Commitment to Display Rules and Emotional Labour to Predict Organizational Outcomes: The Moderating Effects of Job Autonomy and Organizational Identification

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Abstract

This study examines the concept of commitment to display rules (CTDR) as an essential factor in understanding emotional labour (EL) regulation and its influence on organizational outcomes, using a mixed-methods approach. CTDR refers to employees' motivation to follow organizational emotional display standards, which influences their engagement in surface acting or deep acting. The proposed model suggests that higher CTDR leads to increased EL, which enhances job satisfaction and performance. Quantitative data, collected through surveys, were analyzed to test hypotheses related to the moderating effects of organizational identification (OID) and job autonomy. OID, defined as employees' alignment with organizational values, strengthens the relationship between EL and positive outcomes, fostering greater motivation and satisfaction. Similarly, job autonomy, which allows employees discretion in task execution, mitigates the negative effects of EL by supporting flexibility in emotional regulation. Qualitative data, derived from interviews, provided insights into employees lived experiences of EL, further contextualizing the quantitative findings. The study highlights practical implications for organizations, including training programs to improve deep acting skills and fostering autonomy to improve employee well-being emphasizing the importance of managing EL. This research contributes to the literature on EL by integrating the overlooked concept of CTDR and its interaction with OID and autonomy, providing a nuanced understanding of its role in achieving organizational effectiveness. By incorporating a mixed-methods design, this study contributes a comprehensive perspective on the underexplored concept of CTDR, and augments the understanding of how CTDR, OID, and job autonomy interact to influence service performance and job satisfaction.

Keywords: emotional labour, commitment to display rules, job autonomy, organizational identification

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Introduction

People are a critical part of any functioning organization; however, the emotions of those people were often ignored in early research. The belief was that sound judgment was essential in the workplace and emotions only clouded that judgment. More recently, researchers have argued that studying emotions and incorporating them into our theories may broaden our understanding of organizational behaviour (Fisher & Ashkanasy, 2000). Emotion management is related to organizational outcomes such as burnout, poor service, and other issues in performance management (Khamisa et al., 2015).

Emotional labour (EL) is a fundamental aspect of many professions, particularly in service industries where employees are expected to manage their emotions to align with organizational display rules (Hochschild, 1983). Commitment to display rules (CTDR), which refers to employees' motivation to comply with these emotional display expectations, is an underexplored yet critical factor in understanding EL regulation (Diefendorff et al., 2005; Gosserand & Diefendorff, 2005). Employees regulate EL through two primary strategies: surface acting (faking or suppressing emotions) and deep acting (genuinely altering internal emotions) (Hochschild, 1983). The extent to which employees commit to display rules can significantly impact job satisfaction, performance, and well-being (Diefendorff et al., 2005).

However, the literature lacks a comprehensive understanding of how commitment to display rules (CTDR) interacts with organizational identification (OID) and job autonomy (JA) in influencing EL outcomes. OID, or the extent to which employees align with organizational values (Mael & Ashforth, 1992), is a crucial psychological factor that may amplify EL's positive effects. Employees with high OID may internalize organizational emotional norms, leading to greater job satisfaction (Van Dick et al., 2006). On the other hand, job autonomy—the freedom to exercise discretion in emotional expression—could mitigate EL's negative effects, offering employees more control over their emotional regulation (Grandey & Diamond, 2010).

This research is significant because it expands the theoretical framework of EL by incorporating CTDR, a relatively overlooked construct. Additionally, it offers practical insights for HR managers and organizational leaders seeking to enhance employee well-being and service performance.

Literature Review

Emotional Labour

The theory of emotional labour (EL) (Hochschild, 1983) is the most noteworthy theory which explains the management of emotions for a wage. If job roles require a display of a particular emotion and/or suppression of another, it can be described as emotion management for a wage, or EL. Regulating one's emotions to comply with social norms is referred to as "emotion work" (Hochschild, 1990). According to Hochschild (1983), jobs involving emotional labour possess three characteristics:

1. They require workers to make facial or voice contact with the public.
2. They require the worker to produce an emotional state in the client or customer.
3. They provide the employer with an opportunity to exert some control over the emotional activities of workers.

The emotional labour expected in an organization is learned in a variety of ways. Corporate mottos such as “service with a smile,” “to protect and serve,” or “the customer is always right” (Diefendorff et al., 2005) may serve as organizational examples to follow, or the company may have organizational standards that stipulate appropriate expressions. Further, in order to ensure that employees will project the desired image of the organization, employees must often relinquish the regulation of their mannerisms, body language, and emotional expressions to the control of their company (Paules, 1991). The belief is that this image dictated by the organization will elicit satisfaction and continued patronage from consumers and continued business success. It has been related to both positive job outcomes, including enhanced performance and job satisfaction (Arvey et al., 1998), and negative job outcomes, including job stress, burnout, and poor customer service (Khamisa et al., 2015).

