Linking Concepts of Playfulness and Wellbeing at Work in Retail Sector

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Abstract

This conceptual article discusses the roles of playfulness and well-being at work in the retail sector with a specific emphasis on service encounters. The aim is to create a new conceptual framework to enhance research on how the element of playfulness can be part of an employee's working environment in the retail sector, and to discuss how playfulness could enhance employee's well-being at work. The framework identifies various interactive relationships characteristic to the retail environment. Furthermore, the application of playfulness in these relationships is discussed from the viewpoint of well-being at work. The framework provides a solid basis for further research to produce results with practical implications.

Keywords: *Playfulness, humor, employee well-being, work systems theory, retailing, service encounter, scoping review, critical review*

1. Introduction

Organizations have become increasingly aware of the positive implications of promoting well-being at work. Well-being at work is a concept that can be associated with various aspects of workplace health promotion (Anttonen and Vainio, 2010). In this study we consider well-being at work as a holistic construct that relates to organizational conditions such as occupational health and safety as well as to personal level aspects such as increased motivation, lower stress, happiness and longer working careers but also to productivity at individual, organizational, and societal levels. Based on various conceptualizations, well-being at work includes both objective and subjective perspectives (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2013; Schulte and Vainio, 2010; Dul et al., 2012; Rodriguez-Munoz and Sanz-Vergel, 2013). A view of this kind can be considered to refer to a holistic perspective on well-being at work.

In this paper, well-being at work is approached from the holistic perspective of the balanced work system theory. This theory provides a human-centric framework for human well-being, and addresses employees as productive units whose performance is affected by different discomforts and loads (Smith and Carayon-Sainfort, 1989; Carayon, 2006). Traditionally retail firms have spent considerable amounts of money in order to achieve higher customer satisfaction but at the same time they might have underestimated the negative effects of employee burnout symptoms and related absenteeism on customer satisfaction (Söderlund, 2017). While there are challenges concerning well-being at work in other sectors as well, it can be presumed that in order to promote their employees' well-being, retail firms also need tools which integrate physical, mental and emotional aspects of health (DeJoy and Wilson, 2003).

Retail services involve various jobs and work tasks. However, in this paper we are especially interested in the tasks in which the employee is in contact with a customer in one way or another. This interaction is known as a service encounter. Service encounter here is considered as the time when a consumer interacts with a service; this definition encompasses all personal, physical and other tangible elements involved in the situation (Shostack, 1985; Bitner, 1990). Service encounter can also be approached through its three key elements as described by Wu and Liang (2009), i.e. environmental element, service employee factors and consumer factors.

The present article argues that playfulness can potentially promote individual employee well-being. With playfulness we refer to individual's disposition "composed of creativity, curiosity, sense of humor, and spontaneity" (Guitard et al., 2005). This article further depicts how playfulness can enhance employee well-being within a service encounter setting in the retail sector. When it comes to adult playfulness, it has not been widely researched (Van Vleet and Feeney, 2015a; Staempfli, 2007).

Furthermore, it appears that playfulness has not often been linked to well-being at work even though some consequences of playfulness in a work setting have been addressed in research (Guitard et al., 2005).

The assumption that playfulness works well in the retail sector is based on the fact that in retail firms' employees are often young people who value fun at work (see Romero and Pescosolido, 2008; Lamm and Meeks, 2009). Recently, Plester and Hutchison (2016) have empirically discussed how workplace fun seems to relate to work engagement both at the individual task level, and at broader organizational team or unit level. Furthermore, Tews et al. (2015) have found that in particular, fun job responsibilities play a big role in promoting younger employees' embeddedness in work activities. These studies have inspired us to discuss the potential of playfulness in promoting well-being at work. More general trends also suggest that playfulness might be useful regarding well-being at work: e.g. gamification has become common at workplaces (see Dale, 2014), and smart environments utilizing playfulness (Nijholt, 2016) have emerged. Moreover, playful elements added to individual objects, such as playful key rings, can be employed as positive psychological interventions (Desmet and Sääksjärvi, 2016).

As for playfulness, we have adopted the idea that it can exist at multiple levels and we have also born in mind that employees are affected by their customers (Johnson et al., 1994). In essence, we approach the phenomenon from the aspect of promoting employee well-being and consequently, take a positive stance on the effects of playfulness. Hence, we acknowledge that we do not focus on the potentially negative consequences related to playfulness, such as negative effects of employees' joking behavior on customer satisfaction in service encounters (Söderlund et al., 2017).

Instead, our goal is to depict the positive potential of playfulness to employee well-being.

