

Emotional Labour: The Human Resource Issues

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Excellent!

Great work:

Thank you for your insight into an interesting topic! I learned a lot for well presented, good structure.

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What is Emotional Labour?

Emotional labour is the control of a person's behaviour to display the appropriate emotions (Chu, 2002). This means that a person evokes or suppresses certain emotion so to conform to social norms. The concept of emotional labour is not confined to the workplace; it invades every aspect of life. This essay will examine emotional labour in service industries. Service is a performance of labour for the benefit of another (KTEC, 2005), and successful service depends on emotional labour.

Good intro !!

Emotional Labour

Emotional labour is a relatively new term, Arlie Hochschild first coined the term in her 1983 book, "The Managed Heart". The practice, however, is ancient. Hochschild pointed out that people control their emotions in personal and work life (Hochschild, 1983). Whenever a person alters their outward behaviour (emotions, verbal cues, body language) to conform to an ideal, something that every human does, it is emotional labour. Since the art is integral in human behaviour, it is important to look more deeply in the workings of emotional labour.

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Hochschild describes two types of emotional acting: surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting is expressing an emotion *without* feeling that emotion (Hochschild, 1983). This is the type of emotional acting of most concern in the workplace, as it has some serious side effects that will be discussed later in this essay. Surface acting most often involves the masking of negative emotions, such as anger, annoyance, sadness, etc., with happier emotions, such as happiness, care, excitement, etc. It is not, however, restricted to this scenario.

Deep acting refers to two different emotional actions. The first is to exhibit the actual emotion that you feel (1983). The other is true method acting, using past emotional experiences to encourage real emotion that you may not have felt otherwise. For the purposes of this essay, when deep acting is mentioned it refers to method acting.

Emotional labour is about controlling emotions to conform to social norms. It is necessary, therefore, to know what the social norms are, and how to conform to them.

Feeling Rules

The key question, in order to understand emotional labour, is what determines the correct emotional response for a situation. Hochschild described a set of “feeling rules”, also called “display rules” (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993), by which people identify what the appropriate behaviour is (Hochschild, 1983). These feeling rules are similar to a script, describing the ‘correct’ response for work situations (as well as others) (Hochschild, 1983). They can be part of the training for the occupation, or can be simply ‘manners’.

Many larger organisations will have a set of policies, most of which will likely cover conduct with customers. This is a form of written feeling rules, a set of guidelines by which to judge the correct response. An example of such written feeling rules comes from McDonalds, who encourage sincerity, enthusiasm, confidence and a sense of humour in their service personnel (Mann, 2004). Most feeling rules, however, are unwritten, as in the case of ‘manners’.

Feelings rules are also connected to the culture of the civilisation. For example, consider a meeting between two managers from different cultures. By each others society's standards, they behave correctly, but could very easily offend the other accidentally. Despite these cultural differences, the main concept of a set of feeling rules remains the same. In the Australian workplace, most workers will show courtesy and politeness to customers, regardless of the behaviour they receive in response.

The practice of emotional labour is most evident when a service transaction is going wrong, when the customers are unhappy for any number of reasons. In most situations, the employee will remain calm and polite to the customer, though the customer will most likely be irritating or upsetting the employee. This is a form of self control, suppressing negative emotions and evoking more positive emotions. Feeling rules are the reason that the employee knows they must be polite.

The employee has a set of feeling rules by which they operate, whilst the customers have an expectation of good service. These are defined by 10 dimensions, including trustworthiness, courtesy, approachability, and understanding (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). The expectation of each dimension would change depending on the moods etc. of the customers. Thus it is possible that a customer may have unreal expectations of good service, and cannot be satisfied. In such situations, the feeling rules of the employee, while they may be correct, would not satisfy the customer.

