

# Definitions of emotional labour



## **Introduction**

Emotional labor is the display of expected emotions by service agents during service encounters. It is performed through surface acting, deep acting, or the expression of genuine emotion. Emotional labor may facilitate task effectiveness and self-expression, but it also may prime customer expectations that cannot be met and may trigger emotive dissonance and self-alienation. However, following social identity theory, they argue that some effects of emotional labor are moderated by one's social and personal identities and that emotional labor stimulates pressures for the person to identify with the service role (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; p. 88).

This current paper will review the definitions of emotional labour, its concepts and consequences based on literature that has been conducted on the subject. Moreover it will clarify the context within emotional labour which has emerged in particular areas (i. e. organizations) and the evaluation of it in the areas used. Specific management interventions and the practices required to achieve the desirable emotional labour will be defined along with the techniques to ensuring it. Finally the paper will end with, which will among others address potential solutions to undesirable outcomes or problems caused by the practice of emotional labour.

## **Emotional Labour Defined**

### **2. 1 Defining Emotions**

Emotions are feelings that people experience, interpret, reflect on, express, and manage (Thoits, 1989). They arise through social interaction, and are influenced by social, cultural, interpersonal, and situational conditions

(Martin, 1999). People in their everyday lives experience emotions by suppressing them in uncomfortable situations or displaying a more accepted behavior that is considered appropriate.

### Defining Emotional Labour

According to the research conducted from Martinez-Inigo et al., emotional displays have been identified as an important requirement in an increasing number of jobs due to their role in influencing work-related outcomes for employees and organizations. Organizations have explicit and implicit display rules that govern employees' emotional expressions in order to influence clients' feelings (e. g., satisfaction), attitudes (e. g., loyalty), and behaviours (e. g., hiring a service); and thereby improve organizational outcomes. When employees' feelings do not meet the organization's display rules, complying with those rules requires that they engage in emotion regulation aimed at aligning their emotional display with the emotional requirements of the job role. Emotion regulation refers to the automatic or controlled processes by which individuals influence different dimensions of their emotions. The " effort, planning, and control" demanded by such emotion regulation defines emotional labour (Martinez-Inigo et al. 2007; p. 30).

Regulating one's emotions to comply with social norms then is referred to as " emotion work" (Hochschild, 1990; p. 118). According to Hochschild (1983), when our job roles require us to display particular emotions and suppress others, we do our emotion management for a wage. Hochschild (1983) defined this regulation as the individual's emotions to comply with working

or organizational norms as “ emotional labor.” What Hochschild defines as emotional labor is “ the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value” (Hochschild, 1983; p. 7).

A very common example of emotional labour given by Hochschild, is of the flight attendants who are required to display appropriate emotions, organization’s policy, for example smiling or a laughing and to maintain a happy appearance for the crew to maintain comfortable and enjoy the flight at the best. In other words, the interaction with the public under the guidance of the organization, manages the desired display of emotions that are not necessarily felt by the employee itself.

According to Hochschild (1983), jobs involving emotional labor possess three characteristics: they require the workers to make facial or voice contact with the public; they require the worker to produce an emotional state in the client or customer, and they provide the employer with an opportunity to exert some control over the emotional activities of workers (Hochschild, 1983). Ashforth and Humphrey (1993; p. 90) defined emotional labor as “ the act of displaying the appropriate emotion.” The difference between Hochschild (1983) and Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) is in the definition of the actual behavior rather than the emotions behind the behavior (Morris & Feldman, 1997).

## **Role of Emotional Labour**

Hochschild (1983) argued that service providers and customers share a set of expectations about the nature of emotions that should be displayed during

the service encounter. These expectations are a function of societal norms, occupational norms, and organizational norms (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989). Ekman (1973) referred to such norms as display rules, which are shared expectations about which emotions ought to be expressed and which ought to be disguised.

