

## **DIFFUSING EMOTIONS THROUGH THE ADMINISTRATIVE RATIONALITY OF CALL CENTER MANAGERS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper is developed to highlight the importance of emotional management in manager and subordinate relationship within the call center industry. Since the said tangent has marginal existence in academic and management literature. It is a conceptual paper fabricated to integrate the literature on managers' emotional labor in event of modeling emotions for subordinates. The paper has developed 12 propositions that differentiate the extent and breadth of emotional labor exhibited by call center managers and front line service providers. The paper suggests that in addition of understanding the emotional labor of leaders the segment of managerial emotional labor is equally critical to the success of an organization. Hence further research is recommended in the said segment. Businesses are formed on an on-going assumption and therefore diffusing legit emotion through the administrative rationality of call center managers is a valuable construct. This research is one of its kind that isolates the literature on the importance and implications of emotional labor or Managers rather than leaders alone, the developed propositions are original.

**Keywords:** Managers, Emotional Labor, Call Centers, Administrative Rationality

**Paper type** - Conceptual paper

## Introduction

The paper is an attempt to advocate the notion that in order for a manager to manage influence on its subordinates, they have to exercise emotional labor. Since the inception of the term emotional labor by Hoshchild (1983) the concept has been realized as a responsibility of the front line organizations representatives only. Until Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) finally incorporated emotional labor as an integral job characteristic of managers. In their foremost study they regarded that the job and task role of a manager calls for a regular application of emotional labor that exceeded the score of Emotional labor demonstration of physical laborers and in instances matched the frequency of its utilization with customer services representatives. The aforementioned research has given the impetus to initiate this research since Brotheridge (2006) demonstrated the need to study emotional labor in managers so as to understand the effects of emotional labor on a manager's job, subsequently its implications on the performance of its subordinates. With the advent of modern literature ample repository of researches has been deployed to study the antecedents and consequences of emotion management and labor on Leaders, but the impact of emotional expressivity on managers seems an unexplored topic. The research is therefore conducted to draw tangents on the impact of exercising emotional expressivity for execution of effective managerial practices.

The paper will go about by first defining emotional labor in detail so at it suffices the rationale of the paper, all the related constructs of emotional labor will be defined to ensure the navigation through the topic of emotional expressivity as part of successful managerial practices. The paper will than discuss various form of emotional labor exercised by customer service employees in call centers. The paper will than attempt to compare the variation of emotional labors encountered by the service agents and the managers. The paper will than discuss the phenomena of emotional contagion via prism of modern managerial practices. The traditionally findings will be quoted that endorses that emotional labor demonstrated by the frontline service providers is a cause of employee stress and ill-being, the debate will establish the podium of whether exercising emotional labor is equally awful for the managers or not. The paper will than move towards the proposition development phase where literature will be used to contrast and compare the intensity of Emotional Labor execution by call center agents and call center managers. There are certainly a number of propositions that would match our pre-assumption on

the significant consequences of emotional labor, but an expected variation of the consequences is expected once we discourse the said phenomena of emotional labor on call center managers. These differences originate from the diverse personality traits that differentiate a manager from a non-managerial employee, precisely backed by job autonomy, position power, and situational factors along with the frequency of customer interaction.

Hence the antecedent literature has yielded the following two propositions

*In situations where the exercised emotions synchronize with the actors' social, central and valued identity, it will result into an enhanced psychological wellbeing.*

In their second proposition, they antecedent scholars asserted:

*In situations where the exercised emotions do not synchronize with the actors' social, central and valued identity, it will result into an emotional dissonance and a deviation from one's authentic self.*

As a matter of fact the importance of emotional showcase and expression at work has been examined by Kelman (1958) where he establishes three levels of organizational investment; the least effective investment is investment in physical assets, the next level is cognitive and the highest level is Emotional. On the similar note the role of effective group functions has been acknowledged for effective organizational functioning. Ever since the inceptions of groups in organizations the role of emotions in the group dynamics has been in limelight. A few emotions associated to the successful group development includes cohesiveness, which is typically determined as tendency of the group members to bind together to perform the task at hand, this is certainly highlighted by the affective bond exhibited by the group members.