Some service industries are subject to higher expectation than others, such as medical professionals, call centre operators and airline attendants. These industries spend a lot

of time interacting with other people. This interaction includes an expectation by the customers/clients/guests/etc. (from now on, referred to as customers) for good service. For example, good service from a doctor would include a caring attitude, politeness, friendliness, happiness to be there and frankness. Colloquially, this is known as 'bedside manners', and is becoming increasingly important for doctors today. Doctors are subject to higher expectations for good service (among other things), as are counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists. Also, the feeling rules would need to change based on age. For example, a doctor will behave differently in front of a child, than a person in their 20's, or in their 60's.

Emotional labour occurs when a person suppresses or evokes an emotion conform to feeling rules. Feeling rules are scripts by which people decide the correct emotional response to a situation. When the system breaks down, however, there are harmful consequences for the individual.

Dilemmas with Emotional Labour

All service industries require interaction with customers. These jobs require employees to be courteous and nice to customers, regardless of how the customer is treating the employee. Such treatment of employees' can have negative effects.

Sandi Mann, from the University of Salford, Lancashire, England, stated that having to manage your emotions in such a way could lead to work stress (Mann, 2004). This stress, Mann said, could cause hypertension, heart disease, even exacerbate cancer.

This is because, to the larger extent, people tend to surface act (Persaud, 2004).

Surface acting can cause sufferers ^{to} experience detachment from their own emotions, and may suffer burnout as a result.

Raj Persaud, from Maudsley Hospital, London, describes how doctors can lose their ability to care, an integral part of their job, when suffering from emotional burnout (Persaud, 2004). Persaud also stated that burnout can lead to dissatisfaction with the quality of work completed, and doubt about the effectiveness (Persaud, 2004), leading to a higher likelihood the sufferer will leave their job, the behaviour of the airline attendant can greatly affect the comfort of a person's flight.

This theory can be applied to any service industry. Hochschild used the airline attendant as her example. Despite the fact that the airline attendant performs less than 10% of the total service taking a customers and their luggage to your destination, the attendant is the 'person on the ground', the person that the customers see the most (Hochschild, 1983). This makes emotional labour an integral part of the job.

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Emotional labour can also be a source of job satisfaction; it all depends on whether the employee is experiencing surface acting, or deep acting. If a person is deep acting, the high level of emotional labour can be very rewarding (Persaud, 2004). If a person is only surface acting, the strain of masking emotions can cause serious stress. As mentioned before, people can tend to surface act, increasing their levels of stress.

Surface acting is especially dangerous with care professions, such as doctors, nurses, and airline attendants. As discussed earlier, the concept of care is driven by emotional labour. So when care is lost due to emotional stress/burnout, the key element of the job is gone and the customers' expectations will not be met.

It is possible to lose a job due to poor emotional labour, or letting the wrong emotion leak out (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). In the service industry workplace, where many feeling rules are written down as policies or guidelines, emotional labour is becoming more and more part of the main service. Yet since people become more and more prone to surface acting the more they do their job, it could possibly become harder and harder to retain that emotional control as the stress of doing so builds up. This can be illustrated through the example of a simple sales transaction, where the shop assistant may be called to help a customer find a certain item. If the shop assistant is continually nice and helpful, it is more likely that the customer's expectation will be met, regardless of whether the item is found or not. If the shop assistant, however, lets the customer see that they are bored or uninterested, the customer is less likely to be satisfied, even if the item is found.

Another dilemma with emotional labour is its strong connection with stress (Persaud, 2004). It is known that faking emotions through surface acting can lead to higher levels of stress (Persaud, 2004). Stress is becoming more and more prominent in the workplace, including the introduction of stress leave, alongside sick leave, bereavement leave etc. As a person continues to surface act, they build up emotional stress as a result (Persaud, 2004). This emotional stress can hinder their performance of emotional control, thus decreasing their ability to perform their job. This may, in turn, cause the individual to feel disheartened and dissatisfied with their work, which, as discussed above, can lead to the individual quitting (Persaud, 2004).

This is a serious side-effect, and one of most concern to human resource management. Human resources can prevent this emotional cycle, using different methods for different situations.

