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ROLE AND CONSEQUENCES OF EMOTIONAL LABOR IN THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract

The use of emotions in the workplace has begun to be increasingly studied by theorists and researchers in organizational behavior. One essential construct in the literature is the emotional labor which is perceived to be the management of feelings to express organizationally desired emotions. This article aims to review existing perspectives on emotional labor, to differentiate the concepts of emotional labor and emotional dissonance, to analyze emotion regulation strategies, and to discuss the consequences of emotional labor in the workplace. These clarifications with regard to the emotional labor and its mechanisms can help manage their associated negative outcomes (such as emotional exhaustion, lower job satisfaction, higher levels of burnout, and intentions to quit the job) and sustain their possible positive outcomes (such as feelings of accomplishment and enhanced identification with the work role).

Introduction

Until recently, many researchers and experts in organizational behavior assumed that an individual's thoughts and actions are governed primarily by cognition or conscious reasoning, but groundbreaking neuroscience discoveries have showed that human perceptions, attitudes, decisions and behaviors are determined by both cognition and emotion (Mc Shane & Steen, 2009), the latter often having a greater influence.

Even though early organizational theorists ignored emotions or assumed they played a negative role by biasing perceptions and interfering with administrative rationality (Gopinath, 2011, p. 4), lately there has been increasing interest in their role in applied and organizational settings. Employees bring their emotions to work and it cannot be denied that „emotions are an inseparable part of everyday organizational life” (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). The display of appropriate emotions is vital to many jobs and plays an important part in how employees are perceived (Gopinath, 2011). Theory and research on emotions in the workplace show that employees' moods, emotions and overall dispositions have an impact on job performance, decision-making, creativity, turnover, teamwork, negotiation and leadership (Gopinath, 2011). Therefore, employees' emotions are an integral part to what happens in an organization. The way in which employees display emotions has a strong impact on several dimensions such as quality of service transactions, attractiveness of interpersonal climate and experience of the feeling itself (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).

One concept receiving increased research attention is emotional labor, construct proposed by Hochschild (2003) to indicate the management of emotions done within a context in which it has exchanged value.

1. Definition of Emotional Labor

Emotional labor is a term proposed and defined by the American sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild as the „the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (Hochschild, 2003, p.7) in „The Managed Heart. Commercialization of Human Feeling” which first appeared in 1983 and was republished in 2003 and 2012. Hochschild's construct became a cornerstone in the studies of emotions within an organizational context. Emotional labor is important nowadays when „most jobs call for a capacity to deal with people rather than with things, for more interpersonal skills and fewer mechanical skills” (Hochschild, 2003, p.9).

One important underlying assumption is that emotions are being managed at work in order to meet some rules stated by the organization.

Many employers have associated specific work roles with feeling rules regarding emotions that employees should show to clients (Hochschild, 2003), rules that can be declared explicitly in selection and training materials or known by observation of coworkers (Grandey, 2000).

These norms can be clearly expressed specifying the range, intensity, duration, or object of emotions that should be experienced. For example, employees must conceal their frustration when serving an irritating customer, display compassion to an ill patient, and hide their boredom in a long meeting with senior management (McShane & Steen, 2009). Some authors prefer the term display rules for these norms because it refers to „what emotions ought to be publicly expressed rather than to what emotions are actually felt” (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993, p.89).

According to Hochschild (2003, p. 7), employees that deal with emotional labor are those that enter into face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact with the public requiring them to „induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others”. Moreover, this labor is done through two types of acting – surface acting and deep acting. People „engage in surface acting when they try to modify their behavior to be consistent with required emotions but continue to hold different internal feelings” while deep acting involves changing the true emotions to match the required emotions for the job (McShane & Steen, 2009, p. 83). As Hochschild (2003, p. 33) put it, „we are capable of disguising what we feel, of pretending to feel what we do not - of doing surface acting”. For example, employees use surface acting when they are forced to smile in front of rude clients and deep acting when they try to change the way they feel about the whole situation and start to see the interaction with such clients as an opportunity to test their communication or interpersonal skills.

