

The Effect of Emotional Labor on Emotional Exhaustion in Banking Services: The Role of Iranian Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of emotional labor on emotional exhaustion by considering the role of emotional intelligence. With increasing development of economy and competition among service providers, management of employees, feelings is considered as a vital aspect in providing services to customers and influences organizational outcomes. Thus service organization, based on the results of the present study, would be able to identify and manage feeling and emotions of their employees in providing high quality and superior services to target customers and in addition to promote the spirit of service providing and effectiveness of employees, create some competitive advantages for themselves. Totally, 133 questionnaires were distributed to employees of Bank Saderat which the results from analysis of them based on simple linear regression and multiple hierarchical regression show that emotional labor influences emotional exhaustion and in addition to it, variable of emotional intelligence moderates these influences too.

Key words: Emotional exhaustion, emotional intelligence, emotional labor

INTRODUCTION

Emotions are quintessential to human experience, which influences man's thoughts and actions. In the past, emotions in the workplace were believed to conceal sound judgment and thus were not even perceived as workplace phenomenon (Grandey, 2000). The theme in much of this research is that many service jobs (e.g., customer service, healthcare) have emotional requirements and that well-being and effectiveness in these jobs are damaging, relatively, by a person's ability to meet these requirements (Gosserand and Diefendorff, 2005). Interpersonal interactions, such as the emotions employees declare to others, can affect important organizational outcomes. The importance of emotions has become even more common with the expansion of the service economy. Oftentimes the products provided by service employees are intangible and the perceived quality of the service is related to the interpersonal interactions between the employee and the customer (Morris and Feldman, 1996; Wolcott-Burnam, 2004). For example, Pugh (2001) showed that employees' displays of positive emotion were directly related to customers' evaluations of service quality. The expression of emotions has also been connected to customer mood (Luong, 2005), customer willingness to return and pass positive remarks to friends about the organization (Tsai, 2001; Tsai and Huang, 2002) and customer overall satisfaction with the organization (Mattila and Enz, 2002).

This phenomenon is of more necessity in countries having weak legal, commercial and administrative communicational infrastructure and employ face-to-face communication more frequently emotional labor in addition to its influence on customers, coworkers and organization, also influences physical and psychological health of individual service provider. Also in jobs requiring emotional labor, emotional intelligence is considered as key moderator variable in workplace. Thus according to the results from the present study, by identifying spirits and emotions of service employees which communicate in a face-to-face manner, it is possible to promote effectiveness and health of employees simultaneously and reduce job burnout and dissatisfaction. Considering this and also the fact that service jobs in Iran are performed in a face-to-face manner, the essential question of the present research is that to what extent an emotional labor influences physical and psychological health of people working in Iranian service industry, especially bank tellers, in terms of work nature and to what extent emotional intelligence influences the relationship between emotional labor strategies and emotional exhaustion in this type of jobs?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional labor: In general, researchers agree that that emotional labor assumes emotions are managed at study;

whereas, differences in definitions and operationalizations of the construct have result in some confusion (Bono and Vey, 2005). In order to support the current study's conceptualization of emotional labor, I will review the four major ways that past literature has defined the construct.

As stated previously, Hochschild (1983) was the first to coin the term emotional labor. She depicted emotional labor as "the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and body display" which is sold for a wage. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) explained emotional labor using a more behavioral approach. They suggested that emotional labor is "the act of displaying the appropriate emotion" (i.e., conforming with a display rule). Thus, they concentrated on discernable behavior rather than intrinsic feelings or emotional states, thereby separating the experience of emotion from the expression of emotion.

Morris and Feldman (1996) provided a third conceptualization of the construct in which they defined emotional labor as "the effort, planning and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions". They proposed that emotional labor composed of four dimensions: frequency of appropriate emotional display, attentiveness to required display rules, variety of emotions to be displayed and emotional dissonance. Grandey (2000) proposed a fourth definition of emotional labor based on her review and integration of previous conceptualizations of the construct. She identified two themes common to most definitions of emotional labor:

- Individuals are able to regulate their emotions at work
- Surface and deep acting are often admitted as methods for performing emotional labor

She disputed that defining emotional labor as surface acting and deep acting is beneficial for three reasons. First, surface acting and deep acting are not intrinsically positive or negative which allows emotional labor to have both negative and positive outcomes. Second, if differences exist between the consequences of surface acting and deep acting, training can be applied to teach more effective emotional labor. Finally, surface acting and deep acting can be linked to Gross' (1998) established model of emotional regulation (Grandey, 2000).

