



The Importance of Emotional Labor in Organizations

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ABSTRACT

In the service sector where direct communication with people is involved, meeting customers' expectations for service is crucial in alignment with the organization's expectations. Emotional labor refers to the effort employees put into behaving in ways that align with the organization's expectations. As this level of emotional labor and sincerity increases, customer satisfaction improves, subsequently positively impacting organizational success. However, while an increase in employees' tendency to display emotional labor can positively influence organizational success in the short term, in the long term, it may lead to employees feeling inadequate. This, in turn, can negatively affect organizational success. This study aims to emphasize the importance of emotional labor in the service sector through a literature review. In this context, the review has revealed that deep acting and the expression of naturally felt emotions, as types of emotional labor, are particularly critical for the service sector.

Keywords: Emotional labor, service industry, customer satisfaction

1. Introduction

The key to success in the service sector is customer satisfaction. One of the most important aspects of customer satisfaction is the customer's happiness and fulfillment of their expectations during interactions with service sector employees. In this context, the importance of emotional labor in the service sector is increasingly recognized. Emotional labor refers to the process by which employees manage and regulate their emotions in the workplace (Hochschild, 1983). In the service sector, meeting customers' emotional expectations is of great importance because, despite providing the same product, employees who display emotional expressions that align with customer expectations can enhance customer satisfaction (Grandey, 2000).

2. Definition of Emotional Labor

Emotions, which serve as a tool for individuals to convey their current state to others around them, are also essential components of healthy communication. While emotions are not always reflected solely through gestures and facial expressions, facial expressions play a crucial role in both conveying and interpreting emotions. Often, similar emotions are expressed in similar ways among different individuals. However, these expressions can vary due to reasons such as cultural differences. Components such as an individual's current profession, gender, educational background, and age influence how emotions are displayed. Nevertheless, overall, it can be concluded that facial expressions carried by individuals are universal (Barutçugil, 2002, p. 66). There are various definitions of the concept of emotion in the literature (Seçer, 2005, p. 815). Caruso, Mayer, Salovey, and Sitarenios (2001, p. 232) define emotion as a mental set based on experience, psychology, and cognitive state. The broadest definition of emotion is "a subjective state of feeling" (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995, p. 99).

On the other hand, the concept of labor is described by the Turkish Language Association (TDK) as the effort and mental and physical strength expended to perform a task (TDK, 2020). The concept of emotional labor was first introduced by Hochschild in 1983. Hochschild (1983, p. 7) defines this concept as employees altering their emotions in ways that can be recognized by others according to the goals of organizations. This is manifested by the employee through facial expressions as well as bodily expressions. Subsequently, various researchers have made different definitions for the concept of emotional labor. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993, p. 88) define emotional labor as the portrayal of behaviors expected by the organization in the transmission process of services to the customer. Grandey (2000, p. 95) defines it as employees differentiating their emotions to meet organizational expectations. Morris and Feldman (1996, p. 987) explain this concept as the energy expended by employees, the management of plans formulated, and the resulting control mechanisms aimed at achieving business goals. Diefendorff and Gosserand (2003, p. 945), on the other hand, describe emotional labor as behaviors aimed at influencing the emotions of individuals contacted in order to achieve organizational goals.

3. Importance of Emotional Labor

In the service sector, where the expectation of emotional labor is high, achieving customer satisfaction and capturing a loyal customer base for the organization is only possible through managing employees' emotions (Grandey, 2000, p. 98). The importance of the concept of emotional labor in the service sector is significant. In evolving and changing market conditions, one of the most crucial aspects for organizations to survive is undoubtedly to ensure customer satisfaction. The ability of employees who directly interact with customers to communicate with genuine emotions and show willingness to meet customer needs will determine the quality of service provided by the organization (Groth, Hennig-Thurau, & Walsh, 2009, pp. 962-970). Often, individuals who quickly internalize the expected behavior from others both in their professional and social lives perform actions in line with the demands of the other, such as genuinely feeling that emotional state. This situation is evaluated under the category of deep acting. According to the research conducted by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006), it has been determined that customer satisfaction increases as a result of employees demonstrating deep behavior. While entering this role by individuals who have a good ability to act creates positive effects on the customer, if the person does not have the ability to act, he will not be able to internalize the expected behavior and will not be able to convey that emotion to the other side as he really feels it. This situation is evaluated as surface acting and is perceived as insincerity by the customer, having a negative effect on customer satisfaction.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, for service sector organizations to be sustainable, they must meet customer expectations at the highest level. This requires employees to exhibit behaviors and emotions that align with customers' emotional demands. At this point, it is important for decision-makers and employers to set corporate expectations and provide training to employees on emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983). However, they should place more emphasis on deep acting and the expression of genuinely felt emotions (Kılıçarslan & Özsoy, 2024; Grandey, 2000) because surface acting can lead to negative outcomes for employees.

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