individuals in other industries. The last contingency model dealing with demographics was to determine any differences in individuals’ planned length of stay at their current company. There was nearly a 5% differential in the category of five (5) or more years, retail being slightly higher.

Next in the survey, was a section that focused on the emotional exhaustion of individuals. Responses were assigned numerical values numbering one (1) through five (5). An average

response of 3.5 or higher was determined to be a “Yes” response. A contingency analysis was conducted to determine the difference in emotional exhaustion of individuals that worked in retail specifically compared to other industries. It was found that only 7.69% of retail workers had a positive response overall, as opposed to the 10.87% of other industries. That should not be taken entirely at face value; however, because retail workers had an average score of 2.5 compared to a score of 2.167 for other industries. Overall, there was very little difference in levels of emotional exhaustion between retail workers and any other industry. This is contrary to the common stigma associated with retail.

Following the emotional exhaustion portion, there was then a section of the survey asking individuals how they perceive certain aspects of their work environment to be, followed by a corresponding section of the survey asking individuals how they thought those same aspects of the environment should be. Responses between the two sections were compared and a numerical value of two (2) was assigned if the responses were the same (In agreement), and a numerical value of one (1) was assigned if the responses were different (Disagreement). An average score of 1.5 or higher was considered to be a “Yes” response indicating agreement with the work environment. It was found that only 23.1% of individuals agree with their current work environment, compared to a 28.26% level of agreement among other industries. The retail industry had an average score of 1.2. Other industries had an average score of 1.4. Overall, there was very little difference between retail and any other industry in terms of satisfaction with the work environment.

The first question dealing with the work environment asked was what the individual felt their organization was like. Answer choices ranged from very personal and like an extended family to very controlled and structured. The majority of survey participants, at 43 percent, felt

that their company was like an extended family and very personal. Likewise, this was the most popular answer for how they preferred their company to be, at 66 percent of survey responses. This answer aligned with the Clan type culture. Next, survey respondents were asked what they believed their current leadership exemplified. The most common answer was “mentoring, facilitating, and nurturing,” with 40 percent of all responses. This was the most preferred answer, as well, at 54 percent. Again, this answer aligned with a Clan culture.

Most of the survey respondents felt that the management style of their organization would be categorized by teamwork, consensus, and participation, rather than other answer choices like individual risk-taking or competitiveness. In addition, this was the most common answer for what they preferred the management style to be categorized as, with 65 percent choosing this category. Like the prior questions, this aligned with the Clan type culture. When asked what survey respondents felt there was an emphasis on in their organization, two answers represented the majority at 34 percent each. Some survey respondents felt like there was an emphasis on achievement and goal accomplishment, which would align with the Market culture. While others felt the emphasis was on loyalty, mutual trust, and high commitment to the organization, which aligned with the Clan culture.

The next question was about what the individual felt their company emphasized in general. Forty-five percent of respondents felt this emphasis was on performance, stability, efficiency, control, and smooth operations, which fell under the Hierarchy category of company culture. However, the most preferred answer, at 53 percent, was having an emphasis on human development with high trust, openness, and participation, aligning with the Clan culture. Last, survey respondents were asked about how they believed the organization defined success. The answer for how the organization actually defined success (40 percent) versus how they preferred

the organization to define success (54 percent) were both development of human resources, teamwork, employee commitment, and concern for people. This, like many of the other answers, aligned with Clan culture.

The second type of primary research we completed was a focus group. The students that participated in our focus group varied in age and major. Some of the areas the students were studying consisted of marketing, accounting, biology, environmental studies, and more. Many of the students that participated in the focus group had some sort of retail experience. We started off the focus group by asking questions about sales positions and how the students would feel about working in a sales position. Many of the students were uncomfortable with sales positions, especially those that were paid based on commissions. Once they were told that the sales position was salary they were more accepting of it, however, most of them still felt as though a sales position was not something they would be interested in.

We then went on and asked them about what they are looking for in a work environment. All of the students preferred a team-oriented, inclusive work environment that had good communication. The type of work environment they described was a Clan culture. This finding aligned with what we found in the survey. Next, we asked them what they thought about working in retail right after graduating from college. Many of the students saw this as taking a step back, however, when we mentioned retail management they were more accepting of the possibility. The students said that they would consider a job in retail management as long as there was room to grow and potential for promotions quickly. Many students said that the retail management job would not be their first choice if they were presented with job opportunities in their field of study.

After asking questions about the retail positions we started asking the students questions about different company perks/resources such as tuition reimbursement, company training, and flexible scheduling. We wanted to know how important these company resources are to students who are looking for full-time jobs after they graduate. All of them felt as though tuition reimbursement and company training were extremely important. These company resources show that the firm is willing to invest in their employees and allow them to further their education so they will be more equipped for the future. Some students said that when a company offers tuition reimbursement and company training it is worth just as much as getting extra money such as additional salary or bonus. For the flexible scheduling, many students liked the idea that a company might offer this, but they didn't expect to be able to have a flexible schedule or to work from home since they are in entry-level positions. Many felt that you have to learn how to do your job at work before you can do your job at home.

The last thing we asked the students about, was what was the most important thing to have in a job. All of the students felt that it was extremely important that they feel valued in the workplace. They said if they were feeling valued that they might leave the firm. Based on all of these answers we were able to see that graduating students are looking for Clan type cultures at firms. Also, they responded positively to retail management positions and felt as though this was a viable career path to take after college if a student is interested.