Our aim here is to conduct a review (see Arksey and O'Malley, 2005; Grant and Booth, 2009) in order to create a new framework which integrates the positive aspects of playfulness and well-being at work within retailing with a special focus on the contexts of service encounters. We attempt to build a framework that reviews and synthesizes the existing literature on the subject of the role of playfulness to promote employee well-being in service encounters. The objective behind this is to summarize findings and to determine research gaps and targets for empirical research in the future.

2. Methods

For the present paper, a review of relevant literature was carried out in order to provide an overview on the literature pertinent to the topic. The review conducted here bears resemblance with more than one type of review but in particular some features of a scoping review and a critical review are apparent. Firstly, we aim to summarize research findings and identify research gaps in the existing literature. This is in line with reasons for a scoping study as stated by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). Moreover, a scoping review can be a preliminary enquiry into a phenomenon (Campbell et al., 2011). Secondly, our goal is to find the most significant topic-related literature and to create a framework involving the novel idea of integrating playfulness and well-being in service encounters; a critical review can have these kinds of features (Grant and Booth, 2009). We have also followed a modified version of the scoping study process of five stages as depicted by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). With the exception of the stage of charting the data, we followed the scoping review process. As for charting the data, a detailed list of references was left out from this paper on account of the paper having a more comprehensive goal of forming a new framework.

2.1 Review process

In accordance with the first stage of the scoping review process, a research question was formulated. This research question is related to multiple areas of research. Essentially, we are interested in how playfulness can be incorporated into the service encounter settings in retail sector so as to promote the well-being of employees in those settings. The second stage was about identifying relevant studies. In order to do this, we searched for literature in the following research areas: well-being at work, (adult) playfulness, retail sector and service encounter. Concepts from these areas were used as search terms to find scientific literature via the database of Scopus; launched in 2004, it is large abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature. No restrictions were used in the search but the search was confined to the documents published in English. In consequence, all the documents found in Scopus were reviewed. Additionally, relevant sources found in the previous studies by the authors and in the reference lists of the existing sources were also utilized in the formation of the framework.

In the following phases, the study selection and charting the data stages, the relevance of the literature was assessed based on the subject areas, the titles, the abstracts and finally, the full texts. It appeared that there were various irrelevant studies related to e.g. the field of medicine as playfulness was at times studied in the context of therapy. Further, service encounter was occasionally studied in the context of patient and nursing staff. The number of relevant sources in each area of research was relatively limited and as a consequence, lists of them were not drawn up. The last stage, reporting of the research results, will be covered in the next chapter.

2.2 Reporting search results

As the areas to be covered were several and diverse in nature, the search

involved several independent searches, each of which concentrated on a specific area of interest in this paper. The first area to be covered was well-being at work which was combined with retail sector in the subsequent phases of the search. As the searches resulted in a relatively low number of documents, the search word 'well-being at work' was replaced with more negative oriented search words; i.e. 'physical stressor', 'psychosocial stressor', 'occupational safety' and 'occupational accident'. All in all 218 documents were found. From those 44 were considered potentially appropriate when the subject areas, the titles and the abstracts were studied.

The second search was related to (adult) playfulness complemented by retail and service encounter in the later phases. Lastly, the two main concepts of well-being and playfulness were combined and a search related to these was carried out. Firstly, using 'playfulness' as the search word yielded a substantial number of results, altogether 1,343 documents written in English. Of these close to 70% were published in the past ten years. Because the results were numerous and this paper is particularly focused on adult playfulness, another search was performed using the words 'playfulness' and 'adults'. This yielded 150 results which were studied more carefully in terms of their titles, abstracts and full texts. After examining the titles and abstracts, some documents were left out based on e.g. the discipline (medicine, health profession etc.); still, twenty documents were deemed potential in terms of the topic in this paper. 'Playfulness' combined with 'retail' and 'service encounter' yielded very few results, seven altogether, and they were mostly concerned with the consumer perspective. 'Playfulness' together with 'well-being' / 'wellbeing' yielded 27 results of which five were potentially relevant in our context.

All in all, we gained some important sources via the scoping review. Furthermore, sources found while reviewing the reference lists and while conducting

previous studies proved to be especially valuable in the formation of the framework. By examining the results, especially produced by the electronic review, it became quite obvious that a lot of the existing research has been published in the past ten years. It also turned out that there are very few studies combining playfulness and well-being.

3. Key concepts

3.1 Well-being at work in retail context

Employee well-being as a subjective and objective characteristic poses challenges to management. Traditional management literature discusses individual employee well-being as a multidimensional construct, including psychological, physical and social dimensions (Schulte and Vainio, 2010). In general, well-being could be considered as a result from the holistic fulfilment of the needs of individuals and the realization of goals and plans set for life itself (Anttonen and Vainio, 2010). Well-being at work is in general associated with the positive elements of work. However, a holistic approach to well-being at work urges one to contemplate and identify also negative elements, such as risks to occupational injuries, ill-health, hazards and accidents as sources threatening the employee well-being (ibid., 2010).

