THE EFFECT OF EMOTIONAL LABOUR ON ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AMONG CALL CENTRE CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES

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ABSTRACT

Call Centers industry is developing rapidly and as a consequence of their rampant development provided rich topics for investigation to educational researchers. One of such concept generating increasing discussion is emotional labour. When an individual enhances or suppress emotions as a part of his work, it is called as emotional labour. Emotional labour may increase businesses however employees often find it harmful or taxing. The paper explores the relationship between emotional labour (Surface Acting, Deep Acting and Emotional Dissonance) and organizational commitment and the influence of variables like gender and year of experience in current organization. Data was collected from 200 Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) from call centers in the city of Pune, India. CSRs find that emotional labour is lowering the organizational commitment. There is no difference in strategies adopted for performing emotional labour and level of organizational commitment among male and female CSRs. Those who have more years of experience in current call centers perform emotional labour through surface acting and have low level of organizational commitment compare to CSRs having less years of experience.

Keywords: Emotional Labour, Emotional Dissonance, Organizational Commitment, Call Centre


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1. INTRODUCTION

Emotions play a very important role in our social life. It acts as screens of perception, affects our decisions and sometimes, even makes decisions for us on their own. However, we often find ourselves in situations where our spontaneous emotions or expression thereof, (would) bring about negative consequences. The range of tolerable emotions varies with culture, gender and age. In lot of areas of life, display of inadequate emotions leads to adaptation troubles. (M. Vennia & K. Vivekanandan, 2017)

Emotions were ignored in the study of Organizational Behavior in the past. Recent years have seen an upsurge of interest in the study of emotions in organizations. One of the reason that organization science has been so tardy in researching emotions is because of the inherently ephemeral and idiosyncratic nature of emotions. How is it possible to study systematically a concept that can vary so widely and unpredictably within each of us? Now-a-days many researchers of organization behavior are concentrating on emotions and its relationship with work effectiveness. In some of the jobs managing emotions are essential and basic requirements of the job.

In 1983 sociologist Arlie Hochschild coined the concept of emotional labour and it has been defined as ‘the effort, planning and control needed to express organizationally desired emotions during interpersonal transactions’. Managing emotions at work is termed as emotional labour. This means that the person evokes or suppresses certain emotions to conform to social norms. All service industries require interaction with customers. These jobs require employees to be courteous and nice to customers, regardless of how the customer is treating the employee- cause emotional labour. Research on emotional labour has been receiving increased attention especially in context to call centers. Emotional labour in call center setting is performed in remote mode. Customer service representatives are expected to smile down on phone (Belt et. al. 1999).

Although emotional labour and emotional dissonance in call centers has been greatly acknowledged, there is lack of empirical research in such work. In emergent markets such as India, the center sector is rapidly growing. The challenge for call center management is to equip the employees with the necessary tools and skills to handle/control emotional labour situations that they are face with in the call center environment on a daily basis before it manifests into burnout and low organizational commitment. However, there is very little research on organizational commitment in call centers in Indian context. Moreover, there are different antecedents of emotional labour, emotional dissonance and organizational commitment in different work context, which implies that taking them in different roles/professions required different approaches. Therefore, this research is undertaken to examine the impact of emotional labour on organizational commitment among CSRs of call centers which is a key component of service sector work including call centers.

2. CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE

2.1. Call Centre: A General Overview

Information and communication technologies have facilitated globalization of business services allowing for the relocation of voice based call centers and of back office processes from global north to global south (Huws and Flecker 2004). Another reason for the burgeoning of the call center industry is a drive towards reducing costs and cutting staff, both of which can be accomplished by centralizing services, reducing branch office close to the customers and taking advantage of lower cost real estate and labour costs in locations outside main business centers (Richardson and Marshall, 1999). Call Centers are a significant part of global economy. As per Taylor and Bain Call center is a dedicated operation in which
computer utilizing employees receive inbound or make outbound telephone calls, with those calls processed and controlled either by an Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) or predictive dialing system. Call centers are “tools” for organizing communication with customers, with the help of telecommunication. Majority of call centers have been established to organize mass service for customers and the work of call centers is characterized by routine work and low task control.

