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Acting and performing: influences of manager emotional intelligence

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## Acting and Performing: Influences of Manager Emotional Intelligence

Keywords: EMOTIONAL LABOR, MANAGER EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE,  
DEPRESSED MOOD, EMOTIONAL PERFORMANCE

## Acting and Performing: Influences of Manager Emotional Intelligence

### Abstract

**Purpose:** This work examined the predictive role of manager emotional intelligence (MEI) with regard to emotional labor efforts and outcomes relationships. Testing evaluated the influence of MEI on the effects of emotional labor activities employed by subordinates (e.g., surface and active deep acting).

**Design/methodology/approach:** Relationships were examined between the emotional labor efforts employed by subordinates and their levels of depressed mood, as well as the supervisory leaders' evaluations of the subordinates' emotional performance resulting indirectly and directly from the emotional labor activities. Specifically, hypotheses that MEI will influence the performance of emotional labor and the effects of such activities on depressed mood and emotional performance were tested.

**Findings:** Findings indicate that MEI moderates the impact of depressed mood on emotional performance.

**Originality/value:** This research adds to the emotional intelligence literature and enhances practical understanding of how organizations dependent on relationship-oriented, successful customer care can sponsor employee actions that facilitate results.

## Acting and Performing: The Influence of Manager Emotional Intelligence

The health of organizations partly depends on the success of interactions between employees and customers, especially in service environments. Certain organizational rules of interaction and emotional display are established to ensure the employee-customer transaction goes smoothly and promotes the organization according to customer expectations. The current work proposes that the attitudes, provision of emotional support, and modeling behaviors of managers imputed by manager emotional intelligence (MEI) will create a blueprint by which employees may use these resources and model their own emotive efforts during the service interaction process.

The satisfaction of interaction rules through the management of emotion and emotional display is called emotional labor. The rules dictating one's emotional labor in the organizational setting may be explicitly managed, as in the case of a training program, or implicitly managed through the behavioral modeling by managers and seasoned employees. In the retail industry, store managers not only have the responsibility of maintaining operative business functions and an environment that is representative of the organization's values, but they also are responsible for training, engaging, and motivating employees. Social Learning Theory explains that individuals perform according to observations of role models and continue various behaviors based on outcomes that serve to reinforce those behaviors (Bandura, 1986; Wood and Bandura, 1989).

Invariably, the manager influences the perception, acceptance, and enactment of these rules in the organizational environment. However, there is no empirical information in the literature regarding the influence of managerial emotional intelligence on the relationship between emotional labor efforts and related outcomes. Liu, Prati, Perrewé and Ferris (2008)

expressed the need to investigate the extent to which social resources, such as manager instruction, support, and guidance, affect the use of emotional labor strategies through the provision of emotional resources.

In an effort to address the gap in the literature, this effort suggests MEI provides the cultural and social resources necessary to influence employee perception, adoption, and execution of organizational display rules. The general proposal is that MEI contributes to attitudes, behaviors, and performance success of organizational members (see Figure 1).

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Insert Figure 1 about here  
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### **Emotional Labor**

Hochschild (1983) coined the term emotional labor, the compliance of the employee with organizationally established rules of emotional display, and explained various kinds of activities encompassed by the term, such as surface and deep acting. In this seminal work, Hochschild warned that prolonged emotional effort to fulfill such requirements could lead to detrimental outcomes for employees, and a great deal of evidence exists to support the notion of the emotional labor's deleterious effects (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Morris and Feldman, 1997; Abraham, 1998; Pugliesi, 1999; Zapf, Vogt, Seifert, Mertini, and Isic, 1999; Grandey, 2000; Zapf, Seifert, Schmutte, Mertini, and Holz, 2001; Erickson and Ritter, 2001; Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Totterdell and Holman, 2003; Côté, 2005). Conversely, there are a number of studies showing evidence of positive effects, such as better service performance with some forms of emotional labor, and beneficial influences on employee attitudes including increased job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Morris and Feldman,

1997; Diefendorff and Richard, 2003; Totterdell and Holman, 2003; Abraham, 1998). This equivocality indicates certain factors exist to influence emotional labor efforts and their outcomes.

### **The Manager: Emotion Rule Engagement and Support**

Evidence supports the idea that supervisors provide the necessary tools for employees to be effective in the work environment (Sy, Tram, and O'Hara, 2006). Accordingly, emotional intelligence is a requirement of the manager in order to establish corresponding perceptions of organizational display rules between manager and employees, and for the employees to understand how those dictates of emotional labor are to be carried out for successful organizational function.

