Emotional Labor Strategy and Job Satisfaction: A Chinese Perspective

Xuan Jiang

Yanbian University

Zhou Jiang

Macquarie University

Dong Soo Park

Yeungnam University

Author Note

Xuan Jiang is an associate professor in the Department of Business Administration at Yanbian University. Zhou Jiang is a PhD candidate in the Department of Marketing and Management at Macquarie University. Dong Soo Park is a professor in the School of Business at Yeungnam University.

Abstract

We examined the relationship between emotional labor strategy (ELS) and job satisfaction (JS), and the moderating effects of job characteristics on this relationship, based on data collected from 291 supermarket employees. Results showed that the 2 types of ELS, surface acting (SA) and deep acting (DA), were negatively and positively related to JS, respectively. In general, job characteristics were found to moderate the relationship between ELS and JS.

Keywords: emotional labor strategy, surface acting, deep acting, job satisfaction, job characteristics, job routines, job autonomy, skill diversity.

Emotional Labor Strategy and Job Satisfaction: A Chinese Perspective

Emotional labor has become a popular domain of employment psychology in recent years. Hochschild (1983) defined *emotional labor* as "*the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display*" (p. 7). Hochschild proposed that to complete tasks, employees not only exert cognitive and physical effort (i.e., mental and manual labor), but also control and manage their emotions and expressions (i.e., emotional labor). It is crucial for employees, especially in the service industry, to treat customers cordially and effectively, and to provide high-quality service to accommodate customers' needs and expectations. When dealing with customers, they should smile and be courteous (Hochschild, 1983; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989). Nowadays, an increasing number of organizations try to promote employees' positive emotional expressions. Consequently, employees are encouraged to internalize their emotions and expressions to meet work requirements (Wharton & Erickson, 1993). However, as employees may possess different emotional abilities, the influences of these emotional tendencies on their reactions at work may be different. To our knowledge, the mechanisms affecting these influences have been examined in only a few studies. These influences may also vary according to individual job characteristics. To explore if this conjecture is true in China's service industry, we examined the relationship between employees' emotional labor strategy (ELS) and job satisfaction (JS), the most intensively investigated variable in organizational studies (Rainey, 2009), and the moderating effects of job characteristics on this relationship.

Literature Review

Emotional Labor Strategy (ELS)

According to Hochschild (1979, 1983), a service provider performs emotional labor using

one of two strategies: surface acting (SA) or deep acting (DA). SA involves employees complying with organizational display rules to modify their outward emotional display without changing their inner feelings (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2003; Hochschild, 1979, 1983). This often leads to emotional dissonance during the inner-outer interaction (Zapf, 2002). Conversely, employees adopting the DA strategy attempt to modify their inner feelings to manage their displayed emotions and thus match display rules (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2003; Hochschild, 1979, 1983), by concentrating on the positive aspects of the situation.

Job Satisfaction (JS)

A general sense of JS refers to an attitude or view of the work itself and the related environment. It may involve employees' satisfaction with work status, work pattern, work stress, and interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Smith and Wakeley (1972) pointed out that JS is an average emotional state caused by good or bad emotional experiences at work. Locke (1973) further emphasized that JS is a pleasant emotional state, which is the result of the appraisal of one's job or job experience. Companies value JS because it reflects "employees' reactions to what they receive" (Wright, 2001, p. 562) and may beneficially influence their further effort and performance.

Job Characteristics

According to Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman's (1959) two-factor theory, job characteristics can be classified into two categories: the hygiene factor (i.e., job context) relating to company policy and objective work conditions, and the motivation factor (i.e., job content) relating to a sense of achievement and responsibility. Turner and Lawrence (1965) identified five job characteristics influencing employees' JS and performance: skill diversity (SD), job

autonomy (JA), selective social interaction, knowledge and skills, and responsibility. Wright and Davis (2003) also found four job characteristics (i.e., job routines [JR], job goal specificity, feedback, and human resource development) that can impact on JS. From these characteristics, we adopted JR, JA, and SD to conduct our study.

Hypotheses

In line with the ELS theory, employees who display their true emotions without reluctance and pretending, are more likely to enjoy their work. Previous researchers have established a relationship between ELS and JS. For example, Grandey (2000) found that JS is negatively correlated with the SA strategy and positively correlated with the DA strategy. SA decreases employees' JS because it suppresses people's real emotions (Hochschild, 1983; Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989). DA increases JS because it can promote a personal sense of accomplishment (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002). Thus, we proposed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: SA will negatively impact on JS.

Hypothesis 2: DA will positively impact on JS.

