Concept of Emotional Labour in the BPO industry

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Emotional Labour in Service Sector, providing "service with a smile" is a job requirement used to promote the customer's intention to return and their satisfaction. Organizations have clear expectations about the interaction between their consumers and employees. For example, a frequent organizational goal is customer satisfaction, which is reached through employees' customer orientation that can be displayed by employees being very polite, friendly or asking about the customer's. Specifically, employees are required to display emotions that are in line with organizational expectations of what emotional displays are appropriate or expected in certain situations. Emotional display rules have been explored in a wide array of occupational contexts: the typical model is that positive emotions should be expressed and negative emotions suppressed. In fact, emotions play an important role in employee/customer relations in Business Process Outsourcing sector. Companies highlight the importance of this relationship and employees are encouraged formally or informally by their organizations to display emotions during face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions that conform to specific display rules defined by the specific organization. This paper focuses on some of the challenges faced by the Labour and Manager regarding management of emotions, and it also leads to a number of strategic recommendations.

Key Words: Emotional Labour, BPO Sector, Employee Employer Relationship

The last two decades of the twenty first century witnessed a major global shift in the distribution of employment away from agriculture and industry in to the service sector. Concomitant with this transition has been the creation of a relatively new labour market characterized by work roles that emphasize interactions between front-line service workers and customers. As a consequence a new type of work demand, that of emotional labour, has emerged as a key component of interactive service work. One such example of work requiring emotional labour is that of work of Business Process Outsourcing employees. This work requires constant interaction with customers, and the requirement to regulate emotions at work. It is not unusual to experience constant abuse from angry customers, and in these situations the Business Process Outsourcing worker must maintain organizational standards with respect to customer service—adherence to the organizational value that the customer is always right. Paradoxically, while the unique role of the Business Process Outsourcing/call center is the creation and maintenance of good customer relationships, call centers themselves have evolved in response to significant technological advances as well as global demands for cost-cutting initiatives. Therefore Business Process Outsourcing workers faced with the opposing goals of optimizing productivity while delivering superior customer service. Even in call centers

driven by quality rather than quantity, call center work is of itself demanding, repetitive, and often stressful. [1]

Each year, NASSCOM publishes its flagship report – the Strategic Review: The Technology Sector in India .This year's edition focuses on the theme "Resilience to Resurgence" and explores how various stakeholders partnered together to navigate the challenges posed by the pandemic and overcome these successfully. As a result, Financial Year 2022 is a tipping point for the industry – the year in which the industry crossed $200 Billion in total revenue and 5 Million in total workforce. The report examines the driving factors behind this growth via the Trends that Defined Financial Year 2022. It also analyses in detail six global megatrends that have become prominent as a result of the pandemic and how technology is being/can be leveraged to address these areas. With an aim to define the future, the report carries, for the first time ever, NASSCOM's TECHScope Framework that has looked deep into the top 25 technology that will be key to unlocking value over the next 3 to 10 years. Finally, the report also presents the short-term outlook (Financial Year 2023) – a sentiment analysis of both the enterprise (end-user industries) and the technology industry perspectives – both indicate a highly positive outlook for technology.

Given the rapid growth of the Business Process Outsourcing industry, it is important from a practical perspective that organizations are aware of the impact of the emotional and psychological demands of call center work on their employees in order to optimize the effectiveness and well-being of front-line workers and decrease the costs of turnover and absenteeism. From a theoretical perspective it is important that emotional labour is acknowledged in existing theories of occupational stress in order to assess its interaction with, and impact on, other workplace influences such as job and organizational characteristics.[2]

Emotional Labour

Emotional labor is a work-specific role. It involves managing emotions during interactions (e.g., organizational outsiders) to achieve professional goals and conform to work role requirements. Labor expectations are explicitly stated in handbooks, training, financial goals. Emotional labor is a form of emotional regulation wherein workers are expected to display certain emotions as part of their job, and to promote organizational goals. The intended effects of these emotional displays are on other, targeted people, who can be clients, customers, subordinates or co-workers.[3] The concept of emotional labour was first used by sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1983) to analyze the jobs of flight attendants and bill collectors and has been defined as ''the effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally desired emotions during interpersonal transactions''. [4] According to Hochschild, Jobs, involving emotional labor are defined as those that:
(1) require face to face or voice-to-voice contact with the public;
(2) require the worker to produce an emotional state in another person;
(3) allow the employees to exercise a degree of control over their emotional activities.

