



Managing Emotions at Work: A Review of Emotional Labour Strategies Used by HR Professionals in High-Pressure Organisations

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ABSTRACT

Emotional labour has proven to be an important element of working life especially to the Human Resource (HR) professionals who regularly deal with the problems of conflict, employees suffering, organisation change, and high stakes decision making. As emotive mediators in high-pressure organisations, the HR professionals are involved in multifaceted emotional labour plans, i.e., surface acting, deep acting, and authentic expression, to keep up with the organisational demands and remain professional. This review is based on the current body of empirical evidence to analyse the impact of emotional labour on the wellbeing of HR professionals, job performance, commitment, and risk of burnout. Relying on the research conducted in various fields including the hospitality sector, public administration, banking, healthcare sector, information and technology sector and journalism, the review indicates the emotional demands which have escalated in the contemporary workspaces and the effects of prolonged emotional control. Results indicate that, despite possible positive contribution of emotional labour to service quality, trust, and employee relations, it also poses higher susceptibility to emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and turnover intentions especially when organisational support is weak. The paper singles out several moderating factors such as emotional intelligence, leadership support, work characteristics and psychological capital and underscores the importance of specific interventions to help the same in regard to HR professionals. The gaps in research and future directions are hypothesized to lead to further studies in the area of emotional labour in HR.

Keywords: Emotional labour; HR professionals; Surface acting; Deep acting; Emotional exhaustion; Organisational support; High-pressure work environments; Burnout; Emotional intelligence; Job performance.

1. Introduction

The theme of emotional labour has become a major focus in modern organisational studies that have been observed to be a promising output of the increasing awareness of the emotional depths inherent in the contemporary work state. In the current global trend analyses, emotional labour is currently interpreted as a complex process that determines the employee wellbeing, performance, and organisational operations in all sectors (Feng et al., 2025). The role of the Human Resource (HR) professionals is especially filled with emotion, as they are the organisational boundary managers, who need to control their emotions and at the same time, address the emotional needs of employees. HR professionals always practice strategic emotional regulation whether it is a conflict resolution process, helping staff members navigate the organisational change, or dealing with crisis like layoff, or disciplinary processes.

These demands are further aggravated by high pressure work places. The time limitations, excessive workloads, and continuous interpersonal difficulties typical of such environments precondition the usage of advanced emotional labour strategies on the part of the HR professionals who must be capable of ensuring the professionalism and the efficient organisational performance (Allameh, 2021). It has been found through high-pressure industry research that good stress and emotion management have a direct impact on performance outcomes, and as a result, emotional regulation capabilities have been proven to be valuable to the organisation (Bajwa et al., 2024). Although HR professionals are extremely crucial, the bulk of the emotional labour studies have been on frontline service labour, with a gap in the theoretical and empirical studies on people in charge of sustaining the organisational climate and employee wellbeing. The gap that this review fills in is the synthesis of the available literature regarding the implemented emotional labour strategies to encourage HR professionals to work in high-pressure environments. The review provides conceptual premises of emotional labour, the HR-specific strategies, the analysis of their implications, and the organisational supports and future research directions.

2. Theoretical Foundations of Emotional Labour

2.1 Classical and Contemporary Definitions

The original conceptualisation of emotional labour was that of emotion regulation to fulfill organisational display regulations especially in service based jobs. The definition has been however expanded by contemporary scholarship to incorporate a more subtle meaning of the interaction between emotional regulation and employee wellbeing, identity and organisational outcomes. Empirical proof shows that emotional labour is very closely related to burnout especially when surface acting is highly depended upon (Chen, Huang and Chu, 2024). This supports the theoretical issue that emotional regulation may be psychologically draining whereby employees are repeatedly forced to repress or alter their actual emotions. Additional information provided by latent profile analysis reveals that different people have different emotional labour patterns, or combinations of surface acting, deep acting, and natural expression, which are the predictors of differing wellbeing and job satisfaction (Park et al., 2021). These results highlight the heterogeneity of emotional labour experience and the necessity of theoretically grounded models that have the dynamic and situation-specific quality of emotional labour.