Call centers are distinguished into inbound and outbound call centers. Inbound Call Centers mainly respond to incoming calls and primarily deals with questions and complaints that customer may have. Outbound call centers are mainly for contacts that are initiated by the organization. They are primarily for attempts to sell a product or service. There are also call centers with both inbound and outbound activities.

Customer service representatives are important for service organizations since they provide link between external customer environment and internal operations of the organization. They represent the company and directly influence the service quality perceptions of the customer. Their work is characterized by performing multiple tasks with frequent interruptions and repetitive movements while complex information is processed. It is also expected from them to have good communication skills and to be efficient while they work in noisy environments, usually under high time pressures and odd working hours. While call center is increasingly known as valuable resource for firm in managing customer relationships, it has also developed a reputation as stressful work environment (Proper 1998). Call centers has been labelled as ‘electronic sweat shops’ (Garson 1998), ‘twentieth- century panopticons (Fernie and Metcalf, 1998) and ‘assembly lines in the head’ (Taylor and Bain, 1999).

Customer Service representative sometimes communicates with about 100 customers during a typical eight-hour shift. Also, to continuously keep track of whom you are speaking to and frequent readjustment to new customers is a further non-trivial attention requirement. More significantly, call center agents are usually instructed to be friendly, enthusiastic, polite and helpful to customers even if they are rude. This indicates further demands with respect to the volitional presentation of emotions in opposition to those being felt.

The expression of organizationally desired emotions is not an end in itself. Emotions are shown to have an influence on clients. Expressing emotions is one possible way to influence client's emotions. To be able to do so, accurate perception of client's emotions as well as the accurate identification of the emotional display required, is an important prerequisite. Hochschild (1983) argued that carrying out emotion work for long hours would overtax the employee's ability to show the desired emotions. They would go on smiling but, they would not feel the expected emotions. This discrepancy between displayed and felt emotions is called emotional dissonance, which in the long run, could lead to psychological ill health. Several studies have reported significant relationship between emotional labour, burnout, job satisfaction, work effectiveness, organizational commitment, etc. When employee’s genuine feelings are masked, it leads to decrease in job satisfaction and increases the intention to quit.

2.2. Call Centre in India
The call center industry in India is located within the country’s emerging ITES-BPO sector whose major constituent is global off-shoring operations (Noronha and D’Cruz, 2009). The rapid spread of globalization has added competitive pressure across geographic markets impacting growth and profitability. Budhwar et al. (2006) cite data to highlight why India has become the electronic housekeeper of the world. The main reason for the rapid growth of call centers include the availability of over 2 million English speaking graduates every year who are ready to work at up to 80 percent less salary than their western counterparts. Availability
of technical and computer literate human resources, enormous savings for foreign firms by offshoring their processes in India, availability of useful infrastructure such as established telecom services, better productivity and quality of services as lead to proliferation of the call center industry in India.

Indian call center work involves customer service representatives providing voice-to-voice service to clients dialing toll free numbers primarily in North America. Customer service representatives learn American accent, work at night to cater to US time zones and adjust to an altered social and family life. There are stringent controls from part and parcel of work life in call centers. Indian call centers have work systems that are more tightly constrained and standardized than those found in US also gives low level of discretion to handling customer requests, use of problem solving groups, pacing work and scheduling request.

Call centers seem to be struggling with the problem of attrition from a long time. McMillin (2006) highlights that turnover rates continue to be high despite numerous employee benefits such as mentoring, leadership programs, insurance facilities, loan schemes, educational subsidies, health improvement programs and recreational opportunities. In counties like UK & Australia, where the call center industry is a lot older, there are clear guidelines and practices regarding labour related issues. In India, there is absence of any notions of work protections and guidelines. Thus, an equitable and gender safe work culture, an understanding regarding stress factors and alignment of peculiar to the industry and minimum standard code of the workplace are nonexistent. Therefore, there is need to study the challenges and issues of call center industry in India.