### 3. 1 Role of Emotional Labour in organizations

In the industries that provide services in general and hospitality, certain display rules are implemented in order to regulate and control employee's behaviours. Diefendorff and Gosserand (2003) defined emotional labor as the process of regulating one's emotional displays in response to display rules so that work goals can be achieved. The basic purpose of display rules is to dictate the emotions that employees express. These resulting emotional displays are intended to facilitate the attainment of other work goals (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Consider a salesperson whose goal is selling a certain number of cars. Part of the sales process may involve creating and maintaining positive emotions towards customers. To facilitate this goal, the organization may expect employees to display cheerful and friendly emotions when interacting with customers so that these positive emotions spread to customers through contagion processes (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994).

The display rules that companies use for the reinforcement of the emotional labour are policies, symbols, myths, stories to teach from and demonstrate its use. These display rules are performed in order for the employee to be able to act friendly and to disguise anger and disgust, even in facing some of

the most annoying customers. Further, employees must often relinquish part of their independence to the control of their company, including such things as wearing uniforms, and regulation of their mannerisms, body language, and emotional expressions (Paules, 1991).

### 3. 2 Desirable Emotional Labour in Organizations

Hochschild (1983) claimed that emotional labor is performed in individuals by influencing them in various ways and other situational characteristics. Although in recent research on emotional labor have shown that it is based on situations. These situations could be variables as the frequency, the duration, job variables like training and quality orientation.

The individual different approach to emotional labor involves the measurement of individual dispositions and the assumption that such measures can aid in explaining individual attitudes and behavior (Staw & Ross, 1985). Therefore, it is assumed that people can be characterized into certain dimensions, that these dimensions have some stability over time, and that these dimensions are useful in predicting individual behaviour across situations (Staw & Ross, 1985).

Researchers have proposed in order for emotional labor to be performed to its best possible way, three types of acting mechanisms should be implemented: surface acting, deep acting, and genuine acting (Hochschild, 1983; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). A short definition will follow for each one of the acting mechanisms below.

#### 3. 2. 1 Surface Acting

Hochschild (1979, 1983) argued that a service provider performs emotional labor in one of two ways. First, he or she may comply with display rules through surface acting. Surface acting involves simulating emotions that are not actually felt, which is accomplished by careful presentation of verbal and nonverbal cues, such as facial expression, gestures, and voice tone.

“ If I pretend I’m feeling really up, sometimes I actually cheer up and feel friendly. The passenger responds to me as though I were friendly and then more of me responds back” (Hochschild, 1990, p. 121).

The flight attendant uses surface acting to display an emotion, friendliness, which she does not actually feel. Surface acting then is a discrepancy between felt and

displayed emotion (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).

### 3. 2. 2 Deep Acting

Complying with display rules is conducted through deep acting, whereby one attempts to actually experience or feel the emotions that one wishes to display. In much the same way that actors “ psyche themselves” for a role, a service agent psyches himself or herself into experiencing the desired emotion. Feelings are actively induced, suppressed, or shaped (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; p. 93).

In the following example, a flight attendant describes how she tries to stop feeling angry and resentful at an annoying passenger:

I may just talk to myself: “ Watch it. Don’t let him get to you.

Don't let him get to you. . . ." And I'll talk to my partner and she'll say the same thing to me. After a while, the anger goes away. (Hochschild, 1983; p. 55)

Furthermore, deep acting has mostly involvement with the inner feelings and changing them in contradiction with surface acting.

### 3. 2. 3 Genuine Acting

As Hochschild's acting paradigm rests on the assumption that service providers are making efforts to actually feel the emotions they are displaying, many scholars claim that Hochschild ignores the instances whereby one spontaneously and genuinely experiences and expresses the expected emotion without exerting any effort (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). For example, a bartender may show genuine caring when trying to comfort a depressed customer. Or a nurse who feels sympathy at the sight of an injured child has no need to "act." Therefore, genuine acting is used to imply the situation where employees spontaneously experience and express same emotion (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).

## **Emotional Labour Consequences**

Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) described emotional labor as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it can facilitate task performance by regulating interactions and precluding interpersonal problems. On the other hand, it can impair performance by priming expectations of good service that cannot be met (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). To elaborate more, further below the positive and negative consequences will give a broader idea on the



emotional labor performed and its affects on the organization and the psychological well-being of the individuals.