Wharton (1993) stated that the relationship between ELS and JS may be moderated by job characteristics because they may promote or prevent employees' willingness to use ELS. These job characteristics may or may not meet different employees' needs (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), which may subsequently affect their JS. Employees may also have a differential view on skill diversity, or place different importance on JR and JA. These differences may influence employees' reactions to ELS. For example, Morris and Feldman (1996) pointed out that in the process of using ELS, employees with greater JA experience lower psychological oppression, thus increasing the level of JS. Thus, we proposed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: JR will moderate the relationship between ELS (SA and DA) and JS.

Hypothesis 4: JA will moderate the relationship between ELS (SA and DA) and JS.

Hypothesis 5: SD will moderate the relationship between ELS (SA and DA) and JS.

Method

Participants

Participants were 291 employees (response rate = 90.9%) who worked in nine large supermarkets in three cities in mainland China. Of the participants, 73.2% were women and 26.8% were men, with an average age of 39 years and an average work experience of 3.2 years.

Measures

Emotional labor strategy. SA was measured using four items of Diefendorff, Croyle, and Gosserand's (2005) 7-item scale. A sample item is "I just pretend to have the emotions I need to display for my job". DA was measured using all four items in Diefendorff et al.'s scale. A sample item is "I make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display toward others". Participants rated each item using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Reliabilities for SA and DA were .88 and .84, respectively.

Job characteristics. Each job characteristic, that is, JR, JA, and SD, was measured by four items developed by Morris and Feldman (1996). Reliabilities for JR, JA, and SD were .81, .81, and .87, respectively.

Job satisfaction. JS was measured using Smith, Kendall, and Hulin's (1969) 9-item scale. Reliability for this scale was .95.

Gender, age, and work experience were controlled in the data analysis. All items (except control variables) were responded to on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

Results

On the basis of a two-tailed test, the correlation between SA and JS was negative and significant, and the correlation between DA and JS was positive and nonsignificant. We then conducted a regression analysis (incorporating both SA and DA) with a one-tailed test. Results showed the regression coefficients of SA ($\beta = -.62$, $p < .001$) and DA ($\beta = .09$, $p < .05$) were all significant. Thus, Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 were supported.

To test the moderating effects of job characteristics on the relationships between JS and SA and DA, a series of three-step hierarchical regression analyses were performed separately for each moderator. Gender, age, and work experience were entered in the first step. SA, DA, and one of the moderating variables were entered in the second step. The interaction terms (the cross-product of the moderating variable with SA and DA separately) were entered in the last step. The moderating effects would be confirmed if the interaction terms were statistically significant. Results showed that both JR and JA could moderate the relationships of JS with SA ($\beta = .13$, $p < .01$; $\beta = -.21$, $p < .001$) for JR and JA, respectively, and DA ($\beta = .10$, $p < .05$; $\beta = -.12$, $p < .01$) for JR and JA, respectively. SD was found to moderate the relationship between SA and JS ($\beta = .15$, $p < .01$), but not the relationship between DA and JS ($\beta = -.02$, nonsignificant).

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, we examined how employees' emotional strategies influence their job satisfaction, and how job characteristics moderate these influences. Hypothesis 3 and 4 were fully supported, while Hypothesis 5 was partially supported. Overall, the results of our study produced meaningful findings.

First, although SA has a negative effect on JS, DA has a positive effect on JS. The results verify Grandey's (2000) theoretical model and are consistent with Van Maanen & Kunda's

(1989) and Brotheridge & Lee's (2002) findings. Our findings suggest that employees who use

SA may have to suppress their true feelings to comply with organizational display rules. This

leads to a reduced level of JS. Because employees using DA are able to maintain a consistency

between their true feelings and display rules, this is helpful in improving their JS. In comparison

with employees using the SA strategy, they may experience less emotional exhaustion.

Second, job characteristics, in general, moderate the relationship between ELS and JS.

According to our findings, a lower level of JR may be helpful in improving JS among employees

who adopt the SA strategy, and the reverse is true for those who adopt the DA strategy. In a low

JA situation, employees who adopt the SA strategy are more dissatisfied with their jobs than

those who adopt the DA strategy. They tend to be more satisfied with their jobs. In addition,

employees preferring SA are more likely to have higher JS when their position requires a low

level of SD. In contrast, it appears that SD does not affect the JS of employees who prefer DA.

Our empirical findings generated from the Chinese supermarket industry suggest that

managers should deal with supermarket service employees according to their ELS preference.