### **Discussion and Implications of Findings**

The secondary research that drove the primary research presented emotional exhaustion as a constant and significant factor in the retail industry. The primary research was expected to prove this as well. The primary research, however, did not show a significant amount of emotional exhaustion within the retail industry. The retail industry, in the participants surveyed,

had almost no amount of emotional exhaustion. Therefore, the primary research concludes that emotional exhaustion does not exist in a significant amount within the retail industry.

When analyzing the findings of the company culture portion of the survey, it was found that most employees prefer to have a Clan type culture in their workplace environment. Therefore, they want an organization that puts an emphasis on concern, commitment, morale, empowerment, and teamwork. The few employees surveyed with a job in the retail sector responded that their current company cultures would fall under the Hierarchy category, while they preferred the culture to be more like a Clan culture.

### **Limitations of Research**

When completing the primary research, there were certain limitations that we faced. The first limitation that we faced was the time restriction. We were given one semester to finish the primary research and seeing that we only had a limited amount of time to gather results from surveys and the focus group, our sample size was not as large as it could have been if we would have had more time. Another factor contributing to the time limitation is that everyone in the group was either taking a full class load or in an internship, making it hard to find time to be able to gather the necessary data.

Going along with the time limitation, a second limitation was the region in which we were able to collect data. Seeing as though we only had a limited amount of time, we decided to limit the region in which we would conduct our research, that area being Northeast Ohio. This limitation did not apply to surveys taken through social media. However, the number of responses that we received through social media was a very small percent compared to the responses coming from respondents in the Northeast Ohio region. We are aware that we may

have had different responses had we been able to survey different locations, such as more rural areas or even areas with different weather patterns or geographical features.

Another limitation we had was the number of resources we were limited to. There were only 5 of us in the group and we were given \$500 to conduct our research. Had we had more people to pass out and spread the survey, we would have been able to gather more responses. If we had more money available, we might have been able to pay for more responses or hire people to collect responses. In addition, we would have been able to offer more incentives for people that participated in our focus group(s) and surveys.

The last major limitation for this project was the ever-changing contact and project questions from Sherwin-Williams. Throughout both the fall and spring semester, our contacts for Sherwin-Williams changed. As the contacts changed, so did the scope of the project. Overall, it was a little difficult to get a good grip on exactly what the firm was looking for, so some of our research we did during the fall semester did not exactly align with what they said they were looking for during the spring semester. Even with this limitation, our group did the best we could and tried to cover all areas of the project on a broad level in order to answer the various questions the Sherwin-Williams contacts posed to us.

### **Alternative Solutions**

An alternative, to the research presented in this paper, Sherwin-Williams could focus on their non-degreed employees. While Sherwin-Williams already has a program to teach and train non-degreed employees, they could work on promoting this program better. They could do a survey to see how many non-degreed employees actually know about the program. If the program does not have good awareness, Sherwin can start an internal marketing campaign to help raise awareness about the advancement programs for non-degreed workers. Another

possibility is that workers may know about the program but not feel that it is accessible. This can also be a problem that is fixed with marketing. Sherwin can change how the non-degreed management program is perceived by workers. This may be by bringing in graduates of the program to make the program feel more personable or even by changing the wording of the program's description.

### **Recommendations and Action Steps**

The first recommendation for Sherwin-Williams is to survey employees and see if results come close to what we had found in our primary research. This survey should include questions about emotional exhaustion to see if more Sherwin-Williams employees experience this than was found in our project. In addition, include questions to find out if the current company culture is preferred by employees. It may be necessary to change or include certain demographic questions. For example, different regions may experience a higher rate of emotional exhaustion or prefer a different type of company culture. Thus, a question about what Sherwin-Williams location the employee works at may be beneficial to ask. Sherwin-Williams could use the survey we created for the project or utilize a third-party or consulting agency to create the survey, analyze the results, and report the findings. By doing this survey Sherwin-Williams will be able to see what the current company culture looks like and what their employees would prefer it to be, and they will be able to see which employee positions and regions tend to have the most emotional exhaustion. Based on these answers they will be able to move forward and make adjustments to their firm's strategy.

The second recommendation deals with how the job is described. Sherwin-Williams should look into not necessarily describing the job as a retail position. Sherwin-Williams stores do not have the typical retail feel - employees mainly work with a small crew. Additionally, the

customers that come into the stores are not the ones that normally come to mind when the word “retail” is brought up. Sherwin-Williams customers are primarily contractors and individuals doing self-repairs. Instead of calling the job a retail position, it could be called “Management Development,” or something of the sort. As the focus group showed, individuals are much more willing to go into the retail industry when the management aspect is emphasized. Retail management was not seen as much of a step back and brought to light the ability to move up through such a position.

### **Future Research**

In terms of future research, we believe that it would be a good idea for Sherwin-Williams to conduct a similar survey to the one we created but on a much larger scale and changing the demographics questions to better suit their needs. As far as future secondary research goes, it is not necessary to continue this research, seeing that it was done for background information to help guide the primary research and they would only find similar data to what we already found. If Sherwin-Williams wanted to go a different route, straying away from things like recruitment and retention, then it would be necessary for future secondary research. It may also be necessary for Sherwin-Williams to do primary research that supplements the survey, such as focus groups or even just asking managers to figure out what it is that makes an employee stay with the company through talks with their employees. There are many routes Sherwin-Williams can take and one is not necessarily better than the other. However, we believe that they will be headed in the right direction with the help of our research and their continued research.

## Works Cited

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