2.3. Emotional Labour

Arlie Hochschild first coined the term in her book, “The managed Heart”. The actual definition of the construct has evolved through the years and many versions have been proposed (Bono & Vey, 2005). Managing emotions at work is termed as emotional labour. When an individual performs emotional work as a required part of his job performance, it is called emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). This means that the person evokes or suppresses certain emotions to conform to social norms required for his/her job. All service industries require interaction with customers. These jobs require employees to be courteous and nice to customers regardless of how the customer is treating the employee is the cause of emotional labour.

Hochschild (1983) originally referred to emotional labor as the purposeful control of feelings to outwardly demonstrate an appropriate facial and body display. This control could be managed by using either surface acting, in which the outward expression is altered, or deep acting in which the actual emotion felt is altered through re-appraisal or directly conjuring the appropriate feeling.

Surface acting refers to the display of the characteristics of an emotion that are regarded as appropriate but are not actually felt. For example: “Put on a mask in order to express the right emotions for the job” or “to pretend to have the emotions you need to display for the job” (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Zammuner & Galli, 2005b). Deep acting is a regulation that aims to produce the experience of a required emotion. The employee tries to actually feel the emotions that he or she is supposed to express in the service interaction (Zammuner & Galli, 2005a).

The practice of emotional labour is most evident when a service transaction is going wrong and when the customers are unhappy for any number of reasons. In most situations, the employee will remain calm and polite to the customer. Feeling rules are the reason that the employee knows they must be polite. Feeling rules are scripts by which people decide the
correct emotional response to situation. However, when this system breaks down, there are harmful consequences. Emotional labour has been investigated across a wide variety of occupations. Research has shown that demand for emotion regulation at work can negatively affect the individual as well as organization.

2.4. Emotional Dissonance

Emotional dissonance at work represents a mismatch between genuinely felt emotion and display organizational emotions (Hochschild, 1983). Hoffman and Bateson (2001, p. 252) conceptualized emotional dissonance as a result of person/role conflict in which, “contact personnel are required to hide their true feelings and present a front or face to the customer which is appropriate for the situation”. Emotional dissonance therefore occurs when emotions are expressed that satisfy feelings rule or role expectations pertaining to emotional expression that come with the job rule, but clash with inner/true feelings.

Emotional dissonance sparks when service providers experience a conflict between the emotions they feel about their job and the required emotions the organisation has determined to be acceptable for display (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Several experiential consequences may occur from emotional dissonance. Displaying unfelt emotion is the core of emotional dissonance and has negative consequences due to the feelings of alienation from one’s true self when engaging in emotional labour. Emotional dissonance has also been said to be a type of role conflict which has been linked to emotional exhaustion (Lewig & Dollard, 2003; Morris & Feldman, 1996). In addition to this, emotional dissonance is a consequence of negatively evaluating emotional experiences as a threat to one’s identity (Jansz & Timmers, 2002).

Emotional labour can become dysfunctional for the worker when dissonance between felt emotions and displayed emotions is experienced. This incongruence between feeling and action, termed emotional dissonance, may ultimately lead to lowered self-esteem, depression, cynicism, and alienation from work. Similarly, self-alienation may result when the worker ceases to recognize or even feel authentic emotions (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).

2.5. Commitment

The concept of organizational commitment has attracted substantial attention over recent years and has become a central objective of human resource management. Commitment can be defined in various ways. Porter et al (1974) defined organizational commitment as “an attachment to the organization, characterized by an intention to remain in it, identification with the values and goals of the organization and willingness to exert extra effort on its behalf”. Individuals consider the extent to which their own values and goals relate to that of organization as part of organizational commitment; therefore it is considered to be linkage between the individual employee and the organization.

Organizational commitment is defined as an employee’s strong belief in and acceptance of an organization’s goals and values, effort on behalf of the organization to reach these goals and objectives and strong desire to maintain membership in the organization (Hunt and Morgan, 1994). In other words, organizational commitment points to the attitudes of employees concerning commitment towards the organizations they work for. Organizational commitment is directly related to the desire to maintain membership in the organization, the willingness of employees to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization and a strong belief in and acceptance of an organization’s goals and values.