One of Hochschild's (2003) major points is that the management of emotions in the work setting requires effort and may be harmful to the employee. Not only the employee must make an effort to support the processes of surface and deep acting, but also the commoditization of feelings, where the organization controls something as personal as emotions, is unpleasant to the employee and may cause burnout and job stress (Hochschild, 2003). Another major contribution to the conceptualization of emotional labor is made by Ashforth and Humphrey (1993, p. 90) who define it as „the act of displaying the appropriate emotion (i.e., conforming with a display rule)”. These authors prefer to focus on the behavior rather than on their underlying emotions and decouple the experience of emotion from the expression of emotion.

They discuss the processes of surface and deep acting noting that Hochschild's definition of emotional labor implies certain deliberateness in managing emotions. In their view, this definition does not allow for „the instances whereby one spontaneously and genuinely experiences and expresses the expected emotion” (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993, p. 94). One of Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) points is that emotion may be felt and displayed with relatively little effort prompting. Therefore, they add a third means of accomplishing emotional labor besides surface and deep acting and that is the genuine expression of emotion.

Other authors that have greatly influenced this field are Morris and Feldman. They define the emotional labor as the „effort, planning and control needed to express organizationally preferred emotions during interpersonal interactions” (Morris & Feldman, 1996, p.987) and conceptualize the construct in terms of four dimensions: frequency of appropriate emotional display, attentiveness to required display rules, variety of emotions to be displayed, and emotional dissonance determined by having to display emotions not genuinely felt, but desired by the organization. According to Morris and Feldman (1996), individuals make sense of emotions based on their understanding of the social environment in which they are experienced. In addition, their view is consistent with Hochschild's on the existence of some degree of effort (or „labor”) required in expressing emotions, even in situations in which the individual's felt emotion is congruent with the organizationally desired emotion (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Their argument is that it takes effort to express the desired emotion even when it is genuinely felt because felt emotion must still be translated into appropriate emotional displays.

Grandey (2000) integrates the three perspectives by defining emotional labor as „the process of regulating both feelings and expressions for the organizational goals” (Grandey, 2000, p. 97), acknowledging that the cited authors discuss surface and deep acting as a way of managing emotions. She notes that a broad theory of emotion which integrates regulation can help to better understand the mechanism of emotional labor. Finally, seeing emotional labor as a process of emotional regulation helps identifying its organizational outcomes (Grandey, 2000).

2. Emotion Regulation Strategies

Not only organizations have rules regarding the required emotions for specific work roles, but also expressions of negative emotions such as fear, anxiety or anger tend to be unacceptable within the workplace (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995).

The same goes with expressing intense emotions, whether negative or positive, in most organizational situations. In accordance, the employees have to regulate their emotions through different means.

Grandey (2000) discusses antecedent-focused and response-focused as types of emotion regulation methods and the way they apply to surface and deep acting. The antecedent-focused emotion regulation implies a modification of the situation or the appraisal and the response-focused an adjustment of the observable signs of emotions.

The employees do not have too many options to modify the situation without living the job, but they can reshape how they perceive the situation in order to adjust their emotional response to the situation through attentional deployment and cognitive change (Grandey, 2000). On one side, attentional deployment consists in recalling events that brings up the required emotions in a particular situation and is consistent with Hochschild's construct of deep acting. On the other side, cognitive change leads to a cognitive reappraisal of the situation so that to lessen the emotional impact and is also a deep acting process.

The second emotion regulation method, response-focused, involves the modulation of the response or the manipulation of emotional expression of the person's reaction to the situation (Gross, 1998 as cited in Grandey, 2000, p. 99). An individual may modify the intensity of the emotion or may entirely fake the expression (Grandey, 2000). Therefore, this method of emotion regulation corresponds with the process of surface acting and entails that the employees show more emotion than they feel or suppress their true feelings and display the required expression. In conclusion, regulating emotions is done through surface and deep acting.

Ashforth and Humphrey (1995, p. 104) identify four substitute means of regulating the experience and expression of emotion in work settings: neutralizing, buffering, prescribing, and normalizing.