### **Managing with emotional labor**

Humphrey (2005, 2006) fabricated the concept of managing emotions while dealing in diverse situations and the perceived implications to the subordinates. The concept of managing with emotions refers to the process whereby the managers deploy emotional labor to maneuver the moods, regulate legit emotions, enhance performance and instill motivation amongst the subordinates. Since the subordinates are fascinated by the emotional display of the managers, so generating the correct vibe for obvious receivers remains the utmost agenda of the manager. The precise reason of focusing it on manager is because the literature seemed to undermine the

tendency of emotional labor by managers. This research therefore holds critical value since it shows the significance of emotional expressivity among managers, particularly when it comes on expressing emotions that are not feeling. The subsequent section of the paper will therefore be shedding intellectual rigor on the significance of a manager deploying emotional labor and the ultimate consequences for the call center agents.

### **Emotions Expressed by Call Center Managers**

Emotional Labor is considered unique to certain types of service providers; the three broad types are:

- 1: Customer Services
- 2: Hospitality Industry
- 3: Social Control Jobs

For the domain of our study while considering customer services, the job demand of the customer services agents usually calls for well authenticated slogans like “Service with Smile” and “Customer is Always Right” (Pugh, 2001; Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987; Van Dijk and Kirk-Brown, 2006). Apparently the emotions endorsed are pleasant and positive but the unpleasant working conditions and rude customers may at times motivate a customer service agent to fake their authentic emotional expression. Conversely the job may also demand an individual portraying negative and unpleasant emotions as endorsed by Sutton (1991), the study demonstrated a research on bill collectors, the display rule of the industry requires the actor to be angry and other emotions that are generally regarded negative. The charm in the said scenario lies when the bill collector is required to demonstrate the negative emotion in a perfect balance, which implies displaying irritation to get the customer pay the bill and still not to a point where he launches a complaint against the bill collector to the management. It is always a matter of crossing a thin threshold of successful bill collection and customer agitation to raise a complaint.

In order to be an effective manager, the display to variety of emotions remain the key guide. Because managers have to exhibit diverse emotions from being friendly, supportive, sympathetic and anger. The aforementioned concept gains load when it comes on exerting the right balance by the manager. The variable of interest in the said case is situation. It is rightly recommended

that a manager executes the right filter on his emotional expressivity to fit in the situation behold by the subordinate.

With the aforementioned debate we develop our first proposition as follows:

*P1. Managers typically have a discretion of expressing diverse emotions as contrasted by occupation specific emotions bestowed on the front line service providers.*

### **Managers as Leaders of Subordinate Emotions**

Academic scholars offer wide variety of literature that advocates the role of manager in influencing the moods and emotional states of subordinates, in the similar context the emotional management of a manager can either speed up or hinder the pace of subordinate effective performance. There are three eminent studies that that shows how a manager can pace up or derail the spirit of subordinates' functional capacity. The first study was conducted by, Pirola-Merlo et al. (2002), his study reflected the impact of workplace events on the employees. He asserted that unfavorable workplace events create hurdles for the employees to perform at their full potential, his theoretical model was based on the Affective Event Theory (AET) (AET; Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996; Weiss et al., 1999). According to the Affective Event Theory every individual have an average set of moods that can be elevated or depressed by the events happening at the workplace. The aforementioned notion was first demonstrated by Perola-Merlo et al. (2002) he asserted that one of the implied features of a managers job is to mitigate the negative consequences of the disturbing events happening at the workplace. In revealing consistency with the said model it was found out that managers when adopt facilitative and transformational styles aid their subordinates in mitigating the consequences of emotional hurdles at work. Subsequently the models path analysis indicated that the said behavioral adaptations of the managers serve to pace up the performance of subordinates.

Subsequently the second study drew the findings that the moods of the manager has a direct implication on the emotional stability of the subordinates. The study suggested that the feelings of depression and hopefulness originates directly from the mood of the manager (McColl-Kennedy and Anderson, 2002). The said scholars argued that if the leaders successfully instill the feelings of optimism amongst the subordinates in order to maneuver them that the challenging

goals are to enhance their capabilities and at every point given to them to ensure that they are attainable on their part.

Finally the third study was nominated to draft the importance of self and team's emotional management, Pescosolido (2002), argued that subordinates that can manage their emotions and the emotions of their peers have a tendency to be prospect leaders and managers. Pescosolido endorsed that managers impact the emotions of the group members in two ways. Initially a manager as a leader is expected to have a more subtle and reasonable response to all the workplace events they have the responsibility of demonstrating the right emotional response by role modeling the correct emotional tone. Secondly the prospect managers and leaders are expected to generate a shared emotional experience. The phenomenon have two implications initially is develops the bond among team members and secondly they help foster high morale in the employees.