Deep acting: Deep Acting is an emotional labor strategy wherein the employee makes a cognitive effort to produce the needed emotional display by changing both expressions and feelings that match the particular situation hence aligning their true feelings with the desired emotions possibly by concentrating on positive thoughts or reevaluating the situation (Hochschild, 1983; Grandey, 2000).

Surface acting: Surface acting is an emotional labor strategy that contains complying to organizational display rules by managing and hence simulating emotional expressions that are not actually felt by the employee. This also contains repression and hiding felt emotions, which would be inappropriate to demonstrate (Hochschild, 1983; Grandey, 2000).

Emotional exhaustion: The job burnout construct was formulated to reflect the psychological response to repeated emotional and interpersonal stress on the job (Maslach *et al.*, 1981). There have been three principal characterizations of burnout. The original measure, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), conceptualized burnout in service work as having three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1982). Emotional exhaustion reflects a chronic feeling that one is overtaxed and exhausted by the emotional demands of a job. Depersonalization captures the degree to which one distances and disconnects themselves from others. Eventually, diminish personal accomplishment is characterized by negative self assessment on the job. Emotional exhaustion is a main component of burnout, which refers to individual's "feelings of being emotionally overextended and drained by one's contact with other people," (Leiter and Maslach, 1988). According to Grandey (2000), when a situation persuades repeated emotional responses that the employee must regulate, the employee may experience emotional exhaustion.

Emotional intelligence: Emotional intelligence is concisely defined as "an ability to recognize the meanings of emotions and to reason and problem solve on the basis of them" and it involves "the capacity to perceive emotions, assimilate emotion-related feelings, understand the information of those emotions and manage them" (Mayer and Salovey, 1997). The theorists' conception of emotional intelligence is based completely within the framework of intelligence therefore it is referred to as an ability model of emotional intelligence. Mayer and Salovey's (1997) theory essentially connects the main components of emotions with intelligence at the same time preserving the two distinct terms. As such they proposed that emotional intelligence involves the ability to carry out accurate reasoning about emotions and the ability to use emotions and emotional knowledge to boost thought (Mayer *et al.*, 2004).

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Emotional labor strategies and emotional exhaustion: One hypothesized consequence that has been prevalently studied in emotional labor literature is emotional exhaustion (Grandey, 2003; Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Morris and Feldman, 1996; Hochschild, 1983).

Emotional exhaustion is one aspect of burnout, which is depicted as a state of depleted emotional energy particularly when occupied with customer service interactions. According to Maslach *et al.* (1996), emotional exhaustion involves “feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one’s work”.

Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) present document that the two emotional labor strategies may not have the same affects. The researchers found that only surface acting not deep acting was connected to all three dimensions of burnout. Employees who pretended their emotional expressions hence prohibiting their true emotions reported more emotional exhaustion, more depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. These findings have resultant implications suggesting that surface acting may be damaging to one’s overall well-being and job performance. Grandey (2003) reasoned that surface acting and deep acting might result in emotional exhaustion due to the expended effort required to conform to emotional display rules. Results revealed that surface acting and emotional exhaustion were positively correlated however contrary to her assumption, deep acting was negatively correlated to emotional exhaustion. Analogously, Zammuner and Galli (2005) also found that surface acting regulation was found to have a personal cost, categorized by the burnout dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Thus:

H1: The surface acting strategy of emotional labor has a positive influence on emotional exhaustion.

H2: The deep acting strategy of emotional labor has a negative influence on emotional exhaustion.

Moderating role of emotional intelligence: The theories and models of emotional labor and emotional intelligence presented served as guiding frameworks in understanding the process and outcomes that arises from it. When such concepts are merged, it captivates the mechanisms essential to cognize the possible theoretical links between emotional labor and employee outcomes in the workplace and the possible moderating role of emotional intelligence. Grandey (2000) purported that emotional intelligence may influence whether an individual will engage in surface acting or deep acting or even moderate the outcomes. Brotheridge (2006), found a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and deep acting. Particularly, workers with higher levels of emotional intelligence were found to be more likely to discern the need to frequently display emotions as part of their work role and perform deep acting in response to these situational demands. Daus *et al.* (2004) further established a link between the emotional labor strategies and emotional intelligence with a sample of police

officers. Daus *et al.* (2004) found that all four branches of the ability model of emotional intelligence were meaningfully associated with deep acting strategy of emotional labor while surface acting was associated with one branch of emotional intelligence. Thus:

H3: Emotional intelligence will moderate the relationship between surface acting strategy of emotional labor and emotional exhaustion.