Individual employee well-being is here considered in terms of a human-centric view on work, and well-being at work is understood as one product of a sociotechnical balanced work system (Carayon, 2006). Work systems, as simplified into an individual employee's perspective in Figure 1, are constructs involving the idea of employees' performing specific operational tasks or functions within a specific environment under organizational conditions (Smith and Carayon, 1995; Smith and Carayon-Sainfort, 1989). At an individual level, a work system may be as simple as a single individual using a hand tool to perform a specific work task. Work systems can also be discussed

as complex organizational constructs (Hendrick, 2002). Work systems, when defined broadly, can be discussed outside the work context, as product or service systems where an individual is the product user or person (customer) who receives the service in different activity environments (e.g. hospitals, home, stores) and within different social activity contexts (see e.g. Dul et al., 2012; Väyrynen et al., 2006).
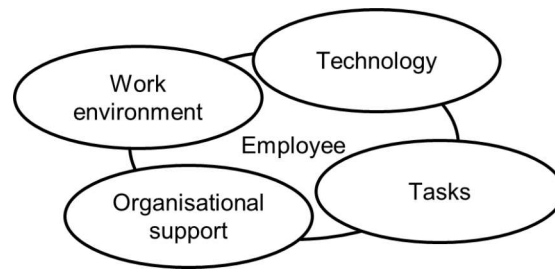

Figure 1. A simplified visualization of a work system of an individual employee (modified from Smith and Carayon-Sainfort, 1989).

According to the general human-centric, balanced work systems theory (see e.g. Smith and Carayon-Sainfort, 1989; Smith and Carayon, 2000; Carayon, 2006), work systems produce different kinds of loads, such as job stressors and hazards to employees. Employees react to these loads physiologically and psychologically, and often with a detrimental effect. Productivity, quality, safety, commitment to work, learning and *well-being at work* can be considered as desired outputs of the work system whereas undesired outputs are negative by-products of the work system; these include physiological and psychological discomfort and stress, incidents, accidents, injuries as well as material and environmental losses (Smith and Carayon, 2000; Kraemer et al., 2009). Perfect work systems, where all stressors and strains are eliminated, are not attainable in reality. Instead, according to a balanced work system theory (e.g. Smith and Carayon-Sainfort, 1989; Smith and Carayon, 2000), work systems should be continuously developed and balanced.

The balanced work system theory has not been tested empirically in a retail sector setting. Below we present a review of the most common stressors affecting the employee well-being in the retail sector. Studies have shown that retail employees are a diverse group in terms of their age, gender and ethnic background (Anderson et al., 2010; von Bonsdorff et al., 2010; Carmichael et al., 2016). Further, retail sector can be seen as the primary industry employing young employees (Evensen et al., 2000; Mardis and Pratt, 2003; Runyan et al., 2007). The sector is diverse as for the size of the company and the jobs related to it (DeJoy et al., 2004; Mroszczyk, 2008). Due to the wide diversity, work systems and work itself in retail sector consist of various kinds of tasks that are performed in different kinds of work environments (Vladutiu et al., 2010). A wide *variety of potential occupational accidents* are involved in these very different tasks (Vladutiu et al., 2010, Sinclair et al., 2010). Nonetheless, the employees in the sector are generally at relatively low risk for occupational injuries and fatalities (Anderson et al., 2010). In addition to the risks for occupational accidents, the retail sector employees are exposed to various *different physical and psychosocial stressors* that might affect their well-being and ability to work. Concerning physical stressors, *musculoskeletal disorders* are emphasized as being the most reported symptoms of health problems according to a report by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2012). Substantial amount of standing and walking during the work shift and also sedentary office work, manual materials handling; including repetitive hand and arm movements, lifting and moving heavy loads and use of machinery and equipment as well as work in painful and tiring positions have been commonly identified as physical ergonomics stressors in the retail sector (Pan et al. 1999; Sinclair et al., 2010; European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions 2012; Carmichael et al., 2016).

