

Effects of Moderating Factors on Foodservice Employees' Perception of Emotional Labor and Propensity to Leave the Workplace

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Abstract

Emotional labor, generally defined as the act of expressing organizationally-desired emotions in the workplace during service interactions, has been the center of many studies exploring the impact of this phenomenon on employees. Mainstream research in this area focuses on managing the unconstructive effects of this concept on employees' morale and job satisfaction, and identifies emotional labor as a management technique that should be used judiciously. Given the critical role of this concept as a central and integral element in the foodservice industry, this study suggests the possibility that under certain conditions, when certain moderating factors of emotional labor are identified and controlled effectively, emotional labor does actually lead to favorable employee attitudinal and organizational outcomes.

Keywords: emotional labor, moderating factors, employee perceptions, propensity to leave, foodservice employees

1. Introduction

Understanding and managing emotions in the workplace, and their impact on customer service and employee job satisfaction is a critical aspect of any organization operating within the service sector. One specific area of workplace emotions research focuses on emotional labor, or the regulation of emotions as part of the work role. Yadisaptura (2015) proposed that in most service jobs, employees need to perform intellectual physical and emotional labor, as the management of feeling creates a publicly observable facial and bodily display; therefore, making it possible for emotional labor to maintain an exchange value.

The hospitality industry, recognized by many as the world's largest industry, relies on this concept within the foodservice segment. Displaying organizationally-sanctioned emotions to customers or clients has been an argued form of "labor" in the service world, since it requires effort, planning, anticipation, and adjustment to situational factors in order to publicly display emotions that employees may not necessarily privately feel (James, 1989). A warm smile, attention to customer detail, friendliness, professionalism, willingness to help, making eye-contact, and engaging in small friendly conversation are all among the many examples of universally accepted forms of emotional labor, required of almost all service employees in some accepted form. The foodservice industry has seen a significant increase in the implementation of this concept to employee selection, orientation, training, and performance evaluation processes. Ogbonna (1990) provided evidence of increased employer emphasis on the selecting and training of service employees for the purposes of establishing emotional labor as well as the development of mechanisms to supervise and evaluate its deployment.

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Through identifying organizationally-desired emotions in the workplace, foodservice managers and employers attempt to control and direct how employees display these desired emotions to customers to create intended organizational outcomes. A substantial amount of research in this area focuses on managing and minimizing the undesirable impacts of this concept. In this study, however, emotional labor is approached as a central, integral, and potentially favorable concept towards organizational effectiveness. Specifically, when certain factors of emotional labor are identified and managed effectively, emotional labor can be a positive management tool to use in the foodservice industry.

Anderson (2003) stated that many workers in the tourism and hospitality industries can be classified as front-line service workers, as their jobs involve direct customer contact, work that involves displaying emotions, and a willingness to be of service, therefore requiring the effort, planning and control needed to express organizationally desired emotions during interpersonal transactions. Performance of emotional labor plays an integral part in such service roles, and has been a widely accepted norm of customer service evaluations as moments of truth or episodes in which customers have the opportunity to form an opinion about the level of service quality. With increasing competition in the foodservice industry and the rapid increase in number of jobs that require regulated or sanctioned displays of workplace emotions, the potential impact of these regulated emotional displays on perceived levels of service quality makes it worthy of additional investigative attention.

1.1 Emotional Labor

Focusing on the impact of emotional labor in organizational settings has been a significant area of exploration for a variety of service working roles where employees are encouraged to express organizationally desired emotions in their personal interactions with customers. Emotional labor can be defined in several ways. First, it is the internal feeling management which is performed as part of paid work, serving the interests of an employer in maximizing surplus value. Secondly, it is the state of mind or feeling within another person, most often a customer or a client. Finally, emotional labor is a managerial attempt to prescribe, and/or supervise, and measure employee performance of emotional labor (Taylor, 1998).