#### 4. 1 Negative Consequences

In most of the literature conducted on emotional labour it has been proposed that it can generate negative consequences concerning the psychological well-being of the employees. Laboratory research suggests that efforts to display positive emotions or suppress negative emotions often lead to patterns of physiological response that presage somatic illness (Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000). Furthermore, Albrecht and Zemke (1985; p. 114) have stated that “ contact overload is a recognizable syndrome in interactive work,” whose symptoms include becoming “ robotic, detached, and unempathetic”. Hochschild (1983) points out that performing emotional labor eventually causes estrangement from one’s genuine feeling, and therefore has detrimental consequences for one’s psychological well-being.

In the emotional labor studies, specialists have addressed with substantial research negative outcomes. Some of the most often outcomes that have been cited are burnout (Hochschild, 1983) and job dissatisfaction (Morris & Feldman, 1996). For example, Rutter and Fielding (1988) found that prison officers report that suppressing emotion in the work place is positively associated with overall stress and negatively associated with job satisfaction.

Wharton (1999) suggested two reasons why the regulation of service providers’ emotional displays is problematic. First, to ensure service quality, employers often implement behavior scripts (such as smile, eye contact, body position, tone of voice) for service providers to follow. This restrictive

script prevents service providers from interacting with customers based on spontaneous intuition, but on a script drawn up by employers. That is, workers' own inclinations for interaction may be suppressed and replaced by an organizationally sanctioned response (Wharton, 1999). Second, service providers may have different interests vis-à-vis the outcome of the interaction. That is, employers believe that service providers' emotional displays are instruments of service excellence. While front line employees may sometimes share those objectives, they do not always do so by sacrificing their emotions.

### Positive Consequences

For an organization, regulating employees' emotional display in a highly scripted manner can ensure task effectiveness and service quality (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993), and increase sales and repeated business (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). For the individual, the positive aspects of emotional labor include financial rewards (i. e., tips or salaries) (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987); increased satisfaction, security, and self-esteem (Tolich, 1993); increased self-efficacy and psychological wellbeing (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993); and decreased stress (Conrad & Witte, 1994). " Emotional labor is not always considered as negative, some employees are rewarded by the fruits of such labor and consequently are drawn to jobs that require emotional challenges" (Shuler and Sypher 2000; p. 83).

### **Conclusion**

Taking under consideration the negative consequences of the emotional labor, for example burnout, job dissatisfaction and suppressing emotions, it

is clear that it is not healthy for the individual. There is no doubt that organizations have to or need to implement emotional labor to their employees to ensure the greatest performance, but the problem that arises from the research done above is the well-being of the individual.

Ashforth & Humphrey (1993) argued that emotional labor could be enriched by incorporating the concept of identity. Specifically, the negative effects of emotional labor on the well-being of the service provider are moderated by identification with the role (or the values and norms of the role) in question. Identification may indeed render emotional labor enjoyable and enhance well-being (p. 107).

Furthermore, Ashforth & Humphrey (1993) indicated that surface acting and deep acting trigger psychological pressures to align one's experience of emotions with one's expression of emotions, but that service providers may use various behavioral and cognitive defense mechanisms to mitigate these pressures and thus forestall identity realignment. Organizations often attempt to recruit, select, socialize, and reinforce the internalization of and compliance with display rules in occupations where emotional labor is central to the work role. Identification however, carries an emotional risk which may psychologically bind one to the role such that one's well-being becomes more or less yoked to perceived successes and failures in the role (p. 107).

One possible solution to achieving positive consequences with emotional labour, from the organization's perspective, could be the techniques used for hiring employees. To elaborate more, there should be a more detailed examination of the candidate in further emotional attitudes and, if

measurable, the willingness and interests on the specific working position. Also the evaluation of the individual's reluctance to the negative consequences of the emotional labor could be as a plus for the future. For example, selecting an employee on attitudinal dispositions in relation to the role and performance needed from the organization.

To conclude, it is most probable that organizations most likely will not make many changes in these situations, individuals though could for a change, study and acquire any possible information on the roles of emotional labor, evaluate their attitudes and search deep “ inside them” if the job position they are applying for is the appropriate one for them.