H4: Emotional intelligence will moderate the relationship between deep acting strategy of emotional labor and emotional exhaustion.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection and analysis:

Questionnaire design:

Surface acting: Surface acting was measured with Diefendorff *et al.* (2005) seven item scale which evaluated the extent to which employees report they counterfeit unfelt emotions and/or repress felt emotions. This scale consists of five items adapted from Grandey’s (2003) surface acting scale and two items based on Kruml and Geddes’ (2000) emotive dissonance scale. Coefficient alpha values for this scale have ranged from 0.91-0.92 (Diefendorff *et al.*, 2005). Sample items include “I put on an act in order to deal with customers in an appropriate way” and “I fake a good mood when interacting with customers”.

Deep acting: Diefendorff *et al.* (2005) four item deep acting scale was used to measure the extent to which employees report they modify their felt emotions so that original displays follow. The items for this scale were adapted from Grandey’s (2003) deep acting scale and Kruml and Geddes’ (2000) scale of emotive effort. This scale has a reported reliability of 0.82 (Diefendorff *et al.*, 2005). Sample items include “I work at developing the feelings inside of me that I need to show to customers” and “I work hard to feel the emotions that I need to show to customers.”

Emotional exhaustion: The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), was constructed as a self-report instrument to evaluate perceived levels of three factorially-derived affective dimensions of the construct ‘burnout’ which is a complex phenomenon involving a sense of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and shortage of effectiveness/personal accomplishment with regards to one’s job and or one’s interactions with other people on the job (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). However, for the purpose of this study, emotional exhaustion was measured with the nine-item emotional exhaustion subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory.

Emotional intelligence: The 16-item measure created by Wong and Law (2002) is another strive to create a psychometrically sound self-report measure for use in organizational research. The scale is based on the model developed by Mayer and Salovey (1990).

Sampling target: In present research, information was collected in December 2011 and bank credit clerks and tellers were used as a group of face-to-face service provider in orders to achieve research aims and in this respect, our study statistical population is Bank Saderat branches of Tehran city.

Sampling method and sample size: Given the main statistical population, i.e. Bank Saderat branches in Tehran city, sampling among these bank credit clerks and tellers was conducted in a simple random way. As researchers believe, if number of statistical population, is known, sample size can be determined referring to sample size determination table proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), Also present research, given the fact that total number of statistical population i.e. bank credit clerks and tellers of Bank Saderat branches of Tehran city is 200. Sample size would be 132, but considering the probable cases in which questionnaire are filled out wrongly or not returned, 140 questionnaires were distributed among them 133 ones were used.

Data analysis: In order to test 2 research hypotheses, considering to significance values and t-value in original regression analysis table, it is judged that if sig. value is less than research error coefficient value, i.e., 0.05 and also t-value is more than 1.96 or less than -1.96, then the related hypothesis will be supported with a CI confidence intervals of 95%.

Also in order to identify moderating role of emotional intelligence in hypotheses 3 to 4, research hypotheses will be judged employing hierarchical multiple regression in 2 blocks. For each phase, R^2 is calculated and variance extension (ΔR^2) is estimated using R^2 from previous phase. In each R^2 phase, ΔR^2 represent the influence of the variable being introduced to the analysis in the same phase. In each phase R^2 , will be significant if introducing of variables in each phase leads to increase in R^2 and decrease in standard error which in that case moderating role of the newly introduced variable i.e., emotional intelligence is demonstrated.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1: Finding from original regression analysis table (t-value = 3.505, sig. = 0.001) in relation to the hypothesis shows that surface acting strategy from emotional labor has a positive effect on emotional

exhaustion; Thus hypothesis 1 is supported. The results from analysis of data obtained from bank employees in relation to hypothesis 1 in present study are aligned with those of Ibanez-Rafuse (2010) research conducted in on flight attendants.

Hypothesis 2: Findings from original regression analysis table (t-value = -3.752; sig. = 0.000) in relation to hypothesis 2, show that deep acting strategy performed by emotional labor, has a negative effect on emotional exhaustion. Thus hypothesis 2 is supported results of analysis of data obtained from bank employees in relation to hypothesis 2 are aligned with those obtained from study by Johnson (2007) on supervisors. However hypothesis 2 was rejected in Ibanez-Rafuse (2010)'s study on flight attendants; may be one of the main reasons for conflicts in results in the influence exerted from work environment.

