

## Emotional Labor – An Empirical Analysis of the Correlations of Its Variables

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### Abstract

The study is aimed at establishing suitable correlations amongst the variables of Emotional Labor. The study is fundamental and was conducted as a prelude to a major research work by considering a sample of 50 employees working in the services sector. The study reveals that there exists a positive and a strong correlation between the variables of Carry Home – Anger & Excitement; Emotional Variety – Emotional Suppression and Emotional Privacy – Positive Emotions. These variables act as the sub-variables of the major variable “Emotional Labor” and have the ability to create a greater impact on the psychological processes experienced by the employees in their respective workplaces.

**Keywords:** Emotional Labor, Emotional Variety, Emotional Suppression, Emotional Privacy

### 1. Emotional Labor – Definition & Brief History

Emotions and an association with it cannot be denied by anyone of us. Emotions are regarded as the most basic facets of individuals since the expressions of feelings are vital as well as indispensable. Expression of emotions, a basic fundamental need, is quite similar to the need for food, water or sleep. This essentiality has led to a constant and continued association between emotions and individuals both at the organizational as well as the societal contexts. The emotional associations which are experienced by most of us is because of the environment in which we live in, the nature of work we do, etc. but the only difference is that, the intensity of emotions experienced varies. Although the study of emotions in work settings is not uncommon, organizational behavior researchers are increasingly recognizing the importance of emotions in everyday work life (Arvey, Renz, & Watson, 1998; Fisher & Ashkanasy, 2000) and hastening the process of study of such emotions. The ground for modern research on emotions in organizations has been laid down with the sociologist Hochschild's seminal book on emotional labor: *The Managed Heart* (1983). Empirical works (e.g., Diefendorff & Richard, 2003) suggest that success on the job front can be achieved through the management of emotions and emotional displays.

According to Hess (2001), emotions in everyday language, can simply refer to feeling states such as happiness, excitement, love, fear, or hate. Emotion (*ex movere* in Latin) is defined as “applying ‘movement,’ either metaphorically or literally, to the core feelings” (Newman et. al., 2009). The movement so given to the inborn emotions adopts a total dynamic state which guarantees explicit/implicit expression between a worker and another party (like another worker, organization, customer etc.). Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) further define emotions as an “integral and inseparable part of everyday organizational life. From moments of frustration or joy, grief or fear, to an enduring sense of dissatisfaction or commitment, the experience of work is saturated with feeling”. Thus, emotions being the centrality of social exchanges, lead us to the understanding of the concept of Emotional Labor.

The concept that we refer to today as “emotional labor” was born of earlier works on impression management and emotion work in social settings (Fulmer & Barry, 2009). (Sharpe, 2005) says that even our social life is guided by feeling rules, which are normative role expectations and instruct us how to feel in different contexts. Feeling rules, such as feeling sad at a funeral or happy on one's wedding day, tend to regulate emotions and thus serve as a tool for social control. They also help to differentiate between normal and deviant behavior. When appropriate behaviors are not presented, it creates emotional deviance. Emotional deviance regarded as the barometer for appropriate or

inappropriate emotions, can be interpreted as evidences of mental illness, when the magnitude of inappropriate emotions exceeds the socially acceptable limits.

Hochschild defined Emotional Labor as '*the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display for a wage*'. It is intended to produce a particular state of mind in others; is sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*' (Newman et. al., 2009). *Emotional labor* is a broader term capturing the "effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions" (Fulmer & Barry, 2009). Emotional Labor summarization has resulted from an analysis of three types of "labor" to be offered to the organization in exchange for reward. Mental labor refers to the cognitive skills and knowledge as well as the expertise of employees. Physical labor refers to the physical efforts of employees to achieve organizational goals. Emotional labor refers to the extent to which an employee is required to present an appropriate emotion in order to perform the job in an efficient and effective manner (Othman et. al. 2008).

Emotional labor is widely adopted by employees so as to create a façade and influence their own feelings and portray a completely different set of feelings to the people with whom they deal with. According to Diefendorff and Gosserand (2003), employees engage in emotional labor to influence the emotions of others (e.g., customers, coworkers) so that work goals can be achieved (e.g., sell a product, make a group decision). Display of a completely different set of feelings by the employees means that, employees especially front end employees/customer service employees engage in the expression of positive emotions like courteousness and cheerfulness and try to avoid the expression of negative emotions like hatred, short temper, brooding etc. Thus, anger or love or surprises are expressions of emotional states which are directed at or caused because of something. This notion finds its explicit status resulting out of social exchanges for which emotions can be regarded as being the central element. Such social exchanges and their inter-linkages again lead us to the understanding of the concept of Emotional Labor.