Retail employees often work at open access environments with both the co-employees and customers present. An ability to continuously operate and maintain a customer-oriented behavior is required (Carmichael et al., 2016; Kolb et al., 2012; Angayarkanni and Thamarai Selvi, 2016; DeFraia, 2015). Exposure to customers' misbehavior and violence has been identified both as a stress and a hazard factor. In addition, physical work environment factors such as the room temperature may activate or deactivate employees' customer orientation and thus affect their productivity (Kolb et al., 2012). A wide variety of other psychosocial stress factors have been identified in the retail sector. Fast pace of work, career uncertainty, job insecurity, short- and split-shifts, Sunday work, unpredictable working hours and poor support from the colleagues have been identified amongst the most common stress factors (Erickson, 1996; Zeytinoglu et al., 2004; Wirtz et al., 2011; European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2012).

In the context of retail industry Santos et al. (2012) have studied employee well-being and conclude that fair, supportive and communicative management practices improve employee well-being. Further, they (ibid.) highlight the need for identifying clear occupational and personal goals in order to improve job satisfaction. Proper communication processes between the management and employees reduce the stressors related to perceived job insecurity (Richardson et al., 2008) and affect the safety culture in general (DeJoy et al., 2004). Tuomi et al. (2004) emphasize that by improving organizational practices - such as the organization of work, supervisory support, opportunities for development and influence, and appropriate level of physical and psychosocial demands of work - employees' well-being can be supported and improved in the retail sector.

3.2 Playful interaction in service encounters

Playfulness is not among the first concepts to come to mind in relation to business, not in the retail industry, either. The concept has a notable history, however, and we argue that it has relevance with regard to well-being at work, in the retail sector, and in the customer interface.

While children's playfulness has long been the focus of attention (Piaget, 1951), adults' playfulness appears to be a more recent area of scholarly interest; up until 2015 the research on it was reported not to be very common (Van Vleet and Feeney, 2015b; Guitard et al., 2005). Nevertheless, there are now quite a few studies concentrating on the various aspects of playfulness (e.g. Barnett, 2007; Glynn and Webster, 1992; Proyer and Jehle, 2013; Lin et al., 2010; Magnuson and Barnett, 2013; Lin et al., 2005; Boberg et al., 2015). It is well established that playfulness as a phenomenon relates closely to people and their actions. As stated by Glynn and Webster (1992), playfulness is an inherent part of human nature. Still, it has turned out to be a challenge to determine the concept itself (Berlyne, 1969); and it seems that it is employed differently in different contexts (Lin et al., 2005). Even so, according to some characterizations it is an individual trait, i.e. a person's predisposition to define or redefine a situation in a way which provides oneself and possibly also others with amusement, humor, and entertainment (Barnett, 2007; Glynn and Webster, 1992).

There are numerous suggestions as to the components of playfulness. Proyer and Jehle (2013), for example, employed seventeen existing instruments in their attempt to determine the most relevant factors of playfulness. Their study, based on the respondents' self-evaluation, brought up such attributes as *Humorousness, Cheerfulness-Uninhibitedness, Expressiveness, Other-directedness, and Intellectuality-Creativity.* After this model created by Proyer and Jehle (2013), Proyer (2017) has proposed a modified model of playfulness with the following four facets: *Other-*

directed, Lighthearted, Intellectual and Whimsical. Two of these components, other-directed, i.e. enjoying playing with other people, and intellectual, i.e. liking to play with ideas and solving problems, are based on the earlier factor analysis by Proyer and Jehle (2013). In turn, in the latter model by Proyer (2017), a lighthearted facet, i.e. not worrying too much about future consequences, draws from e.g. the earlier concept of uninhibitedness. Lastly, whimsical playfulness, i.e. finding amusement in strange situations, was considered more appropriate than humorousness to constitute to one of the components of playfulness. Notwithstanding, it needs to be noted that humor, even if not identical (Proyer, 2014) with playfulness, is intimately connected to it as humor appears to be a part of playfulness (Proyer and Ruch, 2011).

In addition to determining a person in terms of his or her playfulness, studies have concentrated on determining connections of playfulness to aspects of working life. The reason behind this is that the potential benefits of a playful environment are of serious interest among researchers and, naturally, organizations employing the tools of play and humor. The aspects of working life that have been covered by various studies include, for example, innovation, and stress relief (Lin et al., 2010; Magnuson and Barnett, 2013). Moreover, employees' attitudes toward fun at work and the impact of workplace fun on employees' satisfaction and perceptions of customer service quality have been addressed (Karl et al., 2005; Karl and Peluchette, 2006). Play and fun have also been discussed within the sphere of management (Costea et al., 2005).