2.2 Strategies of Emotional Labour

Emotional labour structures have three main strategies, including surface acting, deep acting, and actual emotional expressiveness (Andersen, Pihl-Thingvad and Andersen, 2025). Surface acting tends to change external manifestations and leave internal feelings unchanged that may lead to emotional dissonance. Deep acting involves employees adjusting the interior attitudes to fit the intended portrayals of emotion, resulting in truer encounters. True emotional expression shows spontaneous and naturally synchronous emotional expressions. Research into the topic of emotional labour in journalism shows the intricacy of emotional regulation in high interpersonal and ethical occupation roles and indicates that these tactics can influence the emotional stress and the professional self (Guo and Li, 2025). On the same note, the emotional labour research in information technology professionals indicates how non-customer facing jobs are becoming more and more governed by emotions owing to collaborative pressures and changing workplace expectation (Khan et al., 2025). These views in combination push the emotional labour theory beyond the conventional service environment.

2.3 Widened Theoretical Viewpoints

The recent theoretical advances highlight the importance of personal and the psychological resources in influencing the effects of emotional labour. Current research evidence of a path analysis indicates that psychological capital, which includes hope, resilience, optimism and efficacy, can counteract the effects and negative influence of emotional labour as well as alleviate the risk of burnout (Bostan et al., 2025). A new school of thought emphasizes the role of emotional intelligence in mediating the situation whereby a person is able to better respond to emotional demands with reduced burnout and more healthy emotional regulation patterns (Xue et al., 2024). These contributions provide the importance of incorporating emotional resource theories into emotional labour frameworks, which provide more comprehensive insights into how employees cope with affective requirements in different organisational settings.

3. HR Professionals in High-Pressure Organisations

3.1 Emotional Demands of HR Work

The role of human resource (HR) professionals is characterised by the fact that it is placed between the organisational objectives and needs of employees, and thus, it is emotion-intensive. Their everyday tasks that include solving staff complaints to the organisational changes demand constant emotional control. The studies of work environments at high pressure reveal that workers under high workload pressure and emotional demands have increased psychological stress, especially when the interactions between employees are common and complicated (Dos Santos Tome & Van der Vaart, 2020). Such results are directly applicable to the HR settings, where specialists have to operate in delicate scenarios, including conflict resolution, performance management, and disciplinary actions. Service settings also present further evidence that chronic emotional labour is yet another factor in burnout and emotional exhaustion when organisational and interpersonal demands remain unchanged (Erasmus & Oosthuysen, 2025). This implies that to an HR professional, emotional labour is not only a necessary job skill, but also a possible cause of long-term stress.

3.2 High-Pressure Sector Characteristics

Hospitality, healthcare, banking, and technology are the high-pressure areas that are characterized by fast workflow, ongoing personal needs, and an unpredictable scenario (Bajwa et al., 2024). Such settings intensify the necessity of the emotional labour since the employees have to remain calm, compassionate and professional when affected by external factors. It has been shown that customer incivility is a key foreteller of emotional exhaustion, and it shows how hostile or demanding interactions increase emotional regulation demands (Kim et al., 2025). In the same way, emotional labour in a highly stressful working environment has been revealed to affect the quality of the services directly, because tired staff members are not able to sustain themselves in terms of their emotional expression (Wu, Zhang and Li, 2023). Employees of such industries who require the assistance of the HR professionals are exposed to the added pressures of absorbing and reacting to emotional spill over of a greater workforce.

3.3 Why HR Is Emotion-Intensive

HR professionals often deal with dismissals, conflict management, crisis management, and restructuring of an organisation, which is always a highly emotional situation among the workers. Being emotional anchors of the organisation, they should exhibit the sense of stability, compassion, and professionalism even in case of emotional interactions (Bostan, Selim Balcioğlu and Meral Elçi, 2025). These twofold responsibilities of avoiding their own feelings as well as the feelings of other people highlights the main role of emotional labour in HR especially in the organisational environment that is fast and highly stressful.