Hochschild (1983) was the first to note that, particularly in service jobs, employees are often required to show certain emotions in order to please the customer. Having to show such emotions while one is not actually feeling them, or having to suppress one's own emotions when their expression does not seem appropriate, were taken together in devising the concept of emotional labor. He further suggested that employees regulate their emotional display in order to meet organizationally based expectations via two forms of emotional labor: surface acting, referring to the display of the characteristics of emotions that are regarded as appropriate, but not actually felt, versus deep acting, that is undertaken to actually feel an emotion that is thought to be required in a certain situation.

Regardless of how service employees react to organizationally required display of emotions in customer interactions, surface or deep acting, many studies denote the importance of implementing such requirements in customer service positions. The concept itself can define the perceived levels of service quality, and therefore becomes central to the service industry. Goffman (1959) was among the first researchers to observe that organizationally required emotion display rules are guided by the invisible hand of norms for appropriate expectations established by organizations. Much of what foodservice employees do on the job entails the management of emotions in their interactions with customers, and the display of these emotions help them accomplish tasks that are central to their role performance. Zapf (2002) extended the construct emotional labor and defined it as emotionwork and concluded that the concept of emotional work refers to the quality of interactions between employees and customers as a part of the job.

Zeithaml (1990) found that in the foodservice industry, customer evaluations of a broad range of services, including responsiveness, courtesy, trustworthiness, approachability, openness to communication, and understanding of the customer, were key dimensions of service encounter, and that customers tend to share fairly clear expectations about what constitutes good service. Costanti(2004) stated that performing emotional labor is required for both successful delivery of service to customers as well as a strategy for coping with the need to conceal real feelings, due to the demands made by the customers and management. Such demands bear the possibility of tensions, exploitation, and an unequal distribution of power in the emotional labor triangle of support, expectation, and investment issues for front-line employees. In conveying the desired work place emotions, service employees may experience inner conflict, known as emotional dissonance, which occurs when organizationally sanctioned emotion conflicts with the actually felt emotions of the employee.

When feelings differ from expressed emotions due to incompatibility between organizationally based expectations and actual feelings held by the workers, emotional dissonance may impact work performance (Ashkanasy, 2000). Although this phenomenon has a tendency to develop frequently in emotional labor situations, the impact on employee performance and job satisfaction is not evident. Most research in this area indicates that when presented with the challenge of such conflict, employees either simply alter their displayed feelings (surface acting) or conjure up the appropriate feelings within themselves (deep acting). In order to display appropriate emotions, employees sometimes hide or fake felt emotions, or try to experience the expected emotion, which may cause emotional strain over time. Brotheridge (2002) also described the relationship between emotional strain and job burnout as a phenomenon that comes into existence when the sanctioned workplace emotional roles and expectations conflict with actually felt emotions, causing emotional dissonance, and potentially leading to employee dissatisfaction, job burnout, and an eventual propensity to leave. It should be noted that this inner conflict does not always involve or lead to emotional dissonance or burnout. In fact, Ashforth (1993) explicitly recognized that employees may genuinely feel the emotions displayed, and in such cases, emotional labor has more to do with managing the appropriate emotions rather than expressing unexpressed emotions. This type of finding was also consistent in the research by Zammuner (2005) which indicated that felt emotions do not always call for the activation of regulatory processes. Higher levels of emotional consonance will help a person effortlessly express emotions that are both felt, and at the same time, required for the job, and should result in both a heightened feeling of personal accomplishment and an absence of emotional exhaustion.

Managing employee emotions in the workplace and its' impact on customer service is not a new phenomenon, however most studies investigating it emphasize the theoretical approaches of focusing on internal states and internal processes of behavioral displays (Glomb, 2004). In this study however, all aspects of emotional labor are looked at from a set of external, business setting attributes (with the exception of an extraverted attribute related to employee character traits - yet that too is argued to be manageable to some extent by the organization through hiring processes that screen for more extravert candidates for frontline service positions). These external business attributes are described as moderating factors that organizations have the ability to control and regulate.