Furthermore, it appears that the scope of the use of playfulness is gradually widening from interpersonal relationships and it has recently been extended, for example, to the design of products. Actually, Boberg et al. (2015) compiled a playful experiences questionnaire with the intent of measuring the pleasurable experience of the user. They concentrated on examining the users' experiences of mobile applications and

services in order to gain a further understanding on how to design successful and engaging products in that particular field. Designing mobile applications and services is not the only area in which playfulness has been attracting more attention in relation to products, but involving playfulness and fun in designing products and services has been gaining more interest in companies and organizations (Jacobs and Heracleous, 2007; Yu and Nam, 2014; Blythe et al., 2005; Ahola et al., 2016).

Taking a more methodical view on the service encounter itself to determine the possibilities to involve playfulness in it service encounter can be approached from the viewpoint of the elements pertinent to the context. Based on earlier literature about service encounter elements, Wu and Liang (2009) were able to reduce the elements into three main components. The first element is *environmental element* which refers to consumer interactions with tangible or intangible elements of the service (e.g. music, lightning, design of environment). The second element is composed of *service employee factors*, for example the type of employees providing the services to consumers. Ergo, the communication between service employees and customers plays a role in the evaluation of the service by the consumer. The third presented element is *consumer factors* which is about acknowledging the interaction between consumers. These three elements could serve as a basis for considerations of how to include playfulness in the service encounter contexts.

Based on all the studies introduced above, we have created the following figure (Figure 2) in which the extent to which playfulness can be employed in a service encounter context is depicted. In Figure 2, the environmental element of service encounter is represented by objects and surroundings since they are part of service environment and since the scope of using playfulness is expanding to new areas such as to the design of products (Yu and Nam, 2014). The two other elements of service

employee factors and consumer factors are covered by personal interaction and services. Even if related, playful services can be distinguished from interaction by discerning the features of the service, for example there can be humor in stand-up comedy without any personal interaction between a spectator and a comedian.
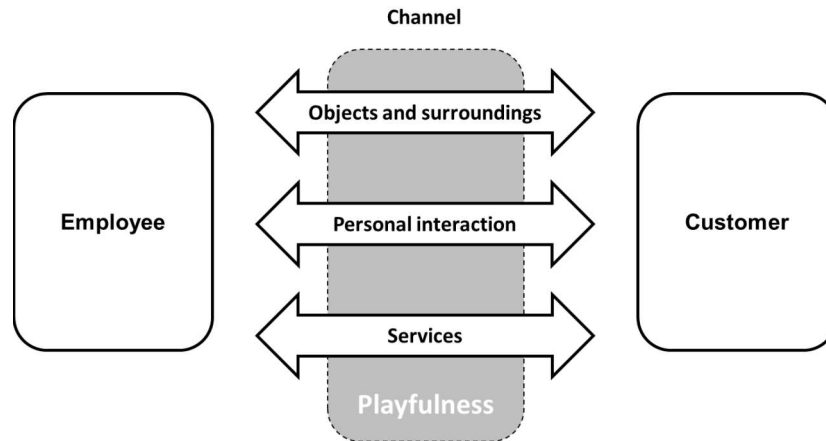

Figure 2. The scope of the use of playful interaction in service encounters.

As new ideas of the potential of playfulness emerge, they spread to areas where they have not previously been employed. According to Desmet (2012), for example, positive emotions can be experienced in human-product interactions. As stated by Yu and Nam (2014), emotions come in, and they are of great importance, when users evaluate the products they are about to purchase and take into use. In order to have an individual to make a purchase decision, evoking positive emotions is beneficial as positive emotions have been found to stimulate an individual's purchase intention (Pham, 1998). Like laughter (Provine, 1992), we expect also other positive emotions to be contagious, and the employee to be positively affected in a situation where positive emotions are experienced by the customer. Within the typology of positive emotions presented by Desmet (2012), an emotional cluster of amusement can be found, and it is to that cluster the emotion words 'playful' and 'humorous' are connected. As for the components of playfulness, it will be of interest to see how they manifest themselves in the different

aspects of service encounter depicted in Figure 2. At this point, it is not judicious to make such presumptions.

4. Framework linking concepts of playfulness and well-being at work in retail sector

As established earlier, well-being at work as a product of a sociotechnical work system can be approached from the retail perspective. Based to what was discussed in the previous chapters, in Figure 3 we have integrated the concepts of playfulness and holistic well-being at work in service encounter settings with their various aspects.
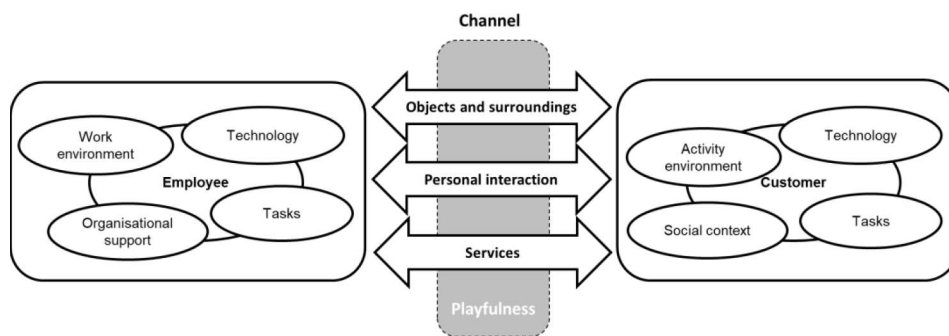

Figure 3. Linking Concepts of Playfulness and Well-being at work at service encounter settings.