The first mean is used to prevent the appearance of socially unacceptable emotions while the remaining three are used to adjust emotions that are inherent or inevitable. Buffering is used to separate potentially disruptive emotions from ongoing activities, prescribing is used to show socially acceptable ways of experiencing and expressing feelings, and normalizing is used to diffuse or reframe unacceptable emotions (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995).

Many neutralizing techniques refer to regulation of strong emotions with numerous norms and organizational practices in place such as prohibiting a person from working in the same department as his spouse or transferring newly promoted persons to other departments in order to avoid the confusion between the leadership and collegial roles. Buffering is more evident in work roles that require dispassionate performance or the expression of authentic concern for the well-being of others while prescribing is more involved when emotional expression is an inherent or desired component or work performance (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). Prescribing is consistent with Hochschild's feeling rules that specify the range, intensity, duration, and object of emotions that should be expressed. Finally, neutralizing involves diffusing or reframing unacceptable emotions. Diffusing may be done through face-saving rituals such as apologies or humor while reframing may entail seeing the situation in another key or using explanations to lessen someone's responsibility for an event or lessen the severity of the consequences (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995).

In summary, there are different emotion regulation strategies that may be used to express the emotions required by the organizational norms.

3. Emotional Labor and Emotional Dissonance

Morris and Feldman (1996) multi-dimensional model of emotional labor entail four organizational variables that have an impact on the skills required for appropriate emotional display: frequency of appropriate emotional display, attentiveness to required display rules, variety of emotions to be displayed, and emotional dissonance.

First, frequency of emotional display is an important factor of emotional labor seen in the following light: „customer or clients are more likely to do business with an organization when the affective bonds of liking, trust, and respect have been established through employee behavior” (Wharton & Erickson, 1993 as cited in Morris & Feldman, 1996, p. 989).

Second, the level of attentiveness to display the rules required by the job includes the duration and intensity of emotional display. The duration of emotional display has an impact on the effort required to express organizationally desired emotion while emotional intensity refers to how strongly an emotion is experienced or expressed (Morris & Feldman, 1996). The longer the duration, the greater the effort and the emotional labor required. Morris and Feldman (1996) argue that jobs that entail a display of intense emotions need deeper acting and more effort from the employee.

Third, according to Morris and Feldman (1996), the variety of emotions to be displayed influences the amount of emotional labor involved in regulating emotions. Wharton and Erickson (1993 as cited in Morris & Feldman, 1996) identify positive, neutral and negative emotional displays in organizations; positive refer to bonds of liking, neutral to authority and status and negative to hostility or intimidation. Some jobs necessitate frequent changes of emotions to support diverse objectives in different situations: positive emotions to encourage business, neutral to speed up transactions when necessary or even negative to discourage some types of customer behavior.

Forth, one of the main points of Morris and Feldman (1996) is that they include emotional dissonance as a dimension of the emotional labor. Emotional dissonance is considered to be a mismatch, a difference between the emotion actually felt and the emotion required by the organizational norm (Middleton, 1989). When conflicts of this type exist, a greater amount of emotional labor is required through greater control, skill, and attentive action (Morris & Feldman, 1996).

Other researchers see emotional dissonance as a consequence of emotional labor. Hochschild (2003, p. 90) notes that emotive dissonance, that is the „difference between feeling and feigning”, leads to strain over a relatively long time. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) consider that this dissonance may cause the individual to feel false and hypocritical and could lead to personal and work-related outcomes, such as „poor self-esteem, depression, cynicism, and alienation from work” (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993, p. 97).

4. Outcomes of Emotional Labor

As Ashforth and Humphrey (1993, p. 96) note, „emotional labor is a double-edged sword”. Emotional labor may have a two sided organizational effect: it may be helpful to the final results, but it may be detrimental to the employees (Grandey, 2000). It may sustain the good performance of the organization, but it may have consequences on the employees' well-being. Grandey (2000, p. 108) mentions that „deep acting should be more positively related to service performance than surface acting, but both should be related to burnout, withdrawal, and negative work attitudes”.