Hochschild (1983) conceptualized two strategies of emotional labour: surface acting (SA) and deep acting (DA). SA occurs when felt emotions and display rules are incongruent. Surface acting results in a change of visible expressions but not felt emotions. For example, a customer verbally abuses Cindy. Cindy may smile and take the abuse, but underneath the fake smile, she harbours a lot of negative thoughts towards this customer. There is a smile on Cindy's face, but she's clearly disgusted internally. The felt emotions are suppressed while the organizationally dictated emotions are displayed.

While surface acting occurs externally, deep acting occurs at the internal experiential level. The internal emotional state is altered to correlate with required external expressions. For example, a customer verbally abuses Jack. Jack is disturbed by the customer's behavior at first, but then "figures out" that the customer is having a bad day and thus feels sorry for him/her and offers the customer a sympathetic smile. This would be an example of deep acting where Jack's initial negative feelings were replaced with positive feelings of sympathy and compassion.

Studies attempt to address a very common problem in work where the employee must deal with customers; managing one's negative emotions to put on a positive emotional display congruent to what is desired by the organization (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Cheung & Tang, 2009; Grandey, 2000, 2003; Liu et al., 2008). The starting point of a discrepancy between what is felt and what is expected to be expressed is the same for both strategies. The final product of both strategies is also the same, meeting the organization's display rules, though the process to reach the goal is much different between strategies.

Commitment to Display Rules (CTDR)

Just because a company has emotional display rules does not mean employees will abide by them or be committed to them. Researchers have failed to explore the idea of commitment to display rules (CTDR) which can aid in understanding the effects of EL regulation on the organization and individual (Gosserand & Diefendorff, 2005). Some employees may fail to put forth the effort needed to display the expected emotion (Diefendorff et al., 2005). In essence, some individuals may lack the commitment to display organizationally desired emotions. As such, simply developing rules does not ensure compliance; employees must be committed to the rules to be confident that they will be enforced.

Commitment to display rules is defined as the intention and motivation to expend effort to produce prescribed emotions and not abandon these displayed emotions under difficult conditions (Diefendorff et al., 2005). Diefendorff et al. (2005) showed that when workers

were committed to display rules, they were more likely to engage in emotional labour than when they were not committed to display rules. Employees with high commitment were more willing to comply with display rules and performed more deep and surface acting. Employees are thus more likely to respond to customer concerns in a natural and authentic way, which gives customers a more positive experience (Cossette & Hess, 2009; Pierre & Tremblay, 2011). Display rule commitment may influence the choice to surface or deep act, but most previous research ignored this element of emotional labour. Diefendorff et al. (2005) argue that the emotional labour process should "explicitly incorporate commitment as a mechanism to explain why some individuals follow display rules and others do not." Employees who are committed to display rules may be able to perform surface or deep acting more effectively and more willingly resulting in a more positive emotional state overall. This should hold true regardless of whether surface or deep acting is employed.

For instance, a nurse who knows that the chances for a patient's surviving are slim but presents an optimistic demeanour because she believes it is in the families' best interest will likely be committed to her surface acting display. If, however, the nurse is not committed to the preferred emotional display, then even though the outward display may be achieved through deep acting, the resulting complex emotional stake is likely to be negative.

Hypotheses 1: There is a positive relationship between commitment to display rules and emotional labour (Surface Acting, Deep Acting).

Organizational Identification

Organizational identification (OID) is the degree to which individuals perceive themselves and the organization to be sharing the same values (Weiseke et al., 2008). Similarly, Mael and Ashforth (1992) defined organizational identification as "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization in which he or she is a member" (p. 104).

Fuller et al. (2006) proposed that organizational identification is essential for the organization to function effectively. Individuals will identify with a specific group in order to reduce uncertainty and gain desirable resources. In turn, these groups prescribe specific behaviors, attitudes, and norms that the individual follows. Fostering a strong sense of organizational identification among employees is critical to management since it can help them to understand a range of work behaviors (Van Dick et al., 2008) including cooperation (Tyler & Blader, 2001), commitment (Cole & Bruch, 2006), turnover (Abrams et al., 1998; Van Dick et al., 2004), and resistance to change (Van Dijk & Van Dick, 2009).

Organizational identification affects employees' motivation to support the organization, their attitudes and job satisfaction as well as the overall effectiveness of the organization (Lee, 1971). Organizational identification is not only a predictor of key organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction and extra-role behaviour (Riketta, 2005; Van Dick et al., 2006) but also an important variable for the evaluation of stressful situations and coping with stressors.