The emotional intelligence of managers is also a factor in reducing the stress that employees often suffer because of emotional labor practices. Himle, Jayaratne, and Thyness (1989) explained how stress is buffered by managerial emotional, instrumental, and informational support. In the case of emotional labor practices, the emotionally intelligent managers have more resources from which they may draw to provide instructional and emotional support for employees.

Palmer, Walls, Burgess, and Stough (2001) found evidence for the idea that emotionally intelligent leaders may be more equipped to influence subordinate emotions and resulting actions on the job effectively. George (2000) explains that the emotionally intelligent leader's use of emotion allows him or her to influence the behavior and cognition of others not only through effective instruction of appropriate emotional displays, but also through the effective display of such organizationally appropriate emotions. Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) contend that organizational members' motivation toward collective performance is initiated by a leader's use

of symbolic management techniques. Prati, Douglas, Ferris, Ammeter, and Buckley (2003) discussed this line of reasoning in their argument for the influence of emotionally intelligent leaders on supportive team environments. More recently, Madrid, Totterdell, Niven, and Barros (2016) enhanced understanding of the influence of a leader's affect-related characteristics on team processes and performance, noting a positive relationship between team leader positive affective presence and information sharing, innovation, and outputs. Along these lines, it is reasonable to assume that a manager with above average capabilities in the emotional realm would notice and encourage actions that display such capabilities in their subordinates.

Herkenhoff (2004) suggests that organizational culture causes one to adapt perceptions of situational context, and that culture may serve as a filter to feelings based on the situation and resulting actions related to those feelings. Relatedly, Prati, McMillan-Capehart, and Karriker (2009) established a theoretical influence of MEI on organizational culture and sense-making. It is, therefore, reasonable to propose that MEI would wield a great amount of beneficial influence in an environment where emotion is salient to the interaction process, considering the manager's influence on the culture of the organization.

### **Hypotheses Development**

Emotional labor is a primary responsibility for employees in service industries. Emotional acting, in the form of surface or active deep acting, implies some amount of involvement or engagement in one's job, and these actions are executed in order to fulfill some expectation. Liu *et al.*, (2008) indicate that both active deep acting and surface acting require a certain amount of emotional resources and argue these resources are committed to a task with the expectation that the outcome will be an increase in resources. Interestingly, surface acting may be all that is required to conduct a positive customer service interaction. As suggested by Rafaeli

(1989), customer expectations for emotional attention may depend on how busy the store is or how rushed the customer is. The researcher found a decrease of positive emotions displayed by clerks when the number of customers waiting for service increased. In a study of restaurant servers, Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, and Sideman (2005) found that the perceived authenticity of the server's emotional display provided for a more satisfactory perception of affective service delivery for the customer when the store was slow, but less so when it was busy. Regardless of the circumstances, surface acting may be an emotional labor effort that is endorsed by the organization and encouraged through training and managerial examples.

*Hypothesis 1:* Surface acting is positively related to performance.

Active deep acting is represented in the literature as a more amenable method of emotional labor (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987; Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). Findings support the idea that more genuine emotional efforts lead to a higher degree of customer satisfaction with service delivery such as in the case of Grandey *et al.*, (2005), who found evidence that active deep acting was positively related to peer-rated affective delivery.

*Hypothesis 2:* Active deep acting is positively related to performance.

Surface acting has been described as the physical attempt to hide the actual feelings of the emotional actor (Zapf, Seifert, Schmutte, Mertini, and Holz, 2001). Hochschild (1983) warned that surface acting can be considered a work stressor. Stress is caused by emotional dissonance in play during the act, and this implies direct, positive association with depressed mood and other types of psychological strain (Prati *et al.*, 2009).

*Hypothesis 3:* Surface acting is positively related to depressed mood.

Active deep acting, as indicated above, is less stressful than surface acting. Even though this form of emotional labor still involves a certain amount of emotional dissonance, the effect of



reprogramming one's emotional state in order to feel the way one is required to act appears to result in less strain. Totterdell and Holman (2003) found that active deep acting was not associated with emotional exhaustion. Studies have deduced that certain moderators serve to reduce any deleterious effects that may be suffered by active deep acting (Huang, Chiaburu, Zhang, Ning, Grandey, 2015; Grandey, 2003).

