

Emotional Labor

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Emotional labor is a form of emotional regulation wherein workers are expected to display certain emotions as part of their job, and to promote organizational goals. The intended effects of these emotional displays are on other, targeted people, who can be clients, customers, subordinates or co-workers.

Definition

A waitress at a restaurant is expected to do emotional work, such as smiling and express positive emotion towards clients

The term "emotional labour" was first defined by the sociologist Arlie Hochschild as the "management of feeling to create a publicly facial and bodily display".

Following her piece in which she coined this term, several conceptualizations of emotional labor have been proposed. Some conceptual ambiguity persists, but each conceptualization has in common the general underlying assumption that emotional labor involves managing emotions so that they are consistent with organizational or occupational display rules, regardless of whether they are discrepant with internal feelings.

According to Hochschild, jobs involving emotional labor are defined as those that:

- require face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact with the public;
- require the worker to produce an emotional state in another person;
- allow the employees to exercise a degree of control over their emotional activities.

Display rules refer to the organizational rules about what kind of emotion to express on the job.

Emotion regulation

Emotion regulation refers to the process of modifying one's own emotions and expressions. That is, the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions.

There are two kinds of Emotion regulation:

- antecedent-focused emotion regulation, which refers to modifying initial feelings by changing the situation or the cognitions of the situation;
- response-focused emotion regulation, which refers to modifying behavior once emotions are experienced by suppressing, faking or amplifying an emotional response.

Forms of emotional labour

Employees can display organizationally-desired emotions by acting out the emotion. Such acting can take two forms:

surface acting, involves "painting on" affective displays, or faking; Surface acting involves an employee's (presenting emotions on his or her "surface" without actually feeling them. The employee in this case puts on a facade as if the emotions are felt, like a "persona").

deep acting wherein they modify their inner feelings to match the emotion expressions the organization requires.

Though both forms of acting are internally false, they represent different intentions. That is, when engaging in deep acting, an actor attempts to modify feelings to match the required displays, in order to seem authentic to the audience ("faking in good faith"); in surface acting, the alternative strategy, employees modify their displays without shaping inner feelings. They conform to the display rules in order to keep the job, not to help the customer or the organization, ("faking in bad faith").

Deep acting is argued to be associated with reduced stress and an increased sense of personal accomplishment; whereas surface acting is associated with increased stress, emotional exhaustion, depression, and a sense of inauthenticity.

In 1983, Arlie Russell Hochschild, who wrote about emotional labor, coined the term emotional dissonance to describe this process of "maintaining a difference between feeling and feigning".

Emotional labour in organizations

A nurse working in a hospital, is expected to express positive emotions towards patients, such as warmth and compassion.

In past, emotional labor demands and display rules were viewed as a characteristics of particular occupations, such as restaurant workers, cashiers, hospital workers, bill collectors, counselors, secretaries, and nurses. However, display rules have been conceptualized not only as role requirements of particular occupational groups, but also as interpersonal job demands, which are shared by many kinds of occupations.

Determinants of using emotional labor

Societal, occupational, and organizational norms. For example, empirical evidence indicates that in typically "busy" stores there is more legitimacy to express negative emotions, than there is in typically "slow" stores, in which employees are expected to behave accordingly to the display rules;

and so, that the emotional culture to which one belongs influences the employee's commitment to those rules.

Dispositional traits and inner feeling on the job; such as employee's emotional expressiveness, which refers to the capability to use facial expressions, voice, gestures, and body movements to transmit emotions; or the employee's level of career identity (the importance of the career role to one's self-identity), which allows him or her to express the organizationally-desired emotions more easily, (because there is less discrepancy between his or her expressed behavior and emotional experience when engage their work).

Supervisory regulation of display rules; That is, Supervisors are likely to be important definers of display rules at the job level, given their direct influence on worker's beliefs about high-performance expectations. Moreover, supervisors' impressions of the need to suppress negative emotions on the job influence the employees' impressions of that display rule.

Implications of using emotional labor

Studies indicate that emotional labor jobs require the worker to produce an emotional state in another person. For example, flight attendants are encouraged to create good cheer in passengers and bill collectors promote anxiety in debtors.

Research on emotional contagion has shown that exposure to an individual expressing positive or negative emotions can produce a corresponding change in the emotional state of the observer. Accordingly, a recent study reveals that employees' display of positive emotions is indeed positively related to customers' positive affect.

Positive affective display in service interactions, such as smiling and conveying friendliness, are positively associated with important customer outcomes, such as intention to return, intention to recommend a store to others, and perception of overall service quality.

There is evidence that emotion labor may lead to employee's emotional exhaustion and burnout over time, and may also reduce employee's job satisfaction. That is, higher degree of using emotion regulation on the job is related to higher levels of employees' emotional exhaustion, and lower levels of employees' job satisfaction.

There is empirical evidence that higher levels of emotional labor demands are not uniformly rewarded with higher wages. Rather, the reward is dependent on the level of general cognitive demands required by the job. That is, occupations with high cognitive demands evidence wage returns with increasing emotional labor demands; whereas occupations low in cognitive demands evidence a wage "penalty" with increasing emotional labor demands.