Display rules refer to the organizational rules about what kind of emotion to express on the job.

Emotion regulation

Emotion regulation refers to the process of modifying one's own emotions and expressions. That is, the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions.

There are two kinds of Emotion regulation:

Antecedent-focused emotion regulation, which refers to modifying initial feelings by changing the situation or thecognition of the situation;
Response- focused emotion regulation, which refers to modifying behavior once emotions are experienced by suppressing, faking or amplifying an emotional response.

Forms of emotional labor

Research Conducted by Dr. Anya Johnson and Dr. Helena Nguyen at the University of Sydney found that workers have two approaches to emotional labor: surface acting and deep acting.

Employees can display organizationally-desired emotions by acting out the emotion. Such acting can take two forms:

1.Surface Acting involves "painting on" affective displays, or faking.Surface acting involves an employee's (presenting emotions on his or her "surface" without actually feeling them. The employee in this case puts on a facade as if the emotions are felt, like a "Personal"). Surface acting has been defined as when we fake emotions to adhere to "organizational display rules," which are the formal and informal norms that regulate the expression of workplace emotion. An example would be staying calm and courteous during a challenging situation with a caller, but deep down, you want to give him a piece of your mind.

2.Deep Acting wherein they modify their inner feelings to match the emotion expressions the organization requires. Deep acting is where we embrace the desired emotion, like walking a mile in the other person's shoes. For example, a customer service agent empathizing with a caller who wants to return a mattress because it hurts his back.

Though both forms of acting are internally false, they represent different intentions. That is, when engaging in deep acting, an actor attempts to modify feelings to match the required displays.[5]
 According to Ashforth and Humphrey (1993, p. 96), ''emotional labour is a double-edged sword''. In its functional capacity, emotional labour can serve to facilitate task effectiveness by providing the service worker with a means to regulate what are often dynamic and emergent interactions and thus provide the worker with a sense of increased self-efficacy. Emotional labour makes interactions with customers more predictable, and allows the service worker to maintain objectivity and emotional equilibrium by cognitively distancing him/herself from the implicated emotion. Emotional labour may

also facilitate self-expression by enabling the service worker to ''project at least some of the 'authentic self' into the enactment''.[6]

On the other hand, 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.[7]There is a wide discrepancy in the literature exploring the relationship between emotional labour and employee well-being. [8] for example found no relationship between emotional labour and job outcomes in a study of table servers, whereas Wharton (1993)[9] found that emotional labour actually enhanced job satisfaction. The relationship between emotional labour and job outcomes appears to be further complicated by the interaction of emotional labour with other work conditions such as job autonomy, job involvement, self-monitoring, and organizational identification.

In contrast Pugliesi (1999)[10] found an independent effect of job conditions and emotional labour on job strain, job satisfaction, and psychological distress. Morris and Feldman (1996, 1997) posit that one reason for the discrepancies noted in the literature is the incomplete operationalization of the emotional labour construct. They have proposed a more rigorous conceptualization of emotional labour that considers both its qualitative (emotional dissonance) and quantitative (frequency and duration of emotional display) components and predict three outcomes of emotional labour based on these components.

First, emotional exhaustion is predicted via emotional dissonance, based on the argument that emotional dissonance is a type of role conflict and role conflict has been shown to be a key antecedent of emotional exhaustion.

