

# EMOTIONAL LABOR

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## Abstract:

Emotional labor involves managing emotions so that they are consistent with organizational or occupational display rules, regardless of whether they are discrepant with internal feelings.

The intended effects of these emotional displays are on other, targeted people, who can be clients, customers, subordinates or co-workers. There is empirical evidence that higher levels of emotional labor demands are not uniformly rewarded with higher wages.

**Key words:** emotional labor, organization, displays rules.

**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.[\[1\]](#)

Emotional labor involves managing emotions so that they are consistent with organizational or occupational display rules, regardless of whether they are discrepant with internal feelings.[\[1\]](#)

Jobs involving emotional labors 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.[\[2\]](#)

**Display rules** refer to the organizational rules about what kind of emotion to express on the job.[\[3\]](#)

**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.<sup>[4]</sup>

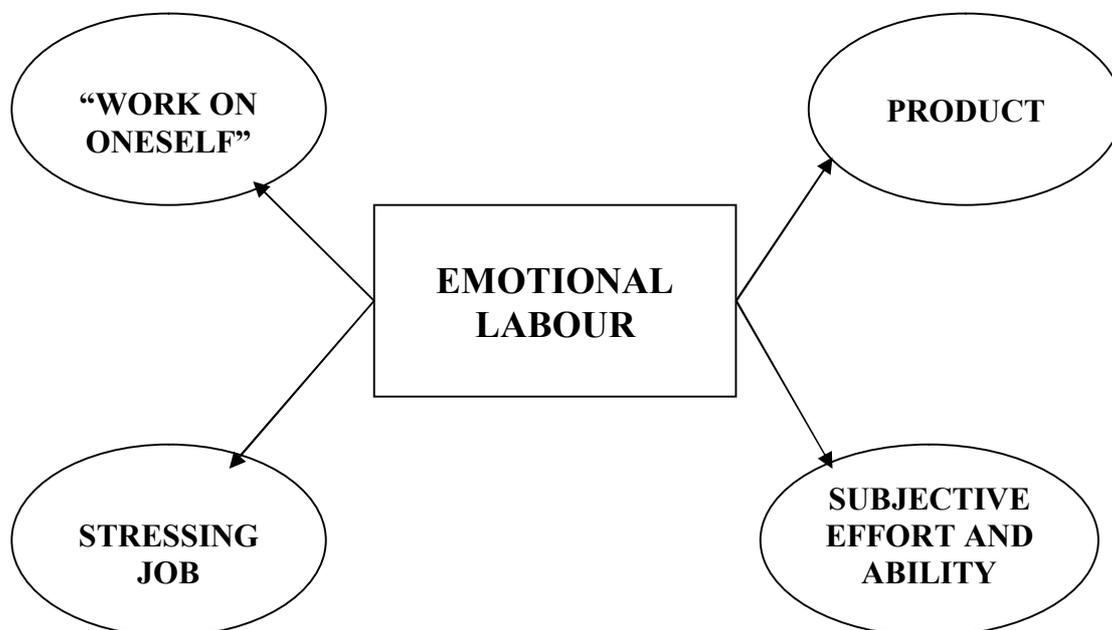
There are two kinds of Emotion regulation:<sup>[1]</sup>

**1) antecedent-focused emotion regulation**, which refers to modifying initial feelings by changing the situation or the cognitions of the situation;

**2) response-focused emotion regulation**, which refers to modifying behavior once emotions are experienced by suppressing, faking or amplifying an emotional response.

### Meanings of ‘emotional labor’

Emotional labor is used in the following meanings:



*Figure 1 Meanings of emotional labor*

#### **A. Emotional labor as product**

“Emotional labor” here essentially refers to the result (someone else’s emotion transformed by the production process), that is the expression is used in the same way as we say: “It’s a craft”, or “She did a really good job”.

#### **B. Emotional labor as subjective effort and ability**

There exists a variety of terms, often used as synonyms, to indicate the capacities required in order to carry out this work, including above all: “acute and objective perception”, “awareness of the situation”, “sensitivity” and “intuitive knowledge” (considered by many as a supreme form of intelligence). Someone who possesses this

quality does not slog away, following slow mental processes, but “knows” or “sees” clearly.

We can assess the value of certain job tasks by considering how much it costs to master ourselves to do them!