*Hypothesis 4:* Active deep acting is negatively related to depressed mood.

Some research has explored a connection between depressed mood and emotional performance. Goldberg and Huxley (1992) provide several results of depressed mood that indicate a reduction in the ability to provide competent emotional performance. The results of depressed mood include low levels of energy and attentiveness and the reduced desire to engage socially (Allen and Badcock, 2003). Dennis (2007) indicated that depressed mood would inhibit performance in emotional regulation activities due to the lower expectation that the regulation activity would result in rewards.

*Hypothesis 5:* Depressed mood is negatively related to emotional performance.

Evidence in the literature suggests that the emotional intelligence of managers contributes to positive work attitudes and behaviors (Carmeli, 2003) including performance (Sy *et al.*, 2006; Wong and Law, 2002). Sy *et al.*, (2006) summarized research indicating that managers provide the relationship- or emotion-oriented tools for employees to be more cooperative in the work environment and contribute above organizational expectations, leading to better performance. Klimoski and Hayes (1980) found that supervisor support of employee activities was positively and significantly related to employee effort and performance.

Côté (2005) cited previous research to explain that social support (which may include supportive behaviors of managers) to the employee during the encounter facilitates the surface

and active deep acting – outcome relationships. According to this, it would appear that the abilities of managers to provide an environment of support and emotional safety are influential to employees' effectiveness of performance related to emotional labor activities.

*Hypothesis 6:* MEI has a positive, direct effect on the relationship between surface acting and emotional performance.

*Hypothesis 7:* MEI has a positive, direct effect on the relationship between active deep acting and emotional performance.

*Hypothesis 8:* MEI has a negative, direct effect on the relationship between depressed mood and emotional performance.

## **Method**

### **Sample**

A total of 574 employees and managers from 29 stores of an 87 year-old retail chain were surveyed, and provided 244 complete and useable responses (42.5% response rate). Emotional performance evaluations labeled for each individual employee were given to floor managers. Employee surveys were coded in order to match them with the emotional performance evaluations submitted by their immediate manager. The General Manager was instructed to evaluate the emotional performance of subordinate managers. This system was designed so that the manager most directly associated with the employee would provide the evaluation of said employee's emotional performance.

Consistent with the demographics of the organization, the sample was primarily female (69.5%) and white (81.0%), with 7.1% African descent, 5.2% Hispanic, 1.0% Asian, and 5.7% who regarded themselves as multicultural. The average age was 31 with a range of ages between 18 and 72. The average tenure with the organization was 2 years with a range of tenure between

1 month and 30 years. The education level of associates was fairly split with 46.2% having high school degrees and 52.4% having at least some college level course work. Managerial positions were held by 26.2% of the sample, which was also close to the average for managerial staff of stores in this chain.

## Measures

*Emotional intelligence.* The *Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test* (SREIT) (Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, and Dornheim, 1998) was used to measure emotional intelligence of the General Managers for each store surveyed. A 5-point Likert scale was used, with item responses ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Sample items of the scale are “I know why my emotions change,” “I use good moods to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles,” and “I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them.”

Reliability for this measure was calculated at  $\alpha = .90$ .

*MEI.* In order to evaluate level of MEI, the *SREIT* was used to collect the emotional intelligence score of the General Manager, only, for each store surveyed. All other subordinate managers were included in the information of the general population of employees for each store.

*Surface acting.* Surface acting was measured using Grandey’s (2003) five-item scale. A 5-point Likert scale was used, with item responses ranging from “never” to “always,” indicating the frequency of specific actions performed by the subject. Items for the scale include questions such as “I fake a good mood” and “I just pretend to have the emotions I need to display for my job.” The data yielded a reliability of  $\alpha = .88$  for this scale.

*Active Deep acting.* Active deep acting was measured using questions compiled by Grandey (2003) and Brotheridge and Lee (1998). A 5-point Likert scale was used, with item

responses ranging from “never” to “always,” indicating the frequency of specific actions performed by the subject. Items for the scale included questions such as “I make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display to others” and “I really try to feel the emotions I have to show as a part of my job.” The data yielded a reliability of  $\alpha = .92$  for this scale.

*Emotional Performance.* Direct supervisors (excluding the General Manager) were asked to rate employees’ performance. Items from the scale were created by Grandey (1999) as a 9-item emotional labor measure. Example items from this scale include, “This person smiles and communicates expressively with customers,” “This person shows enthusiasm when dealing with customers,” and “This person treats customers with courtesy, respect, and politeness.”

