

What is emotional management and labour



In recent years, there has been a significant growth in the range of activities involving emotion work, also known as emotional labour. From the sales associate who is trained to make a good first impression to the physician who is coached on bedside manner, every one in some way or the other, learn how to manage their feelings in the workplace. This interest in emotion has inspired Hochschild to write about emotion management in her book *The Managed Heart*, which has also introduced the term “ emotional labour”.

More and more organisations have the belief that valuing employees’ spirituality and the emotional benefits that this brings can also provide a powerful impetus to workplace productivity (Konz and Ryan 1999; Neck and Milliman 1994). The table below shows some definitions of emotional labour:

Emotion acts as something of a pivot between the individual and the structural or the personal and the social, (Freund, 1990). In other words, emotions centrally concern an individual’s feelings; nevertheless, at the workplace, not all emotions or feelings are acceptable. Emotion is now thought as a key to business success and the definitions of emotion work or emotional labour are closely related in practice. Employees are required to agree to particular sets of ‘emotion rules’, whereby they are given in details which emotions to publicly display, and which to suppress, in the performance of their job. Emotions at the workplace are divided into good emotions and bad emotions. Good emotions are those that are contributing to the goals of the enterprise and bad emotions which are perceived as destructive. Putting it another way, employees are faking their emotions in exchange of wage.

Emotion², which was once considered as “ inappropriate” for organisational life, is now seen as unavoidable and unchallengeable in organisations. Indeed, with the emergence of the service sector, and the constant focus on quality of service, it is no longer sufficient to limit oneself only to deliver the service. This service has to be performed ‘ with a smile’, a friendly greeting, gaining eye contact and a cheery farewell. However, the growth in the service sector does not only account for the growing importance of emotional labour. Another reason for this emphasis is that nowadays, interactions have become more numerous and that those interactions are occurring in an increasingly competitive environment. Moreover, since the customer’s overall opinion of the service has been increasingly recognized by management, therefore, greater emphasis is being given to customer service or ‘ customer care’, so that the customer returns to that particular service provider when a repeat service is sought.

2. Refer to Appendix 3

The evolution of emotional labour is also due to the growth in the customer care philosophy. Customers form lasting judgements about the organisation as a whole from their interactions with the organisation members.

Furthermore, they are increasingly influenced by the quality of the emotional labour that is performed on them. Therefore, employees have to match with customer wants and feelings by being able to provide both the behaviours and the emotional displays. It should be noted that those who perform emotional labour are mostly low skilled and low wage workers. Management sets rules about how to feel and how to express feelings, and by abiding to

these display norms, employees have to pay a price, which is the impoverishment of their emotional lives.

Emotion management or 'emotional labour', as coined initially by Hochschild (1979, 1983, 1990), refers to the commoditisation of emotions within the labour process. In *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild (1983) pointed out a major distinction between two ways of managing emotions; namely, emotion work and emotion labour. Even though these two concepts might appear to be the same, this is not the case; as she puts it,

by 'emotion work' I refer to the emotion management we do in private life; by 'emotional labour' I refer to the emotion management we do for a wage (Hochschild, 1990, p. 118)

Emotion work refers to the attempt to change an emotion and how this emotion is being displayed in everyday life. According to Hochschild, managing one's feelings to what is appropriate in any given situation can be termed as 'feeling rules', that is, 'a set of shared albeit often latent, rules' (Hochschild 1983, p. 268). In other words, the efforts that one attributes to complying to these rules is referred to as emotion work. An example of emotion work would be laughing at someone's unfunny gift, expressing appreciation for an unwanted gift. Emotional labour is what happens when a profit drive strengthens the performance of emotion work within the labour process. When one manages one's own emotion and those of others in exchange of wage, this is what can be described by emotional labour.

According to Hochschild, emotional labour 'requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces

the proper state of mind in others' (1983, p. 7). As part of their job, employees are required to demonstrate feelings they may not share in order to produce a positive frame of mind in the customers. Thus, drawing on sociologist Erving Goffman (1957), Hochschild argues that in order to produce that 'proper state of mind in others'; two techniques are involved, namely 'surface' acting and 'deep' acting. Surface acting involves faking one's emotions and pretending to experience emotions that are not real. Deep acting involves changing what or rather, how we feel. However, managing feelings has a hidden cost, which can be termed as 'emotional dissonance'³.