First, emotional labor may help employees to successfully fulfill their task requirements and may increase task effectiveness by making interactions more predictable and by avoiding interpersonal problems that might disrupt interactions with customers (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).

Moreover, it may facilitate the employee self-expression. In highly interactive customer service jobs, affective delivery predicts the service agent's overall job performance (Goodwin et al., 2011) and it is a key factor of successful customer service (Grandey et al., 2005).

In order to perform the service as desired, the organisation has either explicit or implicit emotional display rules (Van Dijk & Kirk, 2007). Hochschild (2003) stated that, as emotional labour is performed for a wage, display rules come with a sense of obligation or promise of reward which strengthens the impact of these rules. In a service encounter, employees are often required to display emotions that are not genuinely felt. The more demanding and strict these rules are, the greater the sense of obligation (Grandey, 2000).

Service organizations attempt to control employees positive displays such as smiling, eye contact, and rhythmic vocal tone as well as their task-based skills for encounters with customers (Grandey et al., 2005), using a variety of techniques such as training, monitoring, and rewards (Hochschild, 2003). Employees need to abide by display requirements as specific as providing a smile and maintaining eye contact with customers for a specific number of seconds. But, the quality of the smile is more difficult to enforce and the extent to which that smile seems authentic to the customer is at the discretion of the employee (Grandey et al., 2005).

Ashforth and Humphrey (1993, p. 95) assumed that „if the expression of emotion is perceived by the audience as sincere, then compliance with display rules will be positively associated with task performance while the latitude for self-expression in the performance of emotional labor will be positively associated with personal well-being”. For customers, good service means more than the simple conformity with the display rules, it really means a sense of genuine expression of sensitivity and concern.

Grandey et al. (2005) noted that both experimental research regarding emotions and customer service theories suggest that authenticity is a factor that enhances reactions to service encounters. Research has shown that people feel less positively about a person displaying inauthentic smiles versus authentic smiles. In an interesting and revealing study designed as a controlled laboratory experiment, Grandey et al. (2005) extended this research into a more realistic encounter that is both a social and an economic transaction.

They created video vignettes that looked like a real hotel check-in encounter, manipulating both affective displays and task performance, shedding light on the role of authenticity in service encounters.

The results suggest that the authenticity of the display influences the impressions of the provider's friendliness and is predictive of service performance. A false smile reduces the positive effect on the observer and may seem manipulative. Grandey et al. (2005) showed that, given acceptable levels of task performance, authenticity has an additive effect on overall satisfaction. Employees who can engage in genuine smiles, or that seem genuine, are more likely to create satisfied customers.

Second, there is a wide range of negative effects of emotional labor noted in the literature. Hochschild (2003) acknowledges that emotional labor may lead to problems such as drug or alcohol abuse and absenteeism. Based on her study on flight attendants, the American psychologist concluded that emotional labor may cause alienation or estrangement from one's true feelings, impairing the well-being of the employee. Her findings are not supported by all authors. For example, Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) indicated that performing emotional labor may help employees to psychologically distance themselves from the unpleasant situations. But there is sufficient support in the literature for the effect of emotional labor on burnout, emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction.

Burnout appears when the employees that highly interact with the customer become overly emotional and don't have too many options to replenish their emotional resources (Jackson, Schwab, & Schuler, 1986 as cited in Grandey, 2000). The main signs of burnout are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced proficiency (Grandey, 2000). This happens because the repeated regulation of emotions may cause exhaustion, energy depletion and fatigue which may lead the employees to detach from the customers and their work, generating depersonalization and reduced proficiency. The frequency of emotional display, the attentiveness to display rules and the variety of expressed emotions affect the emotional exhaustion in a direct manner (Morris and Feldman, 1996).

Mulki et al., (2006) suggests that emotional exhaustion may lead to organizational deviance, that is employee behavior that violates organizational norms such as neglecting directions, withholding effort, slower and ineffective actions. Their study shows that emotional exhaustion causes job dissatisfaction and lower organizational commitment which leads employees to engage in deviant behaviors (Mulki et al., 2006). On one hand, results indicate that highly satisfied and committed employees are less likely to involve in such behaviors even when they feel emotionally drained. On the other hand, dissatisfied and uncommitted employees are more likely to engage in misbehavior.