2. Methodology

The sample size for this study was 1900, with 414 returned responses from various foodservice employees in restaurants within two states, New York and Texas, resulting in an overall response rate of 21%. The method of completion of the questionnaires included mail, email, and in person via researchers' personal efforts. The nature of the subject matter under investigation in this study should be noted when deliberating the response rate. Limitations of the response rates were mainly associated with sending questionnaires to people's workplace. Similar studies that had restaurateurs as respondents had received relatively low response rates, which is not uncommon for surveys that are directed towards business professionals' workplace with busy schedules.

Restaurant types were categorized by seating capacity (size), service type (quick, casual, fine-dining), and type of ownership (chain, independent). Restaurant size was broken down to three categories; seating capacity up to 70 (small), between 70 and 140 (medium), and 140 and above (large). Table 1 summarizes the sample structure of the study.

Table 1. Respondents Restaurant Size, Service Type, and Ownership

<u>Restaurant Size (Seating Capacity)</u>	Frequency	Percentage
Small (up to 70)	87	21.10%
Medium (70 to 140)	176	42.50%
Large (140 or more)	151	36.40%
Total	414	100.00%
<u>Service Type</u>		
Quick	111	26.80%
Casual	134	32.30%
Fine-dining	169	40.90%
Total	414	100.00%
<u>Type of Ownership</u>		
Chain	202	48.70%
Independent	212	51.30%
Total	414	100.00%

The set of external attributes, known as moderating factors, as well as outcomes that were analyzed in this study are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Sample Structure of the Study

<u>Moderating factors (independent variables)</u>	<u>Outcomes (dependent variables)</u>
Level of job autonomy	Perception of emotional labor
Duration of emotional labor	Propensity to leave the workplace
Frequency of emotional labor	
Explicitness of emotional labor	
Longevity with the job	
Extrovert-ness	

Based on the moderating factors outlined, this study tested the following hypotheses:

- H1:* The more autonomy that employees have at their position, the more positive the perception toward emotional labor and less propensity to leave the workplace will be.
- H2:* Longer duration of emotional labor will lead to negative perception toward emotional labor and more propensity to leave the workplace.
- H3:* Greater frequency of emotional labor will lead to negative perception toward emotional labor and more propensity to leave the workplace.
- H4:* More explicit organizational display rules will lead to positive perception toward emotional labor and less propensity to leave the workplace.
- H5:* Longevity with the job will lead to positive perception toward emotional labor and less propensity to leave the workplace.
- H6:* Extrovert employee qualities will lead to positive perception toward emotional labor and less propensity to leave the workplace.

All of the items measuring outcomes were scored on a 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) Likert-type scale. First, factor analysis was performed to measure the correlations between the six moderating factors and the two separate outcomes as indicated in Table 2. Once the measure of how much of the variance in outcomes was explained by the moderating factors tested, regression analyses was performed for each of the two outcome variables with their respective set of predictors. For example, as sample outcome “Perception of emotional labor” was measured with the question: “I feel comfortable with the emotional labor requirements of my job” by a 5 item Likert-scale as mentioned earlier.

3. Findings

With respect to the six moderating factors measured and their relevance to each outcome, a Scree test and the Guttman–Kaiser criterion indicated that there was one Eigenvalue greater-than-one. In other words, all six factors measured the same and only one factor, which was indicated for each of the two outcomes.

This confirmed the appropriateness of the selected moderating factors in measuring each intended outcome. These six factors could also be used as an indication of the construct validity of the survey instrument in terms of measuring the intended objective. Table 3 summarizes the factor loading scores and the communalities, square scores of each factor loading, indicating the correlations and the amount of variance explained by each factor for each outcome respectively. Although all six factors measured were substantially related to each outcome, with all above 60% scores, some were more closely related due to communality scores. For example, level of job autonomy was significantly related to perception of emotional labor with a factor score of 0.805, and as an independent variable, it also explained 64.8% of variance in perception of emotional labor, which was followed by duration of emotional labor and frequency of emotional labor with 61.3% and 49.2% respectively.