Another perspective of organizational commitment is the “exchanged – based definition” or “side-bet” theory (Becker, 1960). This theory holds that individuals are committed to the organization as they hold their positions irrespective of the stressful conditions they
experience. However, should they not be given alternative benefits, they will be willing to leave the organization.

The three-component model of commitment developed by Meyer and Allen (1997), arguably dominates organizational commitment research (Meyer et. al, 2002). This model proposes that organizational commitment is experienced by the employees as three simultaneous mindsets encompassing affective, normative and continuance organizational commitment.

3. METHODOLOGY
To collect data, a questionnaire has been developed. The questionnaire consists of two parts. In the first part there are demographic questions and in the second part there are four subscales of concerned variables of the study i.e. surface acting, deep acting, emotive dissonance/ emotional dissonance and organizational commitment.

Emotional labour was measured by three dimensions i.e. Surface Acting, Deep Acting and Emotional Dissonance. Surface Acting and Deep Acting were measured by using emotional labour scale developed by Brotheridgee and Lee (1998). Both the dimensions have three items each and respondents were asked to rate their behavior at workplace on five-point Likert type response scale ranging from never (1) to always (5). Emotional Dissonance was measured with the help of scale developed by Kruml and Geddes (2000) having total 9 items on 5-point Likert scale from never (1) to always (5). To measure commitment, subscale affective commitment from the three component model by Allen & Meyer was adopted. This subscale has 8 items also five point Likert (1, Strongly Disagree to 5: Strongly Agree).

The questionnaire was conducted on 200 Customer Service Representatives (CSR) of International call centers operating in Pune, India. Face to face method was used to collect data. Since, generally, CSRs in call centers have high rate of turnover, only those who have more than one year of experience in the respective company were selected for the study. HR manager/Team leaders and other concerned people from respective call centers were interviewed to get more insights that supplement the findings of the study.

Cronbach’s alpha value was calculated to determine the reliability of the scale. Cronbach alpha values of scales were surface acting 0.87, deep Acting O.90, Emotional Dissonance 0.77 and Affective Commitment o.81. It could be argued that the scales are reliable because the values obtained are higher than 0.7 (Hair et. al, 2009).

4. ANALYSIS & RESULT
Table 1 summarizes the profile of respondent. Its seen from table 1 that 38% respondents are age group of 18- 22 years. This group is followed by the age group of respondent 23- 27 years with 49%. Only 13% respondents are age group of 27 years and more. Most of the respondents are young as call centers are willing to recruit young customer service representatives. As Ramesh (2004) and McMillin (2006) show, the average age of CSRs is 25 years, with the main bracket being 21 to 25 years. In terms of educational level of CSRs of call centers to research 25% respondents are post graduates, 66% of respondents having graduate degree and 9% respondents are undergraduates. In research 57% respondents are male and 43% respondents are female. Also, as seen from the table 77% respondents are having 1-3 years of experience in current call centers. Only 23% respondents working in the current call centers for 3 to 6 years.
Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Education Qualification</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-22 years</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Post Graduates</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-27 years</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 years &amp; above</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Under Graduates</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100</td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Exp. in Current Call Centre</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3-6 years</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100</td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Independent t test was performed to find out difference between the emotional and organizational commitment with respect to gender and experience in current call centers.

Table 2 Independent Sample - Test with respect to Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surface Acting</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>11.53</td>
<td>0.190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>11.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep Acting</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>10.71</td>
<td>0.240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>11.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Dissonance</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>34.98</td>
<td>0.362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>34.51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Commitment</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>20.50</td>
<td>0.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>21.68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Table 3 Independent Sample Test with respect to Work Experience in current organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Work Experience</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surface Acting</td>
<td>1-3 Years</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>10.80</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-6 Years</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>13.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep Acting</td>
<td>1-3 Years</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>11.47</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-6 Years</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>8.98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Dissonance</td>
<td>1-3 Years</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>34.30</td>
<td>0.01*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-6 Years</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>36.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Commitment</td>
<td>1-3 Years</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>21.74</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-6 Years</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>18.59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Result shows that for all the for all the variables with respect to gender, t- value is greater than 0.05. No significant difference is observed for surface acting, deep acting, emotional dissonance and organizational commitment. Emotional labour performed and experienced by male and female customer service representatives is same even the commitment level is equal between the male and female CSRs.

