

## EMOTIONAL LABOUR IN THE SERVICE ENCOUNTER

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### **Abstract**

*Service employee works on the boundary of the organization and performs boundary spanning roles (Tushman, 1977) and their Position during the service encounter can be used as a strategy to gain competitive advantage (Zeithmal and Bitner, 2000). Customer's perception of the service quality is influenced by how the service employee expresses her/his emotion in service interactions (Pugh, 2001). Emotions are intense feelings that are directed at someone or something. The term "Emotional Labour" was coined by Arlie Hochschild in her book *The Managed Heart* and she defines emotional labour as. "Inducing or suppressing feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others." (Hochschild 1983 p.7). Jobs that involve voice-to-voice or face-to-face interactions often involve emotional labour and in such jobs employees must manage and at times modify their own emotions, while attempting to manage the emotions of the customer (Hochschild 1983). This paper explores the significance of emotional labour in the service encounter.*

### **Introduction**

It is a common phenomenon in our daily life, we have to suppress our feelings and display a socially accepted emotion that is more appropriate. For example, showing excitement about a colleague's promotion. Similarly a service employee may have to show cheers or tears to the customers depending upon the situation.

The Service Encounter is the "moment of truth" and it may occur any time the customer interacts with the firm. The service encounter is critical in determining customer satisfaction and loyalty. Service employee works on the boundary of the organization and performs boundary spanning roles (Tushman, 1977) and their Position during the service encounter can be used as a strategy to gain competitive advantage (Zeithmal and Bitner, 2000). Customer's perception of the service quality is influenced by how the service employee expresses her/his emotion in service interactions (Pugh, 2001). So, organizations expect the service employee to present emotions that are desired by their organizations besides the competence and expertise in the job (Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, & Sideman, 2005).

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p.7) or is the effort put by the service employee to express emotions acceptable to the consumer (Hochschild, 2003).

Jobs involving emotional labour possess three characteristics (Hochschild 1983).

- They require the workers to make facial or voice contact with the public;
- They require the worker to produce an emotional state in the client or customer, and
- They provide the employer with an opportunity to exert some control over the emotional activities of workers

### **Importance of Emotional Labour**

Customer is always right; his perception of the overall service depends upon the nature of service interaction. The relative intangibility, heterogeneity and inseparability of production of service from its consumption create difficulty to determine service quality from the quality of the interaction during service delivery. Hence organizations in service sector have high stake on how the service employee behaves in service interactions. Also how the service employee attempt to manage and control his emotions during interaction between him and customers. To be successful in the sector, organizations expect the service employee to present emotions that are desired by their organizations apart from the high level of expertise in the job. But very often the felt emotions are different from the organizationally desired emotions. It requires effort or labour on the part of the employee to display the appropriate emotions as specified by the organization. This type of labour is called emotional labour.

### **Forms of Emotional Labour**

Employees can display desired emotions instead of showing their true emotions. The employees can either choose (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993)

- Surface acting where an employee's presents his emotions on the "surface" without actually feeling them
- Deep acting wherein they modify their inner feelings to match the emotion expressions the organization requires.
- Genuine acting where one spontaneously and genuinely experiences and expresses the expected emotion without exerting any effort

### **Jobs Demanding Emotional Labour**

The following are some jobs that demand emotional labour

1. Nurse
2. Bill-collectors
3. Waitresses

4. Cashiers
5. Police officers
6. Flight attendants

### Consequences of Emotional Labour

Emotional labour is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it can facilitate the task performance by regulating interactions and precluding interpersonal problems. On the other hand, it can impair performance by priming expectations of good service that cannot be met (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). The negative consequences being emotional exhaustion, decrease in job satisfaction, low memory performance, stress etc. Whereas service employees with positive emotions are able to gain better control over demanding customers, receive more social support from supervisors and co workers. They are judged by others as sociable, pleasant and likeable thus lead to an increase in self efficacy and psychological well being.

### Conclusion

Emotional labour is an important issue for service marketers, further researches have to be carried out to understand the negative and positive consequences of emotional labour. As feelings are at the core of human emotions, emotions play a vital role in organizations. Service employees are paid to be nice. The ability to be consistently nice to strangers requires incredible effort. When such effort succeeds, it is a remarkable accomplishment. Hence emotional labour should be given due importance since it affects customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and eventually organizations financial performance.

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