### **1.1 Emotions and Emotional Labor in Work Contexts**

The fact that emotion plays a key role in organizational work life seems to be widely accepted. The emotional importance at the workplace was further reiterated by (Kiel and Watson, 2009) with the statement that "you get hired for what you know" (cognitive skills) and "get fired for not getting along with others" (emotional skills). Though the recognition of the existence of emotions in organizations & the importance of such emotional experiences in our physical and psychosocial well-being have long since existed, organizational behavioral frameworks started giving acceptance and consideration to this only recently (Brief and Weiss, 2002). This recognition and importance attached duly to emotions (emotions of the self as well as with the emotions of others) in organizational work life, facilitates not only the effective communication with others but also permits an understanding of how to motivate others to do what we want (Brown & Brooks, 2002). According to (Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988), emotions are typically viewed as intrapsychic states caused by factors such as job characteristics, stress, relationships with supervisors, or compensation. (Inigo et. al, 2007) state that these intrapsychic states of emotions are an important requirement in a number of jobs and play a role in influencing work-related outcomes for both employees as well as organizations. (Brown & Brooks, 2002) consider the prevailing view to observe organizations as entities in which action and activities happen due to rationality and logic. Though rationality exists within organizations, it cannot prevail over work experiences like pleasure, sadness, jealousy, rage, guilt and love which come in packages of varying levels of intensity depending on our work contexts. But emotion work and emotional labor are quite different from each other. Emotion work is the effort employees put in to suppress their private feelings like boredom etc. so as to stay in tune with the socially accepted norms. But Emotional labor is a more institutionalized and commercial way of exploiting employees wherein an employee is required to display emotions in accordance with the organization's prescribed display rules.

### **1.2 Standardization of Emotions in Service Organizations**

India, as a country has made its mark in the global arena, to be precise, only in the post-liberalization era. With the realization that an economic growth approach, derived from Soviet model, would no longer sustain, India adopted the free-market principles. This helped push India into the top echelons where it is now in the top G-20 emerging economies. This also had a spiraling effect on the growth rates, people's incomes, foreign investments, production expansions, infrastructural improvements and employment figures. Analyzing the services sector from an Indian standpoint, it is observed that the current contributions of this sector to the Indian GDP stand at 55.6% as against the 18.1% and 26.3% for the agriculture and industry sectors respectively. The following figure gives a fair idea about the

Services GDP as a constituent of the overall GDP for a period of five years from 2005 to 2010. The graph indicates a more or less steady growth in the Services GDP, after a slight fall in the initial years, despite the varying growth rates presented by GDP.



**Figure I – The Trend of Overall GDP and Services GDP for India**

The services sector is also regarded as a control channel to check the unemployment figures of India. It employs close to 34% of the total labor force, the second highest after the agriculture sector. For the sole reason that this sector harvests a huge workforce, it has been quite a potential platform for extensive discussions and debates. Researchers increasingly are recognizing important and unique demands and far-reaching consequences associated with the customer-management interface within the service organizations. Lot of research has been conducted under service organization settings which primarily focused on the customer experiences and customer satisfaction. Under service settings, customer satisfaction becomes significant. Employees experience in their work worlds is correlated with the experiences they provide for customers, and that, it is these customer experiences that get translated into customer satisfaction. This established line of research is called the “linkage research”. Working on the same lines (Hampson & Junor, 2005), state that with the proliferation in services sector work, labor process theorists have given extra thought to the skills for the work to be performed in organizations supporting “customer oriented bureaucracy”. Also employees’ behavior can make customers form opinions about the service that is being offered. (Zapf et. al, 1999) also argued that the personal relationships with patients, clients, or children are very demanding and require a high amount of empathy and emotional involvement in order to avoid treating other people like objects. In such professions, since the management of emotions becomes fundamental, employees’ constantly work under emotional boundary conditions to create a superior service climate.

## 2. Rationale of the Study

Services sector is viewed as one of the most modern outlets in India through which businesses operate to innovatively reach the customers. This sector caters to a large employee base, in which off late, there has been an aggrandizement of intensified competitions within it. Highly skilled labor coupled with the quality of customer service delivery alone can contribute to the survival of firms. Hence re-scrutinizing of the customer service interactions through the latest concept of emotional labor becomes critical. Wages are widely believed to be the essential motivating force behind the contributions made by any employee to a firm. Hence, this study takes into account the elemental organizational display rules for a detailed scrutiny of the variables of emotional labor to understand their likely impact on labor productivity, overall emotional experiences and turnover intentions of employees. But again, emotional display rules cannot be viewed in isolation. They are subjected to a number of influences that act both as antecedents and

consequences, which this study chooses to temporarily ignore because of the exhaustiveness of such variables. Hence, this study seeks to establish the correlations for Emotional Labor and its sub-variables in isolation.

### 3. Objectives of the Study

The preliminary literature review on Emotional Labor and its related antecedents and consequences has revealed that previous researchers have mainly adopted both job focused as well as employee focused approaches to understand this concept. But the researchers have either overlooked or under-examined Emotional Labor from an employee based perspective wherein Emotional Labor can play the role of an independent variable thereby affecting the levels of the Organizational Role Stress as experienced by employees and also making an overall impact on their Life Satisfaction levels.

This study, a prelude to a major doctoral work, is carried out as a pilot study within the services sector. The objectives of the current study are:

- To study and analyze the levels of Emotional Labor among various employees of the services sector.
- To study the correlation effects of the sub-variables of Emotional Labor and subsequently identify the primary influencing variables.