4. Emotional Labour Strategies Used by HR Professionals

4.1 Surface Acting in HR Roles

Surface acting is a mode of manipulation of external emotional displays when the internal feeling is the one that is manipulated. This is a strategy that is applied by HR professionals in most instances when they have to undertake disciplinary measures, grievance meetings, and conflict mediation when being neutral and calm is the order of the day (Chen, Huang and Chu, 2024). Nonetheless, hiding actual feelings may lead to emotional dissonance and this aspect is associated with psychological stress and decreased wellbeing in the long run. Studies show that emotional labour has a strong impact on job performance, especially in cases where employees resort much to surface acting to perform to the expectation of the organisation (Park, Moon and Ha, 2024). Furthermore, workload pressure increases the use of these strategies, since workers are under pressure to stay emotionally stable even when the internal pressure increases (Vashdi, Katz-Navon and Delegach, 2021). In HR settings surface acting is a requisite though possibly exhausting practice particularly in high-pressure organisations where interpersonal delicate matters are the norm.

4.2 Intensive Acting and Affective Control

Deep acting is the act of adjusting inner emotional states to become authentic in terms of necessary emotional demonstrations. This more real emotional labour is usually perceived to be not as psychologically damaging as a surface acting since there is less emotional dissonance. Deep acting is essential to HR professionals during the process of showing empathy in the course of consultation to employees, discussing their performance, or in intervening in a crisis (Dos Santos Tome and Van der Vaart, 2020). Cognitive reframing is used to make HR practitioners redefine emotionally colored situations so that they can respond with compassion and professionalism. It has been demonstrated that job characteristics, including Autonomy and role clarity, moderate the connection among emotional labour and stress, and that some supportive job design can enhance the deep acting effectiveness (Kuo et al., 2022). Moreover, there is a positive correlation between emotional labour and organisational commitment with job performance in cases where employees internalise professional values, and the importance of deep acting in evolving a strong HR identity (Allameh, 2021).

4.3 Authentic Expression of Emotions

The real expression of emotions is when the employees show genuine expression of emotions that are in line with the organisational expectations which need little regulation. This strategy is particularly useful in developing trust, rapport, and psychological safety among employees by the HR professional (Erasmus and Elrie Oosthuysen, 2025). Authentic communication brings about credibility, particularly when sensitive issues like organisational changes are being discussed or wellbeing initiatives. Studies underline that the supportive leadership approach helps employees to convey emotions more genuinely, which alleviates the emotional pressure and increases the effectiveness of relations (Andersen, Pihl-Thingvad & Andersen, 2025). To HR practitioners, authentic leadership behaviours could enhance the relationship between individuals and create an environment of openness.

4.4 Cross Industry Insights to HR

Despite the fact that emotional labour studies are mostly conducted within the service and front office context, other industries have presented insightful conclusions to human resources practitioners. To illustrate, banking evidence indicates that job insecurity, emotional labour, and supervisory support are related to emotional exhaustion, and the HR should be aware of the impact external pressures exert on employees and their emotional conditions (Wu, Chen and Chang, 2025). Equally, research of IT professionals indicates that there are growing emotional pressures due to collaboration, digital overload and virtual communication, highlighting the role of technology in intensifying emotional pressures applicable to HR teams dealing with hybrid and remote workforce (Khan et al., 2025). Such understandings would guide HR practitioners to predict the behaviour of emotional labour within the various organisational departments and establish the relevant support systems.