Tajfel (1982), stated that awareness and evaluations are necessary in order to achieve the stage of "identification." He also states that a third component is also related: an emotional investment in the awareness and evaluations. This emotional investment can be based on varying organizational dynamics which includes job autonomy and even job satisfaction. We propose that organizational identification will enhance the relationship between emotional

labour and organizational outcomes such that individuals' who display emotional labour will have increased performance and satisfaction when organizational identification is high.

Hypothesis 2a: Organizational identification moderates the relationship between emotional labour and individual performance.

Hypothesis 2b: Organizational identification moderates the relationship between emotional labour and individual job satisfaction.

Job Autonomy

Job autonomy is the degree of discretion individuals have regarding the procedures they utilize and the control they have as it relates to how they do their work (Cossette & Hess, 2009).

Employees feel less exhausted when they have greater job autonomy and the opportunity to "personalize" the service to reflect their own identity (Wharton, 1999). Additionally, increased autonomy allows employees to have latitude to engage in or violate display rules when these rules agree or conflict with their own genuinely felt emotions. Higher perceptions of work autonomy should mitigate the negative effects of emotional labour because "When employees feel a sense of freedom and choice in their work, they are more intrinsically motivated and cope more effectively with the job demands, while when they feel controlled or coerced by others, they experience more strain" (Grandey & Diamond, 2010). In an important study, Wharton (1993) found that individuals with higher job autonomy had higher job satisfaction for both performers and nonperformers of emotional labour but this relationship is significantly greater among performers of emotional labour.

Job autonomy also impacts emotion regulation (Abraham, 1998; Grandey et al., 2004; Grandey et al., 2005; Morris & Feldman, 1996). To avoid such misunderstandings, employees need to have sufficient job autonomy to be able to depart from organizational emotion regulations rules when they become maladaptive. For example, an employee who is instructed to smile at customers may choose to adapt their surface acting when confronted with an irate customer who may believe that the smiling employee is laughing at him/her. Based on the aforementioned it is evident that autonomy could impact the relationship between Emotional Labour and organizational outcomes and as such requires further exploration.

Hypothesis 3a: Job autonomy moderates the relationship between emotional labour and individual performance.

Hypothesis 3b: Job autonomy moderates the relationship between emotional labour and individual job satisfaction.

Service Performance

The idea that displaying organizationally-desired emotions is positively related to individual performance is widely accepted in the emotional labour literature (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Barger & Grandey, 2006; Fineman, 2000; Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983; Johnson, 2007). Barger and Grandey (2006) demonstrate that "service with a smile" is positively related to customers' evaluations of service quality. Even in brief encounters, employees'

display of positive emotion can make clients or customers feel more satisfied with their interactions. Typically, positive emotional expressions (e.g., friendliness, smile, and empathy) lead to better service performance. However, if emotional expressions are seen as inauthentic, clients and customers are more likely to perceive poor service (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987).

Job Satisfaction

In emotional labour literature, job satisfaction represents an employee's evaluation of the job (Grandey, 2000). Côté and Morgan (2002) found that increased suppression of negative emotions (anger, fear, sadness) toward co-workers, customers, and supervisors was negatively related to job satisfaction and positively related to turnover intentions. Researchers on emotional labour do not have a definitive conclusion about how performing emotional labour increases or decreases job satisfaction.

Hochschild (1983) indicated that working to manage something as personal as emotions for commercial purposes would be inherently unsatisfying. In this case, employees who are required to regulate their emotions will experience a lower level of job satisfaction, and it does not matter what types of acting techniques are involved when performing emotional labour. Other researchers have argued that the relationship between emotional labour and job satisfaction is negative because regulating something as personal as emotions inhibits personal expression, and therefore, is bound to lead to negative consequences (Hochschild, 1983; Pugliesi, 1999). Rutter and Fielding (1988) found that prison officers who suppressed true emotions had higher levels of stress and lower levels of job satisfaction.