Hypothesis 3: Given the results of hierarchical regression R^2 of the first phase in which surface acting was introduced in equation equals 0.086, then by introducing emotional intelligence variable in equation in second phase R^2 , of these 2 variable equaled 0.192 ΔR^2 which for emotional intelligence variable equals 0.106. Given the increase in R^2 value from 0.086 to 0.192 and also decrease in standard error from 0.844 to 0.797, it can be concluded that emotional intelligence variable may play a moderating role between two variables of surface acting and emotional exhaustion: Therefore this hypothesis is approved. Results of analysis of data obtained from bank employees in relation to hypothesis 5 of the present study is in conflict with the results obtained from research performed by Johnson (2007) on supervisors and by Ibanez-Rafuse (2010) on flight attendants, perhaps the main reason for this conflict is presence of different emotions in different countries especially in case of Iran.

Hypothesis 4: Given the results from hierarchical regression R^2 for first phase in which deep acting was introduced in equation, equals 0.097, then by introducing emotional intelligence variable in equation in second phase, R^2 of these 2 variables equals 0.097 and ΔR^2 for emotional intelligence variable was obtained as 0.000 showing that this variable cannot explain emotional exhaustion variance. Given the fact that R^2 value remained fixed at 0.097 and standard error of estimation increased from 0.839 to 0.842; it may be concluded that emotional intelligence variable cannot play a moderating role between two variable of deep acting and emotional exhaustion, Thus this hypothesis is rejected results of data analysis obtained from bank employees in relation to hypothesis 6 in present study was aligned with the results of a research performed by Ibanez-Rafuse in 2010 on flight attendants.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to examine effect of emotional labor on emotional exhaustion with respect to role played by emotional intelligence variable based on the results of the present study, by identifying and managing feelings and emotions of employees in providing high-quality and superior services to targeted customers, service organizations would be able to make them committed to organization and create a competitive advantage by reducing work stresses of employees.

Given the results of present research it is expected from employees working in service sector that adopt an appropriate method for providing qualified services to customers by exploiting an emotional labor understanding the way of employing an emotional labor and value of it, provides various methods for correcting negative results and increases positive results for service employees which intern increases effectiveness of organization.

The significant results of this study was found to certify with emotional labor theories (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983) as well as emotional regulation theory (Gross, 1998), demonstrating a theoretical linkage suggesting that although surface acting and deep acting both demand the employee to spend effort in changing expressions, it also exhibits different relationships with well-being outcomes (Johnson and Spector, 2007; Cote, 2005; Gross and John, 2003). For example, whereas surface acting has showed an association with emotional exhaustion, deep acting inclined to generate organizational commitment. Generally, the outcomes show that deep acting provides a positive benefit for the employee while surface acting did not demonstrate the same positive effect. This is comparable with earlier studies demonstrating a consistent link between surface acting with negative employee outcomes such emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction while deep acting had none or little effect on the former (Prati *et al.*, 2009; Goldberg and Grandey, 2007; Martinez-Inigo *et al.*, 2007; Bono and Vey, 2005; Totterdell and Holman, 2003; Brotheridge and Lee, 2002; Kruml and Geddes, 2000; Richards and Gross, 2000). A key premise emphasized in the literature for these opposing outcomes are said to be due to the differential effects between emotional dissonance and emotional consonance. During surface acting, the service worker dons an emotional mask, which involves the repression of genuinely felt feelings and instead expressing emotions that they do not really feel. This further suggests that service workers who engaged regularly in surface acting as opposed to deep acting felt a loss of personal authenticity (Shulei and Miner, 2006; Brotheridge and Lee, 2002). Sequentially this led to feelings of self alienation and estrangement from one's feelings (Hochschild, 1983) which later caused feeling emotionally exhausted.

The model proposed that emotional intelligence plays a moderating role in the relationship between emotional labor and organizational commitment and emotional exhaustion. Researchers have construed that emotional intelligence can moderate employees' emotional reactions to negative outcomes hence suggesting an alleviating effect between the emotional labor and outcome relationship (Jordan *et al.*, 2002; Totterdell and Holman, 2003). However, as previously mentioned this study did not support the common thought suggesting that levels of emotional intelligence can have a moderating effect on the relationship between emotional labor and outcomes despite a clear theoretical basis for expecting a significant moderation effect. To date, only one empirical study resounds with the findings with the present study. Johnson and Spector (2007) found that the interactions were not significant demonstrating that emotional intelligence did not moderate the relationships between emotional labor strategies and personal outcomes of organizational commitment, affective well-being and emotional exhaustion however no further explanation for this finding was provided.

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