Second, job dissatisfaction due to emotional dissonance is predicted through person – environment fit theory, which suggests that not all workers would find the requirement to express organizationally desired emotions dissatisfying. Thus frequency and duration of emotional labour (quantitative components) may not be relevant to job dissatisfaction. Rather it is the workers who experience dissonance (qualitative component) who will experience decreased levels of job satisfaction.

A third outcome, role internalization, work roles requiring emotional labour also carry pressure to internalize role demands because failure to internalize organizational display rules will ultimately lead to poor perceived job performance and job loss. However, over identification with the work role so that too much emotional labour is expended in meeting high work demands can increase the risk of emotional exhaustion .The burnout companion to study and practice: A critical analysis. London: Taylor & Francis.) Zapf et al. (1999) propose that the requirement to display positive emotions, negative emotions, and sensitivity requirements are not necessarily stressful but may become so through emotional dissonance. Emotional dissonance was negatively associated with job satisfaction in all but the hospitality industry sample (Zapf et al., 1999).[11]

Since emotions are internal to a person, we can't always determine if a team member is surface acting or deep acting, but the following are a few tips that can help reduce their emotional exhaustion:

Keep an eye out for triggers of emotional exhaustion. If I notice an agent on a challenging call, I will ask the agent to take a quick break after they finish. I make myself available so that, if they want to, we can talk about it.

Provide soft skills training. During training classes, we emphasize the importance of our agents' emotional well-being and provide tips to help them get through a challenging day. We also provide agents with tools to de-escalate challenging callers, and ask them to consider: "Why is your caller upset? Based on the situation, how would you feel and react?" As part of the training, we discuss the importance of what our agents do and how they help callers.

Set a call center disconnect policy. It's good to have one in place. Make it known to agents. The steps to disconnect could start by making the caller aware of their behavior a few times, preferably at least three times, before letting them know that the call will be disconnected due to their behavior, and appropriately documenting the call.

A little humor goes a long way. Call center work and life can be stressful, so I try to add humor to our call center newsletters or send out an email to my team on Monday mornings with funny work-appropriate jokes or quotes.

The call center can be a demanding work environment—a place where some folks strive while others don't make it. Hopefully, the above suggestions can enhance your agents' daily work experience and overall job satisfaction.

Emotional Labour and Organizational Stressors

Studies indicate that emotional labor jobs require the worker to produce an emotional state in another person

Recent attempts to clarify the relationship between emotional labour and other organizational variables in the prediction of employee well-being have consistently reported that job related stressors, especially work overload, time pressures, and role conflicts, are more strongly associated with emotional exhaustion than client-related stressors such as interactions with difficult clients. Further Schaufeli and Enzmann argue that the high correlations reported between workload and emotional exhaustion may result from the conceptual overlap between task-related and client related job characteristics. For example, call center workers who are expected to provide a service to the customer (client related) and at the same time answer as many calls as possible (workload) may experience time pressure and/or role conflict.

Based on the dual level exchange theory of burnout, Zapf et al. (2001)[12] posit that one can expect to find interactions between organizational stressors and emotional demands in the development of emotional exhaustion due to the combined effect of lack of perceived client reciprocity when emotional demands are high, and lack of perceived organizational reciprocity when organizational stressors are high. However, a unique contribution of emotional demands to emotional exhaustion can also be expected, as emotional dissonance by its definition may act as a stressor independent of other organizational stressors. In Zapf et al.'s (2001)[13] comparison of the relationship between emotional labour variables, organizational variables, and social variables in the

prediction of burnout across a range of service jobs including call center work, a unique contribution of emotional labour variables to burnout was noted over and above the contribution of other variables. Interaction effects between task-related stressors and emotional dissonance were also noted in the prediction of emotional exhaustion.

Job resources are also relevant in the prediction of employee well-being. As found in the broader work stress literature researching psychosocial demands and employee well- being, job resources such as social support and autonomy also appear to moderate the relationship between emotional demands and employee well-being (see Zapf, 2002).[14]

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