On conducting t – test of work experience in current organization, the value of t is to be found significant at 0.05 levels. Further the results show that CSRs having work experience of 3 to 6 years prefer to perform emotional labour through surface acting rather than deep acting. They automatically regulate their emotions as per the demand of the situation. CSRs having work experience of 1 to 3 years perform emotional labour through deep acting. They actually feel the situation and feelings of the customers and then respond.

Emotional dissonance is high ( mean 36.37) among the CSRs of 3- 6 years of experience compared to the CSRs having 1 to 3 years of experience ( mean 34.30). Organizational
commitment is high (mean 21.74) with the CSRs of 1 to 3 years of experience where, its low (mean 18.57) in the CSRs of 3 to 6 years of experience in current call centers.

Table 4 Correlations among the study variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surface Acting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.431</td>
<td>0.425</td>
<td>-0.244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep Acting</td>
<td>-0.431</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.51</td>
<td>0.225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Dissonance</td>
<td>0.425</td>
<td>-0.51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Commitment</td>
<td>-0.244</td>
<td>0.225</td>
<td>0.306</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Bivariate Pearson correlations between the emotional labour variables and organizational commitment are also presented in Table 4. Surface acting is negatively correlated to deep acting (r = -0.431) and organizational commitment (r = -0.244). Also surface acting is positively correlated to emotional dissonance (r = 0.425). Further result shows that deep acting (r = 0.225) is positively correlated to organizational commitment.

The above results show that if employees perform surface acting while carrying out their duties they are emotionally detached with the organization. Due to this there is not much effect on their emotional balance as they just perform their task without getting deeply involved in it. This condition might reduce their connect with the organization and may lead in employee turnover. Employee’s performing deep acting on the other side are seen more attached to organization, however their emotional balanced is disturbed as they are more often portraying the feeling which they do not feel.

5. CONCLUSION

Emotional labour is a key component of service sector. This phenomenon has been immensely researched among traditional helping professions (e.g. nurses, teachers, sales executives, cabin crew etc.). The interface between service providers and customers has changed completely with the advent of technology and this brings with it newer issues and challenges for today’s workplace (Surana and Singh, 2009). Today, we are witnessing novel forms of people-oriented professions like call centre employees.

Call centre jobs are very demanding. CSRs consider the work very stressful and exhausting due to its routinized and tightly monitored centralized nature. These jobs demand that CSRs to express the appropriate emotions to the customers during voice to voice interaction over the phone. Hence, CSRs are involved in emotion work/emotional labour which has further consequences. At the same time labour turnover in call centres is high (Brain & Taylor, 1999).

This study reveals that emotional labour is significantly related to organizational commitment. The significant role of emotional labour – surface acting in the study shows that the non-genuineness of emotional expression at the surface level (e.g. faking) is most lowering the organizational commitment. Similarly, emotional labour – surface acting is increasing the emotional dissonance.

Study indicates that emotional labour experienced and performed by the male and female CSRs is same and even the commitment level does not differ among the male and female CSRs. Another finding of the study is that CSRs having more years of experience in current call centres are more likely to detach themselves from the workplace and have low organizational commitment compare to CSRs having less years of experience.

This study makes an important contribution to the literature but limited to one key issue. The results are based on the CSRs of call centres located in Pune, India. In this context, an
important consideration is whether the findings of this study generalize across jobs and organizations. In this direction more research is needed to explore the relationship between emotional labour and organizational commitment.

REFERENCES

The Effect of Emotional Labour on Organizational Commitment among Call Centre Customer Service Representatives