4.5 Factors (Individual and Organisational) to Influence

A number of personal and organisational contexts determine the emotional labour of the HR professionals. The effects of negative emotional labour can be mitigated by psychological capital, meaning the capacity to cope and feel well through optimism, efficacy, resilience, and hope (Bostan et al., 2025). Emotional intelligence is also important and those who have higher emotional awareness and control capabilities are more adept at dealing with emotional stress and have a reduced risk of burnout (Chen et al., 2024). In addition to personal resources, organisational culture, leadership approach, and expectations of the HR roles play a key role in shaping the strategies of emotional labour. Emotional intelligence and supportive organisational climate

training can make HR professionals more emotionally resilient so that they confront complex emotional interactions more confidently and with greater wellbeing.

5. Consequences of Emotional Labour for HR Professionals

5.1 Positive Outcomes

Despite the fact that emotional labour is often linked to strain, emotional labour may also yield significant HR-related as well as organisational-wide benefits. A well-implemented emotional labour enhances the relationship-building mechanisms in that it helps HR practitioners to deal with sensitive issues in an empathetic and professional manner (Feng, Lin and Chen, 2025). This emotional competence leads to the development of trust among the employees especially when the HR is a mediator in the event of conflict or a supportive agent during the process of organisational change. A study has shown that emotional labour is positively related to internalised professional values and organisational commitment as well as job performance (Allameh, 2021). To the HR professionals, being able to sail through emotionally-charged encounters does not only increase the credibility of the professionals but also facilitates the resolution of workplace tensions. These favourable results indicate that emotional labour is not automatically bad, but the implications of emotional labour are determined by the strategies and the organisational circumstances in which the emotional labour is executed.

5.2 Negative Outcomes

In spite of possible advantages, emotional labour is a serious threat to HR practitioners, particularly in a situation where surface acting is extensively used. One of the most reported outcomes is emotional exhaustion, which happens when people have to maintain emotion regulation in response to challenging interpersonal circumstances. It has been shown that emotional labour is a burnout factor, especially in cases where employees use a lot of emotional energy but do not sufficiently rest or receive the necessary support (Bostan et al., 2025). The meta-analytic results also indicate that emotional labour is strongly associated with psychological fatigue and lower wellbeing particularly when individuals are not provided with the emotional means to dampen the stress (Chen et al., 2024). Latent profile results reveal that employees who consistently have high surface acting levels have significantly worse wellbeing than those who use deep acting or authentic expression strategies (Park et al., 2021). These consequences can be in the form of depersonalisation, irritability and work-family conflict in the case of HR professionals as the emotional demands of the job are transferred to personal life. This pressure jeopardizes professional performance as well as career sustainability in the long run.

5.3 Turnover Intentions and Engagement

Continuous emotional burnout does not only have an impact on wellbeing but also on the intention of HR professionals to stay in their job. Emotional labour has been found to increase turnover intention especially where the employee is exposed to prolonged emotional stress or in situations of abusive interpersonal relationships (Kim et al., 2025). In the case of HR practitioners, who have to deal with conflict, employee distress, and organisational crisis quite often, the emotional burden may build up and reduce their participation in employee support activities. Limited involvement compromises the quality of HR service provision and the organisation operations, particularly in highly stressful settings where the presence of stable HR support is essential (Guo and Li, 2025). The HR personnel turnover also poses organisational problems since the replacement of the skilled HR personnel takes a lot of time and money.

5.4 Sector-Specific Stressors and Applicability to HR

High-pressure sectors put the extra burden of emotional labour that adds to the workload and emotional pressure on the HR professionals. Workload pressure is found to be one of the major enhancers of emotional labour effects that raise the chances of encountering exhaustion and decrease emotional regulation capacity (Vashdi et al., 2021). The emotional blow-out of frontline stressors is frequently taken up by HR personnel when they work in such areas like hospitality, healthcare, finance, and information technology. Such a state of affairs demands particular skills on the part of HR practitioners who not only need to handle their own emotional reactions but also those who are under the acute pressure (Khan et al., 2025). The HR work therefore has its emotional implications not only through the interpersonal interactions but also through the contextual stressors incorporated within the overall organisational environment.