Table 3. Factor Scores and Communalities (Extractions) Between Moderating factors and Outcomes

Moderating Factors	Outcome: Perception of Emotional Labor	
	Factor Scores	Communalities (Extraction)
Level of job autonomy	0.805	0.648
Duration of emotional labor	0.783	0.613
Frequency of emotional labor	0.702	0.492
Explicitness of emotional labor	0.666	0.443
Longevity with the job	0.605	0.366
Extrovert-ness	0.604	0.364
Moderating Factors	Outcome: Propensity to Leave the Workplace	
	Factor Scores	Communalities (Extraction)
Level of job autonomy	0.777	0.603
Duration of emotional labor	0.665	0.442
Frequency of emotional labor	0.784	0.614
Explicitness of emotional labor	0.689	0.474
Longevity with the job	0.880	0.774
Extrovert-ness	0.794	0.634

Table 4 summarizes the findings with respect to moderating factors as predictors and perception of emotional labor and propensity to leave as outcomes. H1, more autonomy will be positively associated with the perception toward emotional labor and less propensity to leave the workplace, is supported for both outcomes ($\beta=0.532, p<.05$ and $\beta=-0.324, p<.05$ respectively). As projected, emotional labor perception was less aversive among workers with more job autonomy, and their' propensity to leave the workplace was less likely. H2, longer the duration of emotional labor, the more negative the perception toward emotional labor and more propensity to leave the workplace will be, was supported for both outcomes ($\beta=-0.236, p<.001$ and $\beta=0.345, p<.001$ respectively). Increased duration of the emotional labor appeared to have a negative relationship with the perception and positive with propensity to leave. H3, greater frequency of emotional labor, will lead to negative perception toward emotional labor and more propensity to leave the workplace was not supported for either of the outcomes ($\beta=0.356, p<.05$ and $\beta=0.023, p>.05$).

H4, more explicit organizational display rules will lead to positive perception toward emotional labor outcome was supported ($\beta=0.267, p<.01$) however less propensity to leave the workplace outcome was not supported ($\beta=0.018, p>.05$). H5, longevity with the job will lead to positive perception toward emotional labor was not supported, even though the relationship was statistically significant ($\beta= -0.134, p>.05$), the direction of the relationship was opposite of what was predicted, however propensity to leave the workplace outcome was supported ($\beta=0.452, p<.05$) as predicted. H6, extrovert employee qualities will lead to positive perception toward emotional labor and less propensity to leave the workplace was supported for both outcomes ($\beta=0.673, p<.001$ and $\beta=-0.494, p<.001$ respectively).

Table 4. Regression Analysis for Outcomes 1 and 2

Variable	Perception of Emotional Labor	Propensity to Leave Workplace
(H1) Level of job autonomy	0.532*	-0.324*
(H2) Duration of emotional labor	-0.236***	0.345***
(H3) Frequency of emotional labor	0.356	0.023
(H4) Explicitness of emotional labor	0.267**	0.018
(H5) Longevity with the job	-0.134	0.452*
(H6) Extrovert-ness	0.673***	0.494***
F	24.567	42.347
R ²	0.223	0.281
Adjusted R ²	0.204	0.267

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Based on the categorization of the restaurant types (3x3x2), 18 possible restaurant type combinations were created. Of those, six combinations with a sample size of 20 or larger were used in MANCOVA. Table 5 indicates a significant difference among these six different restaurant type combinations at $\alpha = .05$.

Table 5. Test of Dependent Variable: Attitude Toward Emotional Labor

Source	Type III (Sum of Squares)	df	Mean Square	F	Significance
Corrected Model	59811.5(a)	8	8778.56	4.145	.000***
Intercept	2227.80	1	2229.78	1.083	.302
Restaurant Type	38727.55	6	6433.09	3.123	.006**
Error	227974.95	138	2063.40		
Total	390700.00	143			
Corrected Total	287683.52	151			

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

According to the results, restaurant type combination medium-casual-independent had the highest mean score toward emotional labor, followed by medium-fine dining-independent.

Table 6 summarizes the perception toward emotional labor mean scores for the six restaurant type categories.