The figure above refers to the interactive relationships which are characteristic to retail environment. This paper argues that the aspect of playfulness, especially humorousness as the best predictor of playfulness (Proyer and Ruch, 2011), can be embedded into these relationships through adding such elements to the physical and psychosocial loads which will, in turn, contribute to the loads becoming less of loads to the employee's well-being at work. Since the loads are not felt as heavy as before, playfulness would, in this way, end up enhancing well-being at work.

Figure 3 illustrates, in essence, the various paths (objects and surroundings, personal interaction and services) into which some component or components of

playfulness could be embedded in the environment in which the employee is in some way connected to the customer. First, playfulness can be utilized by the employee – while performing his/her task – and/or the customer in their **personal interaction**, whether it is face-to-face or via some device/application making use of technological solutions. Second, in this environment playfulness and humor can also be part of services and objects involved in the **human-product** (Desmet, 2012) or **human-service interactions** (Mathies et al., 2016). In other words, component(s) of playfulness can take different forms in these interactions as it could be generated, e.g., by the design of an object or service (Desmet, 2012; Ahola et al., 2016). In the background of all this is, naturally, the organization for which the employee is working, and the ways in which the organization or its mode of operation enables and favors the use of playfulness**.**

4.1 Playfulness in personal interaction

Employees and customers are involved in a reciprocal relationship in service encounters. Customer satisfaction reflects the employee well-being as a positive experience is built on employees' being motivated to carry out their work. In fact, earlier research (Karl and Peluchette, 2006; Karl et al., 2005) indicates that workplace fun experienced by employees has positive outcomes. On the other hand, workplace fun has been established to have a favorable effect on the employees' perception of the customer service quality that their organization provides. Employees are also affected by the customers in service encounters as customer satisfaction has been established to be significantly related to employees' attitude towards stress management, job development, job satisfaction, and teamwork (Johnson et al., 1994). For that reason, it is of significance to also consider the customer experience in the retail context.

Retailers offer a variety of retail experiences for the end-users to enhance their shopping memories (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). In addition to the quality of goods and

services, Spiegelman (2000) advocates retailers to emphasize the quality of the retail experience as it converts the one-time visitor into a repeat customer. Mathwick et al. (2001) argue that the experiential value is composed of playfulness, aesthetics, consumer return on investment, and service excellence. In this paper, we focus on the element of playfulness because it has a direct effect on the psychological well-being of the sender and the receiver (Ulrich, 1979; Romero and Cruthirds, 2006; Mathwick et al., 2001) each of which could be either a customer or an employee in retail context.

The following proposition summarizes this discussion:

P1: Greater customer satisfaction contributes to the employees' well-being, especially to the frontline employees who have a direct contact with customers.

Playfulness in interaction in service encounters can be studied from the perspectives of both customers and employees in terms of their attitude towards playfulness utilized in these situations and their own inclination to involve themselves in playful behavior. Surveys and, in particular, experimental methods which make it possible to investigate the cause and effect relationships could prove valuable in studies of these kind (e.g. Lynn and Lynn, 2003). To provide an example, the purchasing process of a product could be designed to include playful interaction in an experimental setting (for example, see Söderlund et al., 2017).

4.2 Using objects and surroundings to carry playfulness

Playfulness and humor could manifest themselves in the attitudes, atmosphere and activities in the workplace, and of these, attitudes and atmosphere have, in turn, been established to be positively correlated to work engagement (Hurmelinna-Laukkanen et al., 2016). Further, workplace fun appears to be related to work engagement (Plester and Hutchison, 2016). Besides in the attitudes, atmosphere and activities, playfulness and humor could be part of the objects in any surroundings. To

limit the use of humor to be included in the products and their design is unnecessarily restrictive, and this philosophy of playfulness and humor between people and objects could be extended to cover the environment (Yu and Nam, 2014) including workplaces, as a whole.

