

# Relationships between emotional labor, job performance, and turnover<sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the relationship between the emotional labor strategies surface acting and deep acting and organizational outcomes, specifically, employees' overall job performance and turnover. Call center employees from two large financial service organizations completed an online survey about their use of surface and deep acting. Their responses were matched with supervisors' ratings of overall job performance and organizational turnover records obtained 9 months later. Results indicate that surface acting is directly related to employee turnover and emotional exhaustion and that the relationship between surface acting and job performance is indirect via employee affective delivery. Deep acting was not linked to these outcomes. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed from the perspective of emotional labor theories.

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Emotional labor refers to employees' use of various strategies to regulate their emotions when interacting with customers in order to meet organizational emotional display requirements (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983), also known as display rules (Ekman, 1973). Emotional labor is performed by employees in response to their perceptions of display rules (Diefendorff & Richard, 2003) and their commitment to these standards (Gosserand & Diefendorff, 2005). Understanding the consequences of emotional labor is important because both theory and empirical evidence suggest that emotional labor is integral to the daily work experience of many frontline service employees and is closely linked to indicators of employee well-being (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983), customer outcomes such as satisfaction and loyalty (Giardini & Frese, 2008; Grandey, 2000; Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, & Sideman, 2005; Hennig-Thurau, Groth, Paul, & Gremler, 2006), and ultimately, organizational performance (Grandey, 2000).

Emotional labor can be viewed as an application of Gross's (1998b) process model of emotion regulation to the workplace (Côté, 2005). Thus, what is understood as emotional labor is a set of regulatory cognitions and behaviors enacted by employees at work in response to actual or anticipated discrepancies between felt emotions and perceptions of expected emotional displays. According to Gross's (1998b) model, emotion regulation is either antecedent-focused (anticipatory) or response-focused (reactionary). When applied to employee–customer interactions, these types of emotion regulation strategies mirror what is commonly known as *deep acting* (i.e., modifying felt emotions, usually in anticipation of a perceived discrepancy between felt and required emotions) and *surface acting* (i.e., the expression of emotions not actually felt by suppressing felt emotions, amplifying the expression of a weakly felt emotion, or faking unfeared emotions) (Hochschild, 1983).

Empirical evidence shows that surface and deep acting often yield divergent outcomes for employees, particularly regarding their well-being (Grandey, 2003; Judge, Woolf, & Hurst, 2009). Surface acting typically has more detrimental outcomes than deep acting. However, the impact of emotional labor strategies on organizational outcomes remains under-researched, hence the significance of the present study. Specifically, we investigate how the emotional labor strategies of surface and deep acting correspond to two critical outcomes: supervisor-rated overall job performance and employee turnover. In so doing, we move

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beyond prior research that either used broad measures of emotional labor (Duke, Goodman, Treadway, & Breland, 2009) or used self-report (Totterdell & Holman, 2003) or laboratory-based measures of performance (Goldberg & Grandey, 2007) to examine the link between specific emotional labor strategies and core job performance in an applied setting. The mediating roles of emotional exhaustion and affective delivery are also explored.

## 1. Grandey's (2000) model of emotional labor

Building on Hochschild's (1983) work, Grandey (2000) developed a comprehensive conceptual framework of emotional labor that draws on emotion regulation theory (Gross, 1999). The model suggests that employees' emotional labor strategies will result in several well-being outcomes for individuals (increased job satisfaction and reduced burnout and stress) and organizations (improved employee performance and reduced turnover).

Although there is considerable empirical evidence illustrating the effects of emotional labor on employee well-being outcomes, the relationship between emotional labor and *organizational* outcomes has received far less empirical attention, despite strong theoretical support for such a link (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983; Totterdell & Holman, 2003). Indeed, a strong assumption underlying organizations' requirement that employees display positive emotions is that such sincere emotional displays (or good 'affective delivery') are believed to result in favorable organizational outcomes including increased employee and customer retention, higher employee performance, and ultimately, improved organizational performance (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983).

Given this theoretical justification, the present research contributes to the emotional labor literature by examining the links between the emotional labor strategies of surface and deep acting and two critical organizational outcomes: employees' overall job performance and turnover behavior. In addition, we go beyond Grandey's (2000) predictions and examine affective delivery (i.e., the authenticity with which an employee expresses required emotions) and emotional exhaustion as two key mediators of these relationships. Furthermore, this study makes an important methodological contribution by using actual rather than self-reported measures of turnover and performance. With few exceptions (Chau, Dahling, Levy, & Diefendorff, 2009), research linking emotional labor to turnover, employee well-being (e.g., stress and burnout) and to performance have relied on employee self-reports (e.g., Abraham, 1999; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Côté & Morgan, 2002; Pugliesi, 1999; Totterdell & Holman, 2003) or proxies such as the number of errors committed in a laboratory as a substitute for job performance (Sideman & Grandey, 2007). We utilize three independent sources of data—employee self-reports, supervisor ratings of job performance, and organizational turnover records—in order to examine the relationship between emotional labor and organizational outcomes. This approach reduces the potential effects of common method bias on the results, and improves on previous research by concentrating on two rather than a single dependent variable. The overall conceptual model guiding the present research is illustrated in Fig. 1.

## 2. Emotional labor and employee performance

Employee performance—the actions and behaviors that are controlled by the individual and contribute to the goals of the organization (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002)—is an important construct since it often informs reward and discipline decisions. In a service work context employee performance refers to both tangible service delivery and intangible aspects such as interpersonal behavior and emotional display (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990; Bowen & Schneider, 1988). Emotional labor strategies are particularly important in the context of customer service, because employee behavior during service delivery (e.g., empathy, responsiveness) is often perceived by customers as the most critical aspect of service quality (Bitner et al., 1990). In particular, employees' positive emotional displays are typically central to the customer service experience (Bailey, Gremler, & McCollough, 2001) and are associated with favorable customer evaluations (Mattila & Enz, 2002; Tsai & Huang, 2002). Given this centrality, and

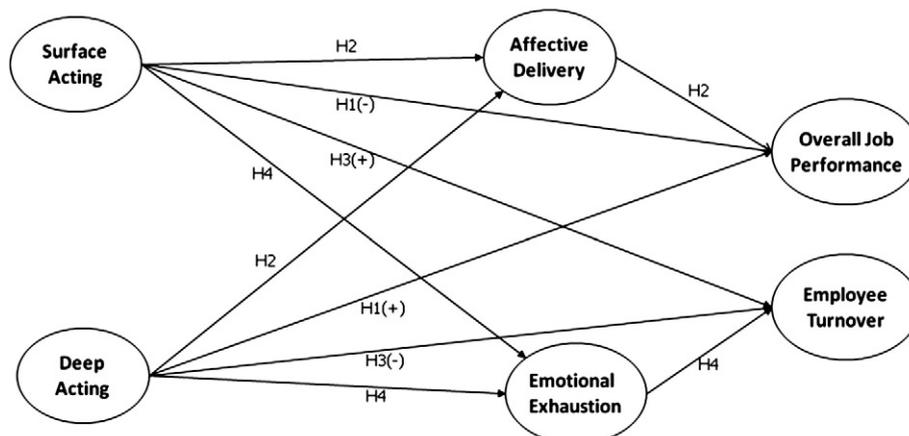


Fig. 1. Theoretical model and study hypotheses.

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