One limitation of employing emotions as part of the work process is that when emotions are faked, this might lead to emotional dissonance and burnout. Emotional dissonance is a feeling of unease that occurs when someone evaluated an emotional experience as a threat to his or her identity. This emotional dissonance can have extensive implications on the individuals and the organisations. From air hostess or salesperson who need to suppress their irritation and show pleasantness with irate customer, to transformational leader who needs to suppress his uncertainty and show enthusiasm in order to keep his employees motivated; emotion management is everywhere and is used as tools in the business environment.

3. Refer to Appendix 4

A number of sociologists and psychologists have considered social life, as well as life within the work organisations, from a performance or 'dramaturgical' perspective. This perspective envisages individuals

performing different scripts in different social situations. That is, in jobs which involve emotional labour, employees perform a particular script, similar to individuals who perform other emotional displays. Ekman (1973) and Ashforth and Humphrey (1993: 89), termed the emotional displays that an employee have to perform as part of his job as ‘display rules’. However, sometimes employees may be required to perform ‘unacceptable’ level of emotional display, with potentially detrimental effects on the individuals involved.

Selection and training play an important role in inspiring particular ‘feeling rules’ into the recruits. From the physical attributes and overall appearance, to “the ability to ‘project a warm personality’ and display enthusiasm, friendliness and sociability” (Hochschild, 1983: 97), recruits are being instructed on almost every emotional aspect of the work. But most emphasis is being laid upon the employee’s smile and accompanying pleasant and helpful manner. For instance, in a study on telephone sales agents (mainly female) carried out by Taylor and Tyler (2000: 84), so as they do not get angry with offensive (often male) customers, a trainer commented:

If a man’s having a go at you... he might even be embarrassing you... don’t get ruffled, you’ve got to keep your cool. Remember that you are trying to offer him something and get him to pay for the privilege. He can talk to you how he wants. Your job is to deal with it... just take a few deep breaths and let your irritation cool down... think to yourself he’s not worth it.

Emotional labours are required to suppress any feelings of anger or frustration and to respond in a manner prescribed by management. An

important training device for dealing with such customers, are to re-conceptualise them as people having a problem, who needed sympathy and understanding; and therefore to respond positively to such customers.

Even though people are paid to be nice, it is hard to be nice at all times. Employees indulge in either ‘ surface’ acting or ‘ deep’ acting in order to manage their emotions. Surface acting involves a behavioural conformity with the display rules (facial expression, verbal comments, and so on) with no effort to internalise these rules. In other words, the emotion are feigned or faked. Deep acting, on the other hand, involves employees internalising their role more thoroughly in an attempt to ‘ experience’ the required emotions. That is, employees match the emotion expressions the organization requires. Emotion at work, specially when dealing with customers is very important, since if a customer notice that the emotions are fake, he may feel cheated and take it badly.

In *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild questions what happens when deep gestures of exchange enter the market sector; when people are no longer free to negotiate their own rate of exchange because it becomes another aspect of saleable labour power where feelings become commoditised. Moreover, Hochschild talks about ways that the flight attendants adopt in order to deal with irate passengers. There is the living-room analogy, whereby, flight attendants view the passengers as guests in their living room. And therefore, they are required to make their best to attend to their guests. Somehow, there are unresponsive passengers who kill the analogy unwittingly, and these passengers are termed as “ teenage execs” by Hochschild. Another way which is adopted is by viewing the passengers as

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potential friends, even though this reciprocity of real friendship is not part of the if friendship. Flight attendants are furthermore advised not to take the passengers' misbehaviour personally, but rather to view them as "just like children" who need attention.

Deep acting, as described by Hochschild has been encouraged by management, so that their employees behave 'naturally' rather than by simply sticking to the prescribed rules. In attempting to do so, many organisations are giving the employees the freedom to 'be themselves', to be 'more natural' and 'more authentic' in their interactions with customers. As long as it served the organisation's objectives, acting natural was fine to management.

In the book "The Regulation of Emotion", written by the author Pierre Philippot and Stephen Feldman, the authors talk about the most up-to-date, most contemporary perspectives on emotion regulation. According to them, the general conclusion that one can reach on emotional labour is that the flourishing performance of particular professional tasks requires the display of some emotions and the suppression of others. Indeed, in almost all service industries, one is explicitly trained to suppress negative emotions and to display smiles, even though it contravenes with what one really feels. Moreover, the display of smiles should look genuine so as to produce the desired effects. As such, people working in the service sector are required to engage in what Hochschild termed as "deep acting", which involves the managing of feelings at the feeling level as well as the expressive level.