### **C. Emotional labor as a stressing job**

Another important and common meaning of the term is “work that implies suffering”, which makes one feel painful, distressing emotions. Involvement/ distress is often felt together. But women workers even feel the need to put themselves at stake emotionally.

There are events - sometimes even pleasurable - that severely test the heart, a person can feel real pain and even die of a broken heart, as doctors and sociologists have confirmed. Moreover, it is to be expected that all-encompassing and instant understanding is matched by a sudden and powerful outpouring of energy, at times a destructive explosion. On the other hand, the slow reasoning of the mind correspond to slower wear and tear, and the same can be said of the body (on the contrary, emotional recovery can be slower and difficult). It is a question of equilibrium.

In the meaning given above, “emotional labor” defines the effect of the work on the emotions, and can therefore be applied to all jobs because they all have this effect, to a greater or lesser degree.

### **D. Emotional labor as ‘work on oneself’**

Work involving observation/perception is also work on oneself; this is certainly more intense, the greater the challenge to one’s emotions and therefore forms a significant part of such jobs. The expression “emotional labor” denotes this work on oneself, in the officially accredited usage -in psychoanalytical language - in order to process/digest one’s own emotions within oneself. The expression is also used for inner, spiritual searching. This “emotional labor” was discussed at the meeting and was viewed as an activity to be carried out consciously, both to “overcome the limits of our ways of approaching people, influenced by our background, behavior, experiences”.

It is this lack of social skill in training the emotions that defines the high value of

the job.

### **Emotional labor in organizations**

In past, emotional labor demands and display rules were viewed as a characteristics of particular occupations, such as restaurant workers, cashiers, hospital workers, bill collectors, counselors, secretaries, and nurses. However, display rules have been conceptualized not only as role requirements of particular occupational groups, but also as interpersonal job demands, which are shared by many kinds of occupations.<sup>[8]</sup>

### **Determinants of using emotional labor**

1. Societal, occupational, and organizational norms. For example, empirical evidence indicates that in typically "busy" stores there is more legitimacy to express negative emotions, than there is in typically "slow" stores, in which employees are expected to behave accordingly to the display rules;<sup>[9]</sup> and so, that the emotional culture to which one belongs influences the employee's commitment to those rules.<sup>[10]</sup>

2. Dispositional traits and inner feeling on the job; such as employee's emotional expressiveness, which refers to the capability to use facial expressions, voice, gestures, and body movements to transmit emotions;<sup>[11]</sup> or the employee's level of career identity (the importance of the career role to one's self-identity), which allows him or her to express the organizationally-desired emotions more easily, (because there is less discrepancy between his or her expressed behavior and emotional experience when engage their work).<sup>[12]</sup>

3. Supervisory regulation of display rules; That is, Supervisors are likely to be important definers of display rules at the job level, given their direct influence on worker's beliefs about high-performance expectations. Moreover, supervisors' impressions of the need to suppress negative emotions on the job influence the employees' impressions of that display rule.<sup>[8]</sup>

### **Implications of using emotional labor**

Studies indicate that emotional labor jobs require the worker to produce an emotional state in another person. For example, flight attendants are encouraged to create good cheer in passengers and bill collectors promote anxiety in debtors.

Research on emotional contagion has shown that exposure to an individual expressing positive or negative emotions can produce a corresponding change in the emotional state of the observer. Accordingly, a recent study reveals that employees' display of positive emotions is indeed positively related to customers' positive affect.[13]

Positive affective display in service interactions, such as smiling and conveying friendliness, are positively associated with important customer outcomes, such as intention to return, intention to recommend a store to others, and perception of overall service quality.[14]

There is evidence that emotion labor may lead to employee's emotional exhaustion and burnout over time, and may also reduce employee's job satisfaction. That is, higher degree of using emotion regulation on the job is related to higher levels of employees' emotional exhaustion,[10] and lower levels of employees' job satisfaction.[15]

There is empirical evidence that higher levels of emotional labor demands are not uniformly rewarded with higher wages. Rather, the reward is dependent on the level of general cognitive demands required by the job. That is, occupations with high cognitive demands evidence wage returns with increasing emotional labor demands; whereas occupations low in cognitive demands evidence a wage "penalty" with increasing emotional labor demands.[16]

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