As for the human-product interaction, Desmet (2012) has identified sources of emotions. Firstly, he says that products as such, i.e. their appearance, can evoke feelings (object-focus). Secondly, he argues that a product, such as a religious object, can represent intangible values or beliefs which may evoke either positive or negative feelings (meaning-focus). Thirdly, the interaction, or the use of an object, may lead to specific emotions; if an object is easy to use, positive feeling may follow but if it is unexpectedly challenging, the result may be negative feelings (interaction-focus). This approach is analogical to the holistic work system theory that emphasizes positive and negative loads that are produced by the system. As described by Dul et al. (2012) and Smith and Carayon (2000), a system in this context might refer to product or service systems in addition to employee-centric work systems.

Further, as products can facilitate some activity, to do this activity may cause emotions related to this activity (activity-focus). Products themselves may also have an effect on their user's identity (self-focus). Lastly, as Desmet (2012) explains, an object can play a part in a situation where the emotions are evoked by other people and the object in question is in some way relevant to the situation, e.g. it may facilitate interaction with other people (other-focus). In product design, these are some of the areas which could be addressed in order to evoke positive feelings as highlighted by Norman (2003). When designing products, some playful components could turn out to be useful as they address the sources of emotions in human-product interaction.

When it comes to the surroundings, the evolution of the internet of things and the advancement of technology enable retailers to interact and communicate with their customers anytime and anywhere without being physically present. This can be performed through various channels and platforms, e.g. virtual and augmented reality, mobile applications, websites, kiosks, interactive display screens etc. Eventually, the decisions on marketing technology are increasingly complex due to the heightened need to personalize products and services to attract customers (Kaneshige, 2016). The service environment characteristics are important, as attitudes towards fun at work have been found to be linked to a higher trust in management and co-workers (Karl et al., 2005). To accept and add elements of fun and playfulness to work appears to positively affect the workplace and work.

Following from these considerations, we propose the following:

P2: To embed various aspects of playfulness into the design and/or technological solutions of objects and surroundings leads to positive emotions, which, in turn, balances individual's work or service systems loads and thus enhances the well-being of people in contact with these.

This proposition could be examined by participatory design methods including playful characteristics in the concept design phase (Mital et al., 2014) of products and surroundings, and subsequently testing the responses of both customers and employees as to the effects, e.g. acceptability and usability, of these characteristics on people. It would also be most interesting to study if it were of any significance to the user satisfaction whether or not the playful characteristic has a functional role in the use of the object. Additionally, usability and ergonomics study methods (e.g. Baber, 2015; Marshall et al., 2015, Mital et al., 2014) provide different quantitative, qualitative or mixed-method approaches possible to be applied in research in this field.

4.3 Playful services

As for services, it is worth considering what playful services actually are in practice, and secondly, what service encounters consist of. Firstly, we argue that playfulness can be either embedded into services or alternatively, they can constitute the service itself. According to Mathies et al. (2016), different playfulness-related applications have been studied; for example, Van Dolen et al. (2008) have discovered positive effects of playfulness on customer evaluations when an online travel agency included funny cartoons, a joke-of-the day and animated pictures in their websites, but this finding only applied if the service process was otherwise faultless. Other practical examples of playful services are for instance amusement parks, stand-up comedians, or hospital clowns. In effect, Dionigi and Canestrari (2016) suggest that clowning leads to positive emotions and further enhances the well-being of the patient. These findings could also apply to business contexts as well as to the actors in the contexts, e.g. service encounters, an area in which research, to our understanding, is still scarce.

Various components of playfulness can be added to the service encounter, and the components themselves, such as humorousness, can indeed enhance employee's well-being at work. Mathies et al. (2016) proposes that frontline employees should use more self-enhancing humor to increase their performance and well-being in service contexts. If employees are using so called positive humor at work, they can be more satisfied, and more involved in their jobs and they also report better mental health (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012).

In summarizing the above discussions, we posit the following proposition:

P3: Aspects of playfulness in the elements of services encounters contribute to the well-being of actors in that context.

We suggest that employees' well-being could be studied by measuring their work engagement using for example Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli and Bakker,

2003; Schauffeli et al., 2006) or by measuring their job satisfaction. For example van Saane et al. (2003) introduce seven validated instruments for that purpose. Furthermore, customer engagement behavior (CEB) model (Van Doorn et al., 2010) could be used to further investigate the impact of playfulness on the value of customer and retailer relationship since the model provides a holistic view from the customer-based and organization-based perspectives.

5. Discussion

The contribution of our paper is to offer a novel way to look at employee's wellbeing by integrating work systems theory and playfulness in a service encounter context. By linking playfulness and well-being in our theoretical paper we hope to be able to continue the emerging discussion on the acknowledged importance of employees' wellbeing in retail firms. We believe that our multidisciplinary approach, which has contributed to the creation of the framework, will enhance playful-oriented research on employees' holistic well-being in retail contexts.