Table 6. Perception Toward Emotional Labor Mean Scores

Restaurant Type	Mean Factor Scores
Medium-casual-independent	58.48
Medium-fine dining-independent	43.29
Large-casual-chain	27.79
Small-fine dining-independent	24.57
Large-casual-independent	23.90
Large-fine dining-independent	18.99

4. Discussion

All six of the moderating factors identified played a significant role on employees' perception of emotional labor and propensity to leave the workplace with significant communality scores. As H1 predicted, the more autonomous employees feel at their workplace, the more receptive they would be toward emotional labor and less likely to leave their jobs was supported by the outcomes of the study. Considering the outcome that the most favorable perceptions of emotional labor were found in fine dining and casual restaurants, as opposed to quick (or fast food type) restaurants, supports this finding, as the employees of fine dining and casual restaurants tend to have more delegated authority in their jobs. The longer the duration of the interaction (amount of time that the employees are engaged in emotional labor during their shift) caused them to have a negative impact on their perception of emotional labor and increased their likelihood of leaving the workplace, as suggested by H2.

Perhaps managing the duration that is required of such interactions and instructing employees to keeping them brief could likely reduce the negative impact, as it can be controlled by the management via setting up certain guidelines and parameters for the duration of the interactions. Interestingly, the frequency of emotional labor interactions did not produce the predicted outcome of H3, negative perception toward emotional labor and more propensity to leave the workplace. Even though the duration of the emotional labor affected perception (H2), the number of times employees engaged in that behavior did not. One possible explanation for this could be that the employees acknowledge emotional labor as the natural and routine part of their job performance expectations, and they do not mind engaging in it frequently, as long as the duration of the interactions are not exhausting.

Making the nature of the expected emotional labor behavior clear and obvious to employees, also known as explicit organizational display rules, led to positive perception of emotional labor as H4 predicted, however its' impact on propensity to leave the workplace was not supported. This finding supports the assumption that training for emotional labor can be clear about the observable examples of what the expected behaviors are, and this can be achieved via role-playing, skill demonstrating, or simple watching instructional training videos on how to acquire such customer service skills. The more obvious the expected behavior is, the more perceptive the employees will be toward it.

Another interesting finding of the study was that the longevity with the job, as H5 put forth, did not lead to positive perception toward emotional labor. On the contrary, it deteriorated the positive perception. The longer that the employees stayed at their jobs, the less likely they were to view emotional labor favorably. This phenomenon is seen in many studies as one of the unexpected favorable aspects of employee turnover. Most studies that looked at the customer service aspects of employee turnover concluded that the employees who are in customer contact positions, and recently hired, were more likely to receive positive or favorable customer feedback or comments than employees that were employed in the same workplace for extended period of times, such as several months or years, since they tended to be more receptive to customer service training.

Finally, the idea of monitoring employee traits in hiring in an effort to match these qualities with job expectations, was supported as H6 predicted. Employees with more outgoing characteristics and who feel naturally at-ease in engaging customer service situations, had a positive perception of emotional labor and were less likely to leave their jobs. The literature seems to be split on this aspect of whether customer service skills are innate abilities or can be acquired through training. Each view has merits, as employee qualities can be inquired about at the time of hiring, and certain aspects of emotional labor expectations can be acquired through training, in order to match employee traits with job expectations, making this a controllable attribute by the management.

5. Conclusion

Based on the overall results of the study, moderating factors had a significant effect on perception of emotional labor and propensity to leave the workplace. Since all of the moderating factors identified in the study are controllable attributes by management, it is recommended that they are taken into consideration when devising a plan for implementing or improving emotional labor aspects of job performance expectations. Customer service in the foodservice industry will always be at the forefront of differentiation when it comes to customers' perceptions, and managing it via effective implementation of emotional labor can be crucial. Also, investigation of the moderating factors revealed that certain restaurant types offered maximum opportunity for implementation as they provided more suitable environment for engagement in emotional labor. This study was limited to two states, New York and Texas. It is recommended that the study is replicated in other states with larger sample sizes to improve applicability of the results on a larger platform. Also, the determination of the moderating factors might be extended or further tested to include more salient attributes in relation to emotional labor.

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