### 4. Research Methodology & Data Analysis

The research design adopted in this study was purely quantitative and descriptive based. A Random Sampling approach has been adopted and the sample chosen for this study was fifty employees from the services sector. Data was collected through the administration of an Emotional Labor Scale, which is a 10-item scale. A four-point response format has been used with *never* (1) and *always* (4) as anchors. Scores for all items are summed to calculate a total score for each individual respondent. Further the data, thus collected, was analyzed to establish the correlation coefficients between the data sets.

The Emotional Labor Scale consists of 10 items for which ten sub-variables have been created. The ten sub-variables are as follows:

- Emotional Quotient EQ
- Emotional Drain ED
- Anger & Excitement AEX
- Carry Home CH
- Happiness Quotient HQ
- Emotional Suppression ES
- Positive Emotions PE
- Emotional Variety EV
- Emotional Privacy EP
- Work Enthusiasm WE

**TABLE I - Distribution of the Respondents as Against the Total Scores of EI Scale**

<b>10-20</b>	0
<b>20-30</b>	14
<b>30-40</b>	34
<b>40-50</b>	2
	50

**TABLE II - Distribution of the Individual Respondents Scores**

SCALES	EQ	ED	AEX	CH	HQ	ES	PE	EV	EP	WE	TOTAL
NEVER	14	0	1	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	19
RARELY	10	12	4	4	2	12	6	8	1	0	59
SOMETIMES	16	27	41	36	19	6	27	6	33	7	218
ALWAYS	10	11	4	10	27	31	16	30	16	43	198
TOTAL	50	50	50	50	11	11	11	47	50	50	380

**TABLE III – Correlation Co-Efficients of the Emotional Labor Variables**

	EQ	ED	AEX	CH	HQ	ES	PE	EV	EP	WE	ROW MAX
<b>EQ</b>	1	0.886	0.78	0.819	-0.056	-0.157	0.003	0.764	0.822	0.627	0.886
<b>ED</b>	0.886	1	0.93	0.964	0.214	0.0772	0.925	0.001	0.88	0.054	0.964
<b>AEX</b>	0.729	0.905	1	0.98	0.386	-0.253	0.861	-0.26	0.898	-0.14	0.98
<b>CH</b>	0.624	0.937	0.98	1	0.56	-0.059	0.944	-0.07	0.965	0.057	0.98
<b>HQ</b>	-0.039	0.518	0.39	0.56	1	0.7245	0.782	0.773	0.751	0.859	0.859
<b>ES</b>	-0.716	0.077	-0.25	-0.06	0.725	1	0.272	0.978	0.15	0.919	0.978
<b>PE</b>	0.371	0.925	0.86	0.944	0.782	0.272	1	0.261	0.981	0.361	0.981
<b>EV</b>	-0.626	0.001	-0.26	-0.07	0.773	0.9784	0.261	1	0.172	0.976	0.978
<b>EP</b>	0.523	0.88	0.9	0.965	0.751	0.1497	0.981	0.172	1	0.307	0.981
<b>WE</b>	-0.448	0.054	-0.14	0.057	0.859	0.919	0.361	0.976	0.307	1	0.976
<b>COL MAX</b>	0.886	0.937	0.98	0.98	0.859	0.9784	0.981	0.978	0.981	0.976	

The above table clearly indicates that the following variables have a strong correlation and have the ability to create a greater impact on the psychological processes experienced by the employees in their respective workplaces.

- **AEX-CH (0.98)**
- **EV-ES (0.978)**
- **EP-PE (0.981)**

#### 4.2 Results, Findings and Conclusion

The study like many of its preceding studies found out that there is a close relationship between an individual's emotional incidences, workplace experiences and psychological health of an employee. It is generally agreed upon that compensation package is the single largest motivator for the employees and this aspect cuts across industries. But more specific to the services sector, the wages and salaries drawn by employees is bounded by certain organizational display rules detailed in particular for the employees' emotional dispositions. This implies that firms attempt to deliver uniform outputs or standardize their customer service interaction by mandating the organizational display rules. This generates a remarkable increase in the output. The Indian services sector and the assortment of industries operating under it were once labor intensive. With change in time, unskilled or semi-skilled transformed into skilled or knowledge workers. But the emotional compulsions inflicted on the modern day skilled workforce question their very branding. The ready availability of Indian labor could also be one of the reasons for enforcing emotional boundaries. This study provides future research directions into the understanding of labor supply- emotional demands-customer

experience equations. It could further be weaved from the study that emotional management helps in building sustained productivity for the firms as well as incising the attrition levels. The findings of this study specifically point towards highest correlations between the variables of *Carry Home – Anger & Excitement; Emotional Variety – Emotional Suppression and Emotional Privacy – Positive Emotions*. This indicates that for any employee the varied emotions experienced at work are likely to be carried home, especially for those where the emotions are either Anger (highly negative) or Excitement (highly positive). The study also reveals that the higher the variety of emotions expressed, higher would be the rate of suppression. Also, if a high level of emotional privacy is provided to the employees at the workplace without subjecting the employee to any display rules, there is an indication of a conducive work climate where the employees by and large express positive emotions.

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