The aforementioned studies helped us craft the following propositions:

*P2: in conditions of uncertainty, the subordinates look up to the manager's emotional tone and response, manager with optimistic emotional modeling will tend to increase the subordinates emotional well-being and morale at work.*

*P3. The performance of the employees is directly affected by their moods, under the feeling of depression there they underperform, and sense of emotional well-being and optimism elevates the performance.*

### **The Role of Emotional Labor in Managing Others' Emotions**

In situations where the employees are faced with emotional barriers and difficulties in executing the daily operations effective managers are required to exhibit a sense of optimism and well-being so that the vibe could be experienced as a multiplier effect by the subordinates. Surprisingly in times of real crisis managers are required to remain calm and radiate the gesture of positivity so that the subordinates may not panic. Luthans and Avolio (2003) posed a similar scholarly finding that effective managers model emotions, if they wish to develop a well spirited team they need to manifest optimism and radiate confidence even at times of crisis.

There are never the less many instances wherein a manager displays emotions that may not be the reflection of his real felt feelings. Manager may display confidence and radiate

positivity even when he has shaking concern about the performance of his team members, he execute that by primarily deploying “Surface Acting”. A manager may also attempt to deploy deep acting to strengthen his own confidence so as to minimize the discrepancy of felt and exhibited emotions, if he fails to exhibit the emotions without feeling them he may not be able to inspire the desired response. Portrayal of merely felt emotions makes a manager exercise emotional labor. Wide tills of researches have explored the critical role of emotional labor in service settings (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Ashkanasy and Daus, 2002; Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Morris and Feldman, 1996; Pugh, 2001; Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987).

The aforementioned studies have nominated the difficulties faced by service sector employees in modeling the emotions demanded by their jobs (Cote and Morgan, 2002; Van Dijk and Kirk-Brown, 2006). Connecting the preceding debate with the findings of Brotheridge and Lee (2002) as they concluded that high identifiers are the antecedent of high performance the relationship according to theses scholars is mediated by emotional burnout or exhaustion.

A similar phenomenon is likely to occur with the managers- managers that actively engage to foster the well being of there subordinates and bolster their confidence on the organization, at the expense of their own emotional labor and exhaustion. The said phenomenon is certainly a double edged sword because by portraying the felt emotions they may get the desired outcome of fostering confidence amongst their subordinates and in instances where they opt for surface acting over deep acting the undesirable shake in the employees’ confidence becomes inevitable. On account of the said research we formulate our following proposition.

*P4. At times of uncertainty the emotional expressivity of a manager serves to drive the emotional morale of the subordinates. If a manager deploys deep acting, by radiating his actually felt emotions the subordinates will experience positivity, optimism and confidence in the crisis situation*

*P5. If a manager deploys surface acting at times of uncertainty and crisis situation it will lead to a mangers increased levels of emotional exhaustion.*

### **Emotional Contagion**

As a matter of fact, emotional expressivity is a contagious force functional since the beginning of management. It is considered as a dramatically significant force that shapes the way

people experience various job roles in the same organization. Certainly the way a manager conducts his emotional notion serve to be the driving force and a model of emotional expression for the subordinates. Multiple scholars took lead to demonstrate the phenomenon of emotional contagion. Barsade (2002) authenticated his findings by concluding that uniform emotions can foster across the organization and influence individual and group behavior. Furthermore, Pugh (2001) advocated the value of the most clichéd statement prevailing across the globe “Service with Smile”. The value loaded concept is actually to make the customers catch the vibe of positivity radiating from the smile of the sales agent. Despite the fact that most of the qualified researchers have focused primarily on the emotional contagion of the peers working on the same level of management, Sy et al. (2005) took the construct of emotional contagion to the next level and prompted that it’s the mood of the manager that models the rule of emotional display for the subordinates. Goleman et al. (2002) coined the concept of resonance which is rooted at the concept of emotional contagion. The model advocates that in order for a manager to model emotions for the subordinates he first needs to initiate resonance, which can be simplified as emotional synchronization with the subordinates for the development of pane of emotional modeling. Hence in act of fostering emotional contagion amongst managers and subordinates’ managers are initially expected to develop a rapport and common grounds with the subordinates and prelude the actually felt emotions to generate the required ripple of emotions at the workplace.