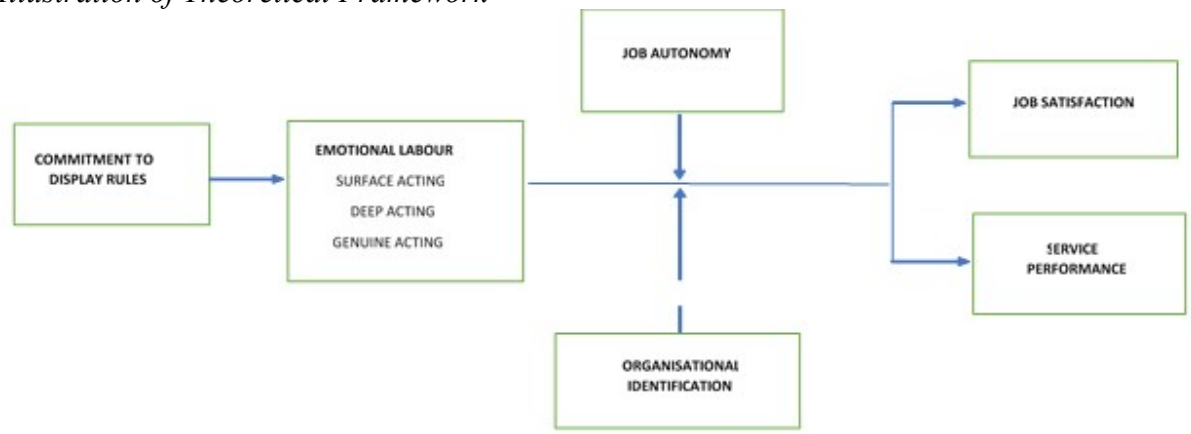
Other evidence suggests that surface acting is negatively related to job satisfaction. Grandey (2003) examined the relationship specifically between emotional labour (surface acting and deep acting) and job satisfaction. She found a negative relationship between surface acting and job satisfaction. However, she tested a model with job satisfaction as an antecedent of emotional labour arguing that people with lower levels of satisfaction will need to engage in emotional labour more frequently than those who are satisfied.

While researchers historically infer that emotional labour leads to job dissatisfaction (Hochschild, 1983; Morris & Feldman, 1996; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987), empirical studies have not provided support for that contention (Wharton, 1993). The relationship between deep acting and job satisfaction is even less clear. As suggested earlier, one possible reason for the contradictory conclusions about emotional labour's consequences is that researchers have failed to take into account the importance of important moderating factors including organizational identification and perceived job autonomy.

Theoretical Framework

Our goal is to examine how commitment to display rules affects the way people deal with the emotional display standards outlined by an organization. In the framework proposed, we propose that employees with a higher commitment to display rules will increase their emotional labour in the form of surface acting or deep acting. This increase in emotional labour will lead to enhanced outcomes in individual job satisfaction and performance when moderated by job autonomy and organizational identification.

Figure 1
Illustration of Theoretical Framework



Briefly, the model states that commitment to display rules can affect how people regulate their emotions in an organization via surface acting or deep acting. This regulation, along with the level of autonomy and job identification present, will influence outcomes such as service performance and job satisfaction.

For practitioners, if EL is the key to performing excellent public service, management must have a thorough understanding of it and its effects in order to manage it better. Thus, there are implications for more effective management of emotions during service transactions. The proposed model allows employers to gain knowledge on how their rules affect performance. For instance, rather than telling workers what not to express on the job, which may lead to frustration and stress (Wharton, 1993), it would be more favorable and helpful to specify the expressions to follow - exercising a bit of autonomy which could improve satisfaction and performance.

For training, tools can be developed to aid in, for instance, deep acting skills. Training would help employees' embrace a service attitude, develop interpersonal skills and learn to be successful emotional labourers. Organizations can design and implement programs that address how employees convey appropriate emotions and handle difficulties such as tough citizens without losing their courtesy and temper and deviating from organizationally desired behaviors.

Practically, the study will advance the understanding of public service jobs. By acknowledging EL, the meaning of work in public service could be redefined by incorporating the emotional aspect of service into discussion.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the evolving discourse on emotional labour by foregrounding Commitment to Display Rules (CTDR) as a foundational construct in understanding how employees engage with organizational emotional expectations. By integrating CTDR into the emotional labour framework, the research addresses a critical gap in the literature—why some employees comply with emotional display rules more effectively than others—and empirically demonstrates that this commitment influences both surface and deep acting behaviors.

Further, the moderating roles of Organizational Identification (OID) and Job Autonomy offer important insights into the conditions under which emotional labour contributes to positive organizational outcomes. Employees who strongly identify with their organization and who experience greater autonomy in their roles are more likely to experience enhanced job satisfaction and performance outcomes, even when emotional regulation demands are high. These findings underscore the significance of contextual and psychological factors in shaping the emotional labour process.

The use of a mixed-methods approach enriches the findings by capturing both the structural relationships among variables and the lived experiences of employees navigating emotional demands. This comprehensive perspective strengthens the theoretical understanding of emotional labour and offers actionable recommendations for practice. Specifically, organizations should focus on cultivating commitment to display rules through effective onboarding, values alignment, and emotional intelligence training. Simultaneously, promoting autonomy and fostering a strong sense of organizational identity can buffer potential negative consequences of emotional labour, thereby enhancing employee well-being and organizational effectiveness.

In sum, this research extends emotional labour theory by incorporating a more holistic view of the factors that shape emotional regulation at work and provides a valuable foundation for future investigations into the interplay between emotion, identity, and autonomy in organizational life.

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