A 5-point Likert scale was used, with item responses ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree,” and the scale had a reliability of  $\alpha=.94$ .

## **Analysis and Results**

Descriptive statistics and correlations of all study variables are presented in Table 1. The Process (Hayes, 2013) software Conceptual Model Template 17 was used to test the moderating and mediating relationships in the model. Figure 1 shows the resultant significant paths and their coefficients.

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 INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE  
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The set of hypotheses addressing direct relationships between surface acting and emotional performance and active deep acting and emotional performance (Hypotheses 1 and 2, respectively), was not supported, as the paths from surface acting and active deep acting to emotional performance were not significant. The relationship between surface acting and

depressed mood is significant, thus supporting Hypothesis 3. The path from active deep acting to depressed mood was not significant, indicating no significant relationship between active deep acting and depressed mood; thus, Hypothesis 4 was not supported. Hypothesis 5, that depressed mood is negatively related to emotional performance, was not supported, indicating that depressed mood does not act as a mediator in the model. Hypothesis 6, that managerial emotional intelligence (MEI) has a positive direct effect on the relationship between surface acting and emotional performance, was not supported. However, MEI has a positive direct effect on the relationship between active deep acting and emotional performance, thus supporting Hypothesis 7 and moderating that relationship. In support of Hypothesis 8 and again acting as a moderator, MEI has a negative, direct effect on the relationship between depressed mood and emotional performance. That is, the presence of managerial emotional intelligence reverses the suppressive impact of depressed mood on emotional performance.

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INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE  
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## Discussion

Beginning with Hochschild (1983), researchers realized that emotional labor is a construct of importance, especially in the service environment. Emotional labor takes the form of emotional efforts performed to comply with organizational rules of emotional display. These rules are necessary to navigate the interactions that occur within the organizational work setting (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995). Because such activities are crucial to organizational success, especially with regard to the services industry, it behooves the scientific community to uncover

the intricacies of the service interaction in order to determine what contributes toward that success.

In the present study, the emotional labor efforts, surface and active deep acting, were examined in order to evaluate performance related outcomes. One of the most interesting results had to do with the surface acting-depressed mood-emotional performance relationship. The path was significant in all aspects as predicted, but the moderating effect of MEI on the relationship between depressed mood and emotional performance was quite strong. It appears that MEI may significantly reduce the deleterious effect of depressed mood on subordinate emotional performance.

In addition, this research proposed that MEI moderated active deep acting-outcome relationships. Although a significant relationship was not found between active deep acting and emotional performance, significance was found in the moderating effect of MEI on the relationship between active deep acting and emotional performance. In both cases of emotional labor studied, a manager's emotional intelligence does have an effect on subordinate emotional performance.

The literature is rich with support for the idea that active deep acting is a beneficial form of emotional labor (e.g., Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2003; Grandey *et al.*, 2005; Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987; Totterdell and Holman, 2003). The results of this investigation further reinforce such findings. The influence of MEI on the relationships between active deep acting efforts of employees and emotional performance indicates that the knowledge (provided through training) and support (provided through cultural socialization and personal encouragement) of an emotionally intelligent supervisor, taking the

form of an emotionally intelligent culture, foster positive results from the emotional labor efforts of subordinates.

Consistent with Madrid *et al.*, (2016), this effort asserts that this sponsorship of successful emotional labor efforts is due to the culture of emotional intelligence set forth by the manager. Liu *et al.*, (2008) argue that conservation of resources theory provides a framework by which emotional labor strategy may be determined, where the emotionally intelligent manager contributes to the employee's emotional resources, and in so doing, effects positive outcomes from the employee's emotional labor efforts.

The same paradigm may be applied to explain the lack of empirical support found regarding the hypotheses relating to surface acting. The lack of supervisor support from such sources stated above may be the reason for employees to rely on surface acting in order to fulfill the organization's expectations of emotional display. Perhaps the emotional resources are not available, and as Liu *et al.*, (2008) argue, surface acting is a more favorable form of emotional labor this case. Further, the feedback loop suggested by Côté's (2005) social interaction model of emotional regulation would indicate that MEI would not come into play in relationships where surface acting is involved.