The use of playfulness is in itself an intriguing topic in the field of research, and it has drawn a fair amount of attention among scholars (e.g. Barnett, 2007; Glynn and Webster, 1992; Proyer and Jehle, 2013; Lin et al., 2010; Magnuson and Barnett, 2013; Lin et al., 2005; Boberg et al., 2015; Costea et al., 2005). Moreover, well-being at work presents yet another topic of growing interest (e.g. Schulte and Vainio, 2010; Dul et al., 2012; Grant et al., 2007; Faragher et al., 2005; Rodriguez-Munoz and Sanz-Vergel, 2013). To discuss these two in the same context in order to determine how they can be integrated in a positive way provides an interesting avenue for research in the retail context. In accordance with its primary intention, this review offers a framework within which these interrelations can be studied. Some suggestions as to how this could be performed are also provided in a form of propositions and related research approaches.

The aim of our framework is to take a more comprehensive view on the topic compared to the earlier studies which most often discuss the direct links of playfulness and its positive consequences to an individual from one perspective. Magnuson and Barnett (2013) have, for example, established a stress-relieving effect of playfulness. We, however, adopted a broad approach to balanced well-being at work with various physical and psychosocial loads (Smith and Carayon-Sainfort, 1989). Additionally, we described how differently playfulness can be incorporated into the context of a service encounter. As a consequence, the proposed framework offers a good ground for conducting research on the various aspects of a service encounter in terms of the relationships involved in it. To study the ways how different stress factors could be affected by the use of playfulness would be an ideal subject for further research. The framework with its potential for further research could also contribute to new insights into the existing research of playfulness. Studies of these kinds would be of practical use to the management and to the employees in their attempts to find ways to develop themselves and their tasks.

We acknowledge that our basic supposition has its limitations when seeking for positive connections between playfulness and well-being at work. Our primary assumption is that well-being at work and playfulness interplay mutually. Thus, we are not attempting to discuss the cause and effects phenomena concerning well-being at work and playfulness. Cause and effects have already been reviewed extensively related to humor in service encounters by Mathies et al. (2016). As for the positive connection, Plester and Hutchison (2016) have given evidence that for some employees, some forms of workplace fun, for example managed fun activities, can be distracting and related to work disengagement. Baptiste (2009) is also more critical towards studies embracing fun at work for too heavily focusing on positive outcomes.

There are also some limitations related to reviews as they cannot work as final independent outputs and they involve possibilities for bias. For example our study, characteristic of scoping and critical reviews, did not include a quality assessment process and in consequence, the intrinsic quality of individual studies has not been confirmed and the conclusions based on these studies can be regarded limited. We are also aware of the limitations of scoping reviews and that they are not considered suitable for recommendations of practice or policy (Grant and Booth, 2009). We have also utilized various sources – e.g. previous research – in our literature review. Therefore, we have presented the literature review methodology in detail. Our literature review provided a preliminary enquiry into a phenomenon (Campbell et al., 2011), and it summarized earlier findings as well as identified further research gaps (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). Based on all this, we created a framework in keeping with the possible aim of critical review (Grant and Booth, 2009). We have provided propositions with the aim of suggesting further research rather than giving strong recommendations for practices for retail firm managers or industrial policy makers.

However, our contribution of linking playfulness to well-being at work in retail environment has some managerial implications as it is also an attempt to increase the management's awareness of the importance of employees' well-being in retail sector. Our paper is making a contribution to the discussion related to different ways retail company managers can understand and develop their service employees' well-being, which is an important issue from the perspective of consumer services development. We offer playfulness as one potential tool for that purpose.

On the whole, further empirical research is needed in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of playfulness to enhance well-being at work and the functionality of playful components employed as positive interventions (e.g.

Desmet and Sääksjärvi, 2016). Our study has focused on discussing the interrelations between playfulness and employee's well-being at work at an individual level. In this paper we have approached service encounter from the traditional dyadic perspective emphasizing human interactions between employee and customer (Solomon et al., 1985). However, service encounters have changed fundamentally due to the developments in technology (e.g. artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, smartphones). Consequently, the roles of employee, customer and technology have changed, and technology can either augment or substitute employees, or it can also facilitate network connections (Larivière et al., 2017). We acknowledge that our traditional dyadic perspective has some limitations and in future studies the technological evolution needs to be addressed when further developing the framework. More specifically, the impact of social media on employee's well-being is an issue which requires more discussion; for example service recovery via social media (Schaefers and Schamari, 2016) could be investigated from the perspective of playfulness and employee's well-being.

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