Furthermore, Philippot and Feldman also stated that there are professions whereby the reverse pattern of emotion management is required. For instance, prison guards, bill collectors, or police officers; are required to “act angry” in circumstances where the clients refuse to cooperate. Additionally soldiers, firemen, or policemen are trained not to feel afraid, and if they do, they are required to hide it. In the same way, construction workers who have to work on tall buildings are asked not to show any fear and never to lose control; and medical students learn the importance to maintain a stance of affective neutrality toward their patients (Thoits, in press). Many professions require the management of one’s emotions, however, generally, negative feelings, other than anger, are supposed to be suppressed at work⁴.

4. Refer to Appendix 5

Besides, the book on “The Regulation of Emotion” also pays particular consideration to issues such as “emotional dissonance” and authenticity. Various studies have revealed that employees do not feel motivated to regulate their emotions in the required direction if these required expressions conflict with their actual feelings, or if they felt they are no longer being genuine (e. g., Ashforth & Tomiuk, 2000; Jansz & Timmers, 2002). These negative feelings, such as unease, dissonance, or tension, can result in job dissatisfaction and increased employee turnover. In a study of Ashforth and Tomiuk (2000), whereby a range of service agents were interviewed on whether they felt authentic, and what made them feel that way; most respondents asserted that despite the fact that they had to “act” in their role as service agent, they also thought that they were still being

themselves. However this was not the case concerning the display of negative emotions. This paradox can be explained in terms of identity.

In recent years, there has been a growing importance attached to emotion and emotional labour; causing management to eventually putting extensive efforts in order to control not only its experience, but also its expression. As Leidner (1993, p. 18) pointed out in her research on McDonald and Combined Insurance, organisations paid ‘close attention to how their workers looked, spoke, and felt, rather than limiting standardization to the performance of physical tasks’. Management writers Ashforth and Humphrey (1995, p. 104) had come up with four overlapping means for the management of emotions; namely neutralising, buffering, prescribing and normalising emotion. ‘Neutralising’ is utilised in order to avoid socially unacceptable emotions, and the other means are utilised to regulate emotions that are either inevitable or innate in role performance.

In her study conducted on various organisations in the US following the terrorists’ attacks on 11 September 2001, Michaela Driver (2003) found that all the four mechanisms of Ashforth and Humphrey were set up as behavioural controls governing the expression of emotion.

The diagram above shows the reaction obtained with respect to the type of control which is exerted on one’s behaviour. Hence, buffering resulted in a more positive reaction than normalising; as well as prescriptive controls which entailed in positive reactions. On the contrary, neutralising was found to result in a negative reaction. It is very important for management to know the type of reaction to expect from their employees when exercising control.

In order to legitimate their activities, management mainly uses scripts, surveillance and culture as control mechanisms. Scripts are designed to create a particular ‘tone’ for the interaction and a particular ‘end’. Besides, it also allows for dealing with a high volume of customers with a minimum of delay.

Similar to Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon⁵, surveillance helps make the employees visible and knowable. Hence, according to Foucault, the more visible employees get, the more controllable they become. So far as emotional labour is concerned, there is close supervision, so that the employees are rendered visible. However, through this visibility, employees are alienated from themselves. They do not have any control over their own feelings, that is, their “self”. Putting it another way, the employees’ self is no longer their “self”.

5. Refer to Appendix 6

The manipulation through culture is attained through designing workplace activities, which may range from daily communications to corporate meetings, training sessions, and peer gatherings. Team values are being instilled in employees through socialisation with others, since then, there would not be the need for managerial control as employees would already discipline themselves in teams. Nevertheless corporate culture⁶ is not as perfect as it has generally been imagined as a form of control. Indeed, despite fostering team spirit in organisations, members also have to face intense peer pressure among themselves. Members are not only under constant supervisions but at the same time, they are also required to

monitor their own team performance as well. According to Kunda (1992) and Casey (1995), team members do not gain a sense of empowerment, ownership, and participation, but rather they often experience negative emotions such as uncertainty, anxiety, fear, and pressure. Employees' resistance to managerial practices of team building is a common phenomenon in the contemporary workplace and the intensity of this resistance can range from a simple tactic of indifference to an active endeavour of manipulating critical information (Collinson, 1994). Hence, these issues raise doubts about the effectiveness of team culture as a form of control.

In the past 15 years or so, the study of “emotions at work” has become a real industry among management, sociology, and organisation studies researchers. “Emotion work” represents perhaps the last boundary of influence over which managers and workers struggle. The increasing focus on the connections between the employees influence and corporate profitability is mainly due to the increasing shift from a production to a service economy. Many studies have been carried out in order to show the relationship between emotion work and profit; and critiques have deconstructed that management efforts are directed towards controlling employees' emotions as a way to “commercialize feeling” and improve the bottom line.