*P6. Only the managers that deploy deep acting will be able to build a rapport and model emotional resonance and contagion as contrasted by the managers that use surface acting*

### **Emotional Labor and Stress**

The most primitive term that comes to mind when discussing emotional labor is stress. To study the strength of their relationship Bono and Vey (2005) conducted a quantitative research over the said topic and demonstrated the discrepancy between the felt and expressed emotions lead to emotional dissonance which is characterized by emotional exhaustion which is a function of physical complaint and an experienced sense of depersonalization from daily encounters. The term depersonalization was comprehensively characterized by Lee and Ashforth



(1996) as they concluded that employees in certain type of job contingencies adapt defensive strategies to avoid the strains forced by their emotional inability to mitigate the consequences of their interpersonal stressors. Furthermore, Brotheridge and Lee (2002) identified that deep acting as an active ingredient of personal achievements and authenticity, the research furthermore marked that deep acting marginalizes the roots of depersonalization. Later Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) isolated their findings regarding various strategies adopted by employees to manage their emotions, deep or surface acting. The strategy adopted by the employees was found to be an acute reflection of employees' mental health followed by their level of stress and vigor of emotional distancing. Hence deriving our following propositions:

*P 7. Customer services managers that deploy surface acting as an emotional management strategy will encounter more stress and a feeling of depersonalization as compared to managers that use deep acting as a strategy of emotional management.*

*P 8. Managers with subtle levels of emotional intelligence will be better at responding to the situational requirements and performing emotional labor with their discretion*

*P9. The ability of a manager to express his interpersonal feelings and emotions will have an edge while using either of the three emotional management strategies.*

*P10. Managers with high levels of responsiveness for the employees will always tend to deploy genuine emotional expression in the form of deep active rather than surface acting.*

### **Autonomy and Position Power**

Irrespective of the fact that the customer services jobs globally are aligned to a typical display rule. Despite having a rigidity in terms of customer satisfaction and serving customers with a delight, the service industry nominates a certain level of autonomy to the employees and managers working in the customer services. The performance parameter of each organization varies drastically, since a few organizations are concerned with measuring the process and behaviors of employees rigidly other tend to script the level of emotional display by employees. For instance, the employees of many fast food chains at cashiers at the retail outlets are seen uttering scripted statements like “thank you” and “have a nice day”. On the contrary there are certain organizations that give the employees a considerable autonomy to its customer service

employees for exercising certain discretions while interacting with customers. Since these organizations encourage its employees to exhibit diverse emotions they tend to initiate a personal touch to their day to day activities for enhanced customer experience, Morris and Feldman (1996) and Brotheridge and Lee (2003) endorsed that exhibiting diverse emotions at work is a dimension of emotional labor just like endorsing scripted responses for service providers to use while interacting with the customers. The foundation of the said difference is manifesting diverse or scripted emotions while customer encounter is rooted to the culture of the organization (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995). The display rule of any organization is personified within the culture and the group member interactions. Comprehensively Kelly and Barsade (2001) concluded that the display rule of the organization prove to be the norms that serves to coerce or enhance the emotional well-being of the group members.

Significantly the critical difference between a manager and its subordinate is characterized by the level of autonomy and the position power exercised by the manager in contrast to the subordinates. The level of differences felt and observed by the manager and subordinates in call centers serves to be the formative stressor while executing emotional labor. Assumably the literature and the human psychological is allured by the notion of considering manager to be omnipotent on account of having autonomy and significant position power and that with their elements in his everyday operation emotional labor and stress are marginalized from his existence, surprisingly this is not the case. For instance, Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) isolated that the job of the manager is as technical in modifying emotions as that of the front line service provider, the point of enrichment in the manager job is his accountability and responsibility to perform a particular job. The attrition and turn over in the front line employees is tremendous since they exercise limited responsibility and are usually in sought of new opportunities, but the call center managers are destined to stay with the organization for a longer period of time and are directly held responsible and accountable for the success of the business.

As a matter of fact, the pivotal influence is held on the organizational settings since they determine the direction of operations within the organization. Owing to the sensitivity of the said phenomenon the role of a manager becomes non-discretionary within the organization because even when the subordinates consider the emotional display of the manager to be totally free

spirited, even than a manager are portraying emotions within the policy framework bestowed by the organization (Hunt et al., 1978; Osborn and Ashforth, 1990).