Human Resource Management Issues with Emotional Labour

It has been discussed that surface acting is the type of emotional labour that can cause stress. Deep acting, however, can be beneficial for people. If deep acting is beneficial for the employees, then deep acting should be encouraged in the workplace, and surface acting discouraged.

It is easy enough to train a person to detect the signs and prevent it, but dealing with people's emotions can be more complicated than that. Firstly, the longer a person is in the job, the more likely that they will surface act as part of their job (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). This means that the more they repeat a task, people can tend to simply complete the task without any thought or feeling. The feeling rules provide a set of ways of completing the task, allowing the individual to simply go through the movements, almost robotically. An example is the idea of a painted smile, where a person is smiling at a customer simply because it is part of the job, not because they are feeling happy. This is clearly an example of insincerity in the individual, a trait that most people can detect in a conversation, and can ruin communication.

The way that emotional labour is handled in the workplace can differ between the types of business. For example, McDonalds has a manual describing the desirable qualities to exhibit whilst completing a service transaction (Mann, 2004). Yet it is unlikely that a small business would have such a system. A small business would rely on the feeling rules that the individual has established before entering the business, as well as those learnt whilst performing the job. Thus it is possible to lose business simply because your personality is undesirable.

Mann also describes how the feeling rules change from profession to profession (Mann, 2004). She suggests that a shop assistant can get by with less feeling rules than a counsellor or fire-fighter (Mann, 2004). While this can be the case in most situations, the need for effective feeling rules in a retail situation can be vital. As discussed above, an undesirable personality can spell disaster for an individual or business. A shop assistant who shows no interest in serving a customer can cause that customer to never return to the store. This is not the only cause of dissatisfaction for the customer; they have 10 dimensions of expectations to fulfil to achieve a good service transaction.

A counsellor or fire-fighter may require more guidance with feeling rules, as well as more assistance with recovering from bad emotional experiences. A popular way to alleviate these problems is to de-brief. De-briefing refers to informing another of, in this case, an emotionally stressful event. A trained professional or supervisor is available in the business for employees to talk to when they experience negative events (or indeed positive ones). The employee can talk to the supervisor or trained professional, and receive advice. This system can also be used over the phone, with some industries having hotlines available to several businesses and employees to ring up.

De-briefing is done after the event occurs, it does not prevent it from happening. Employees can be trained to identify the signs of surface acting, and given good feeling rules by which to operate, but the fact that the more they do the job the worse the problem gets can be a setback.

Repeat training may help, providing a refresh on the methods on identifying and preventing surface acting, as well as encouraging deep acting. Also, the businesses should keep up to date with the theories behind emotional labour, and how best to combat surface acting. For cases that occur, de-briefing and counselling are likely to be the most effective methods in attacking the stress. Also, time off from work would also benefit.

This, however, does not help small businesses, that do not have the time or money to constantly train or research. For these, the best defence is de-briefing. Many small businesses are run by people who are friends, and thus can open up to each other. For those businesses that are slightly larger, then de-briefing remains the best option.

Conclusion

Emotional labour is the practice of an individual controlling their behaviour to display the appropriate emotions. Feeling rules govern what that appropriate response is, and how to execute it.

Surface acting is where a person pretends to feel an emotion, and can be unhealthy for the individual. It can cause stress for the individual, resulting in health issues or quitting. Deep acting is feeling that emotion, or it is method acting. It can be beneficial for the individual, enriching an experience.

Customers have expectation of good service, based on 10 dimensions. It is possible for a customer to have very high, unrealisable, expectations, based on their moods or personality. Many of the dimensions of expectations are affected by emotional

labour. Because of this, an employee can turn a customer away forever due to a poor emotional attitude. It is also possible to simply have the wrong personality for service industries.

Surface acting can be avoided by de-briefing, or training. The best method to use depends on the size of business, with more option available to larger businesses than smaller businesses.

Emotional labour is a large issue for service industries, and its effects can be significant. Emotional labour is being increasingly researched and it will be better understood in future years.

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Great!