Morris and Feldman (1996) argued that even though the emotional labor may be associated with higher emotional exhaustion, for the most part emotional dissonance is the one likely to lead to lower job satisfaction. Celik and Oz (2011) note that there is a significant relationship between emotional dissonance, turnover intentions and unexcused absenteeism. Based on a call-center environment, they demonstrated that employees who were unexcusedly absent experienced more emotional dissonance compared to colleagues who were not absent (Celik & Oz, 2011). Moreover, the employees' perceptions of recognition, developmental opportunities, supportive leadership, fair pay and promotion system inversely affect the turnover intentions and absenteeism.

An individual with high emotional dissonance may feel detached and estranged from the organization and may start looking for another job. The more an agent experiences emotional dissonance the higher will be the turnover intention and the number of unexcused absent days (Celik & Oz, 2011). These findings are consistent with other studies. Karatepe and Aleshinloye (2009) remarked frontline employees' higher turnover intentions due to higher levels of emotional dissonance and exhaustion while Karatepe and Choubtarash (2014) suggested that emotional exhaustion has a negative impact on absenteeism and turnover intents.

Emotional dissonance was positively associated with service sabotage (Lee & Ok, 2014) which involves „deliberate deviant actions by service employees, intentionally designed to adversely affect functional service encounters (Harris and Ogbonna, 2009 as cited in Lee & Ok, 2014, p. 178). This relationship is further explained by the mediating effect of burnout. As Lee and Ok (2014) note, the emotional labor and the emotional dissonance may psychologically exhaust employees, causing them to withdraw, to treat customers impersonally and indifferently, to feel less successful in their jobs, frustrated and motivated to engage in sabotage.

The authenticity of emotions, or better said the lack of it, definitely takes its toll on employees. Hochschild (2003) suggested that surface acting may be detrimental and may result in stressful experiences. The employees may feel untrue or even exhausted because suppressing true feelings and expressing false emotions requires effort (Grandey, 2000). Pugh et al. (2011) also noted that surface acting is considered to be a detrimental emotional strategy which produces negative outcomes such as lower job satisfaction, higher levels of burnout, and intentions to quit generated by the mismatch between felt and displayed emotions. Surface acting has a significant negative impact on employees' well-being causing emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Ugur et al., 2012).

In terms of outcomes, there is a difference between surface and deep acting. Surface acting has more negative effects on employees than does deep acting (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002) and it is more likely to be used by inexperienced employees than by those with more on-the-job experience (Gopinath, 2011). Deep acting may distort the signaling function of emotions which helps individuals to connect. Thus, it may impair one's sense of authentic self or may even lead to self-alienation (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). But it has been argued that deep acting may determine also positive outcomes such as feelings of accomplishment and enhanced identification with the work role based on the true nature of the attempt to feel the appropriate emotion (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Given the greater effort involved in deep acting, this form of emotional labor is more consistent with a strong concern for the customers (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).

Conclusions

This article attempts to show that emotional labor is an essential organizational construct especially in relations to the expected outcomes. Emotions are vital to many work roles and they became an integral and inseparable part of everyday organizational life. The interest in their role in applied and organizational settings is increasing, being mainly related to the way emotions are expressed and managed. Herein, the construct of emotional labor is perceived to be the management of feelings to express organizationally desired emotion. This is done mostly through surface and deep acting, both strategies requiring effort and energy from the employees. The management of emotions may lead to emotional dissonance – the state where the emotions expressed, required by the organizational norms, are different from the emotions actually felt. Given this effort, it is essential to acknowledge what are the consequences of emotional labor within the organizational context. On one side, emotional labor supports the good performance of the organization and represents a key factor of successful customer service. On the other side, emotional labor may impair the well-being of the employees causing burnout, lower job satisfaction and negative work behaviors.

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