6. Refer to Appendix 7

The author Aviad E. Raz, examines the multifaceted interconnections among work, culture, emotion and organisational control through a comparative analysis of Japanese and US companies. Raz's identified a number of

entangled threads in his argument. First, he pointed out that since the Japanese and the US workplace as well as its cultures differ, therefore, the alternatives for managing that workplace will differ as well. Secondly, the interest of Raz was not on analysing the psychological effects of emotion management on employees, but rather to analyse “ the roles of emotion as a structure for action and as a discursive element in the order of things” (p. 11).

Raz’s work is not a Foucauldian study, and this can be seen by the general tone of the book, which is a critical attempt to understand how the managerial discourse of emotion serves to discipline and normalise worker subjectivities. Moreover, Raz refuse to make any general declaration about the relations among emotion, organisation, and control, but instead, he contended in exploring how emotion as both ideology and practice can be analysed within specific cultural contexts. In his book, Raz demonstrated how the relationships between emotion management and individual identity contrasts across the Japanese and the US organisational cultures, thus requiring different responses from management at normative control. In this way, he contradicts some sociologists of workplace emotion, such as Arlie Hochschild, who made general claims about the commercialisation of feeling and emotion labour in contemporary service industries. On the other hand, Raz argues that “ authentic” and “ false” self made little sense in a Japanese control context. In sum, Raz’s book is a hybrid text, which makes a combination of excellent overviews of extent theory and research on workplace emotion with data from his own research on emotion management in several large Japanese organisations, including Tokyo

Disneyland and the Tokyo Dome. But his overall thesis is an important one, since he contributed through this study is the understanding of emotion management as a powerful discourse that attempts to shape the very identities of organisation members. Even though emotion management is an institutionalised, common feature of the global workplace, its ideological foundations and practical manifestations vary from culture to culture; and Raz portrayed the Japanese and the US workplaces to illustrate this idea.

Traditional approach to personnel has taken the individual as a self-evident phenomenon, an observable reality, a unit possessing an essential personnel identity to be recruited, appraised and remunerated. Foucault analyses how individuals come to see and understand in a particular way. He offers a relational and dynamic model of identity. The individual is the “given” which the observer takes for granted and is continuously constituted and constructed through social relationships, discourse and practices. Sometimes discourse shape people. People become subject in two ways:

Technologies of the self are whereby people constitute themselves as objects. That is they situate and define themselves by subject of discourse by becoming tied to an identity. People become docile bodies in technologies of the self. Organisations assume that individuals have fixed identity; but then identity is not fixed because relationships are unrealistic. There is a possibility of challenge and reposition. Hence one may say that individuals are both the sight and subjects of discursive struggle for their identity.

According to Foucault, one can govern the soul. Human has become the focus of organisations, and even though humans are dependable but

disposable, organisations need them. In order to get the best of the individual, one must unleash the potential beneath the self. Therefore workers should be rendered visible through the process of examination. Examination is a system of marking and classification through the simple device of questions and answers; which furthermore provides with basis for judgement and measurement. Your self is no longer your self. Organisations want the individual to have an identity which is beneficial to the organisation.

The examination for example can be seen as both a system of knowledge and power, which Foucault characterised as power/knowledge. It combines into a unified whole “ the deployment of force and the establishment of truth” (184). In other words, it both draws out the truth about those who go through the examination and controls their behaviour. Examination gets individuals to be known according to their marks or scores they achieve, and thus in case they scored less, they could be forced to study or directed to a course treatment. The process of examination turns the individual into a “ case”, that is, both a scientific example and an object of care. Moreover Foucault emphasises that “ the goals of power and the goals of knowledge cannot be separated: in knowing we control and in controlling we know”.

The body is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it, they invest in it, trade it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks to perform ceremonies to emit signs.

[Michel Foucault (1987)]

Hence, it can be said that employees as human beings become manipulated objects as their very soul is becoming open to management scrutiny, interrogation and manipulation.

As Hochschild mentions in her book 'The Managed Heart', "Feeling – whether at the time, or as it is recalled, or as it is later evoked in acting – is an object. It may be a valuable object in a worthy pursuit, but it is an object nonetheless." In order to legitimate managerial activities, management has not only rendered employees as manipulable objects, but they have also started manipulating their feelings. Employees have become as 'assembly lines in the head', and are therefore also subject to alienation and exploitation. It should furthermore be emphasised that even though there has been a radical departure from Fordism, there is still a new form of exploitation which prevails in organisations. Employees are not valued as human beings by management, but rather as objects, which are visible, and therefore manipulable. At the end of the day, albeit emotion is a human feeling, it has been become a commodity which is being continuously commercialised in the market.