Workplace is a discrete set of diverse events that calls for variety of verbal and non-verbal responses from the managers towards the subordinates. In cases where managers are required to exercise coercion or the situation calls for a manager to be tough on employees he is seen fabricating a hostile emotional display. The events like organizational changes, negative feedbacks and demotions, managers mask the legit emotional display again to abide by the organizational display rule, understanding the organizational policy framework and situational requirements (Bryant and Cox, 2006, p. 122). Conversely Bryant and Cox furthermore discoursed the flip side of the coin and found out that just like manager's subordinates are also seen masking emotions in order to avoid any negative lash with the manager hence emotional labor is a functional reality at both sides of the fence. Furthermore, Dasborough (2006) pronounced a tangent to the affective event theory stating that managing subordinates is a tricky phenomenon since it is the tendency of the human mind to relate and absorb negative events faster than the positive ones. When they see their manager depicting positive emotions they may tend to take it for granted and forget it but in situations where they experience the negative emotional display by the manager they tend to associate and remember that facet of the managers' emotional display. The management dynamics nevertheless also offer scenarios where managers exercise their utter autonomy to select and express the emotions. In the said situations managers are usually seen displaying emotions that are a true representation of their personal identity, values and self-image. The resultant of the said phenomenon is an utter sense of self satisfaction and fulfillment by the manager since he is displaying his true inner self rather than fabricating his emotions to show case the organizationally bestowed display rules to manage the subordinates (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). In the similar context Van Dijk and Kirk-Brown (2006) presented their findings and asserted that emotional labor only has negative consequences since it has been proven by multiple researches that in instances of modeling organization rules the resultant is emotional dissonance, which is certainly a negative phenomenon as employees both managers and subordinates tend to detach from the situations and adapt their personality specific defense mechanism. The only vent from the mentioned emotional exhaustion is encouraging the manifestation of true emotions.

Hence moving towards our following propositions

*P11. Managers that exhibit emotions not aligned with their personal identities will experience higher level of stress at work as compared to the front line service provider-where the role of responsibility and accountability remains constant.*

*P12. Managers that demonstrate emotional labor to fit in the organizational prescribed display rules ends up experiencing high levels of stress specifically when they have to mask tough emotional outlook for the subordinates.*

*P13. Managers that have the discretion and autonomy to manifest there felt emotions will ultimately cherish a profound sense of well-being and fulfilment.*

## **Conclusions**

The propositions suggested after thoughtful evaluation of literature suggest that managers are often engaged in performing emotional labor as a practical effort of inducing the required influence among the subordinates. Since the moods and emotions of the subordinate are directly affected by the emotions modeled by the manager, it serves as a source to foster the organizationally required emotions. Because the moods and emotions of the subordinates when synchronized with the modeled emotions and moods of the manager they lay the foundation of substantial organizational performance. As a matter of fact the display rules adapted by the call center and customer services is concluded to be highly repetitive in nature and typically involves a narrow slit of emotions that could be displayed for lasting impact. Conversely managers have a diversity of emotional options to display particularly while influencing the emotions of the subordinates to generate a well synchronized and uniform organizationally prescribed display rule. Emotional contagion and expression is also viewed as an element that catalyzes employees' responsiveness and informal solidarity at work, on the other hand it can also serve to cascade the performance standards on account of negative emotional prevalence and fear factor pervading in the organization. As mentioned above the role and importance of emotions has been a well-researched motive of academic and popular literature. Irrespective of their deepest penetration in individuals the employers are seen working on minimizing the emotional expression of the employees at work. Furthermore, the importance of managing the managerial discretion while selecting what type of emotions are to be displayed is also a critical responsibility of a manager.

Specifically, in crisis situations or in instances of negative workplace events, a manager has to confront with the negative events he must deploy emotional labor to radiate a message and emotion of positivity and optimism. Knowingly that surface acting may not be as fruitful as the deep acting but still literature and professional practices suggest that managing a positive emotional outlook is what differentiates an effective manager from a non-effective one.

By the help to literature analysis twelve propositions have been nominated that will have a practical implication since they heavily emphasize the importance of understanding the moods and emotions of the followers in conjunction with the situation faced by the organization. Surprisingly the said notion presents a picture opposite to the traditional facts endorsed in text books which asserts that the variables like job satisfaction has nothing to do with employee productivity and performance.

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