6. Organisational Supports and Coping Mechanisms

6.1 Supervisor Support

Positive leadership is important shield against the emotional needs formed by HR professionals. Employees will be more prepared to deal with stressors that come with emotionally depictive interactions when they are given guidance, empathy and emotional decompression opportunities by their supervisors. It has proven that high-quality support has a positive impact on the emotional strain reduction as it helps to create a psychologically safe environment when employees feel free to share their concerns and seek assistance (Andersen et al., 2025). As the HR practitioners are often viewed as the emotional support system of others, the access to supportive leaders is necessary to maintain their emotional health and avoid burnout.

6.2 Technology and AI Less Emotional Burden

The technological advances are also increasingly influencing the emotional labour requirements through moderation. Information technology environments have provided insight into the fact that digital collaboration environments create emotional strain due to continuous communication, which is the reason why systems that can simplify work and ease cognitive loads are in demand (Khan et al., 2025). As an HR professional, using AI-based software (e.g. an automated scheduling application, digital onboarding system, or sentiment analysis software) can enable one to do less repetitive work, minimize emotionally demanding interactions, and allocate more time to the relational work. Technology can also help HR practitioners in dealing with multifaceted human-centred activities that entail genuine emotional interaction by alleviating the administrative pressures.

6.3 Wellbeing and Training Methods

Another useful organisational strategy is the strengthening of individual emotional resources. Emotional intelligence (EI) training also increases the capacity of employees to identify, interpret, and manage emotions, which lowers the risk of burnout and increases coping skills (Xue et al., 2024). Mindfulness programs are also used to ensure that HR professionals are emotionally balanced by ensuring they have self-awareness and are less stressed out. In addition to personal interventions, supportive leadership behaviors have a direct negative influence on emotional exhaustion through validation of employee experience and demonstrating healthy emotional management (Wu et al., 2025). Lastly, the redesign of workloads, including the redistribution of work, or offering breaks, can also reduce emotional strain, and the HR professionals can maintain successful emotional labour without impairing the wellbeing.

7. Research Gaps and Future Directions

7.1 Gaps in Existing Literature

- Fewer HR-Specific Studies: The bulk of studies on emotional labour literature looks at frontline service jobs, and little has been done to address emotional demands unique to HR.
- Necessity of New Models: According to the recently reviewed studies, more modern work models require updated emotional labour frameworks that reimburse the complex work environment (Feng et al., 2025).

7.2 Contextual and Cultural Gaps

- Absence of Multi-Country Comparisons: There are differences in the rules of emotional display around the world, but there is very little research on cross-cultural HR emotional labour.
- Digital Human Resource Spaces: There is limited research on the topic of emotional labour within virtual HR practices like online recruitment, remote conflict management, and AI-assisted HR practices.

7.3 Methodological Gaps

- Mixed-Methods Designs required: The complexity of emotional labour can be better explained with the help of qualitative and quantitative integration.
- Longitudinal Studies Requirement: Long-term studies are needed to know how emotional labour builds and impacts the HR professionals in the long term.

8. Conclusion

HR professionals are in the business of emotional labour, they regularly deal with conflict, employee distress, and organisational change. It is compounded in high-pressure settings with heavy workloads, high expectations and emotional colorful interactions that take place at a considerable frequency. The HR professionals will be required to thus adopt different emotional labour behaviours- surface acting, deep acting, and sincere emotional expression, in order to be professional and contribute to organisational operations. These strategies have mixed results. Whereas deep acting and genuine expression can enhance trust, communication, and bond-building, the use of surface acting can cause emotional pressure, burnout and diminished wellbeing. This renders emotional labour not only a useful professional instrument but enables it to be a risk factor that may lead to burnout provided there is no proper support. These challenges require organisational support to curb them. The influence of supervisor direction, training of emotional intelligence, wellbeing programs, and managing workloads all lead to healthier emotional control and long-term HR performance. These reinforcers will help the HR professionals to work in jobs that are emotionally taxing, with strength and sustainability.

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