When creating positions, supermarket managers can be encouraged to consider the levels of JR,

JA, and SD for work positions in conjunction with ELS. In particular, organizations should

employ effective measures to help employees who prefer SA to improve their levels of JS. For

example, allowing employees to work more autonomously, endeavoring to reduce job

routineness when designing a position, and considering allocating these employees relatively

simple tasks, which require less diverse skills.

There are several limitations in this study. First, the single-source data reported by

employees may have resulted in common method bias. Future researchers could use data from

different sources, for example, taking into account both data reported by employees and rated by

supervisors. Second, we investigated employees' job satisfaction in a specific time and did not

reveal their change of job satisfaction as job characteristics vary. Future researchers may employ

longitudinal methods to observe if SA-oriented employees can significantly improve their level

of JS when job characteristics change. In addition, future researchers can investigate the

relationship of emotion-related characteristics with other work behaviors and attitudes in

different contexts.

References

Ashforth, B. E., & Humphrey, R. H. (1993). Emotional labor in service roles: The influence of

identity. *Academy of Management Review, 18*, 88-115. **http://doi.org/df4qpz**

Brotheridge, C. M., & Lee, R. T. (2002). Testing a conservation of resources model of the

dynamics of emotional labor. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 7*, 57-67.

http://doi.org/fr7nh5

Diefendorff, J. M., Croyle, M. H., & Gosserand, R. H. (2005). The dimensionality and

antecedents of emotional labor strategies. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 66*, 339-357.

http://doi.org/czn

Grandey, A. A. (2000). Emotional regulation in the workplace: A new way to conceptualize

emotional labor. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 5*, 95-110.

http://doi.org/fhfzhc

Grandey, A. A. (2003). When "the show must go on": Surface acting and deep acting as

determinants of emotional exhaustion and peer-rated service delivery. *Academy of

Management Journal, 46*, 86-96. **http://doi.org/cbz6gz**

Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1976). Motivation through the design of work: Test of a

theory. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 16*, 250-279.

http://doi.org/hbs

Herzberg, F., Mausner, B., & Snyderman, B. B. (1959). *The motivation to work* (2nd ed.). New

York, NY: Wiley.

Hochschild, A. R. (1979). Emotion work, feeling rules, and social structure. *American Journal of

Sociology*, *85,* 551-575.

Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley,

CA: University of California Press.

Locke, E. A. (1973). Satisfiers and dissatisfiers among white-collar and blue-collar employees.

Journal of Applied Psychology, *58*, 67-76. **http://doi.org/cpzcvk**

Morris, J. A., & Feldman, D. C. (1996). The dimensions, antecedents, and consequences of

emotional labor. *Academy of Management Review*, *21,* 986-1010. **http://doi.org/fxbjt6**

Rafaeli, A., & Sutton, R. I. (1987). Expression of emotion as part of the work role. *Academy of*

Management Review, *12,* 23-37. **http://doi.org/fq22dj**

Rainey, H. G. (2009). *Understanding and managing public organizations* (4th ed.). San

Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Smith, H. C., & Wakeley, J. H. (1972). *Psychology of industrial behavior* (3rd ed.). New York,

NY: McGraw-Hill.

Smith, P. C., Kendall, L. M., & Hulin, C. L. (1969). *The measurement of satisfaction in work*

and retirement: A strategy for the study of attitudes. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.

Turner, A. N., & Lawrence, P. R. (1965). *Industrial jobs and the worker: An investigation of*

response to task attributes. Boston, MA: Harvard University, Division of Research,

Graduate School of Business Administration.

Van Maanen, J., & Kunda, G. (1989). Real feelings: Emotional expression and organizational

culture. In L. L. Cummings & B.M. Staw (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior*

(Vol. 11, pp. 43-103). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Wharton, A. S. (1993). The affective consequences of service work: Managing emotions on the

job. *Work and Occupations, 20*, 205-232. **http://doi.org/ddssvt**

Wharton, A. S., & Erickson, R. J. (1993). Managing emotions on the job and at home:

Understanding the consequences of multiple emotional roles. *Academy of Management*

Review, 18, 457-486. **http://doi.org/ftj3g8**

Wright, B. E. (2001). Public-sector work motivation: A review of the current literature and a

revised conceptual model. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 11*,

559-586.

Wright, B. E., & Davis, B. S. (2003). Job satisfaction in the public sector: The role of the work

environment. *The American Review of Public Administration, 33*, 70-90.

http://doi.org/bdbvp4

Zapf, D. (2002). Emotion work and psychological well-being: A review of the literature and

some conceptual considerations. *Human Resource Management Review, 12*, 237-268.

http://doi.org/gt3