Another reason for the lack of support for a mediating role of MEI between surface acting and outcomes may be due to the circumstances when surface acting is employed. As indicated by previous research, it may be that surface acting efforts occur during situations where time is short (Grandey *et al.*, 2005; Morris and Feldman, 1996; Rafaeli, 1989). In other cases, there may not be a need to enter a comprehensive interaction with the customer where anything more than surface acting is necessary, such as simple exchanges during minor or inconsequential

purchases (Morris and Feldman, 1996). In these cases, customer expectations are low regarding the affective performance of the customer service representative.

### **Limitations**

The current study has several limitations. Worthy of mention is the homogeneous sample from the retail industry concentrated in the southeastern part of the United States. In addition, the cross-sectional design limited the ability to draw any causal references regarding the relationships found among variables in the study and to investigate any recursive relationships that may exist. Interpretation of these results should be done with caution as generalizability cannot be established by one sample in a design of a cross-sectional nature.

### **Future Research and Practical Implications**

Up to this point, MEI has been represented as an important factor for effective employee performance. There are many more facets of this valuable resource to discover. What outcomes of MEI or other forms of managerial support may be useful to engage employees in effective performance? Perhaps MEI may be related to various outcomes that provide for employee performance or other beneficial outcomes. With regard to emotional labor, organizational scientists have yet to evaluate fully the emotional labor interaction process. Researchers like Côté (2005), Morris and Feldman (1997), Zapf *et al.*, (2001), Brotheridge and Grandey (2002), and Liu and Prati (2006) have made thoughtful inquiries and uncovered much useful information, but there are more intricacies of the process to explain. Relatedly, surface acting has the dubious distinction of being known for ambivalent findings. Is surface acting the miscreant it appears to have been portrayed? Is there a place for surface acting that allows it to be a useful and beneficial form of emotional labor? As presented earlier, research indicates that time



constraints and commonplace interactions may provide situations where surface acting is not only useful, but necessary.

This exciting and vital area of organizational research is ripe with useful information and applications. The global service economy is built, and depends on, satisfactory service and customer contact. Researchers and practitioners must understand how organizations dependent on relationship-oriented, successful customer care can sponsor employee actions that facilitate desired results.

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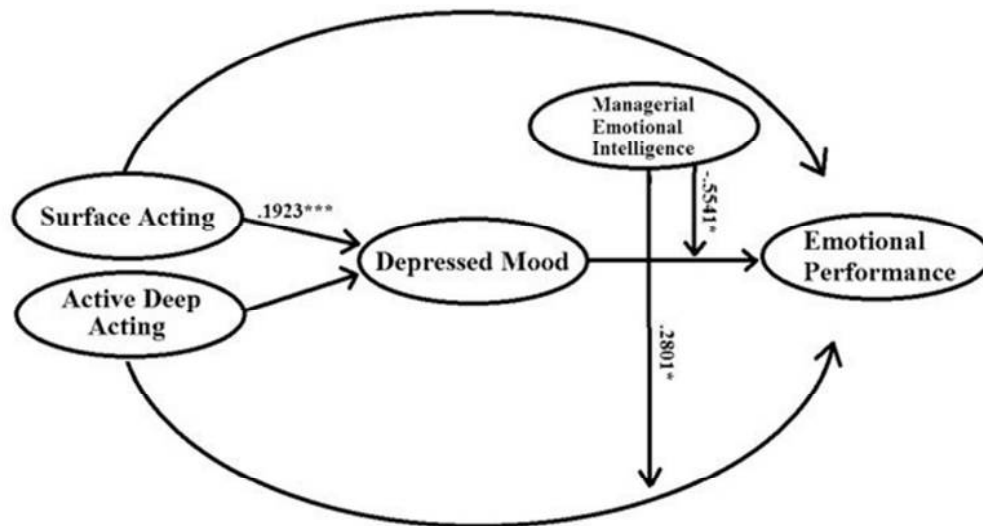
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**Figure 1**  
**Significant Paths and Coefficients**



\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 1**  
**Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Scaled Variables**

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Surface Acting	2.20	.836	(.88)					
2. Active Deep Acting	3.01	1.24	-.057	(.92)				
3. Employee EI	3.89	.411	-.164*	.297**	(.90)			
4. Manager EI	4.02	.343	-.035	.016	.205**	(.90)		
5. Depressed Mood	2.23	.595	.192**	-.027	-.356**	-.024	(.80)	
6. Emotional Performance	4.22	.643	-.056	-.044	.121	.301**	-.166*	(.94)

\*  $p = .05$ , \*\*  $p = .01$

Note: Coefficient alpha shown on diagonal. N=244