

Chapter 2

Emotional Labor and Exhaustion

ABSTRACT

The focus of Chapter 2 is two-fold: emotional labor and emotional exhaustion. The chapter defines and describes each of these concepts in-depth and explores their many interrelationships. Drawing on the work of Grandey, the chapter provides definitions, examples, and related concepts for emotional labor (EL), which pertains to the regulation of one's own emotions within the particular context of the workplace, offering a conceptualization of the notion. This requires an understanding of both surface and deep acting, both of which are discussed. The chapter also explores the consequences of EL on both the individual and the organization. This leads into a discussion of emotional exhaustion (EE) which is likewise conceptualized within the chapter. There are six areas related to EE which the chapter explores: workload, fairness, reward, community, control, and value. It also examines the consequences of EE, briefly introducing its role in the phenomenon of burnout (which is examined more in-depth in another chapter).

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 established that emotion can play a powerful role in an individual's experiences, including those experiences that occur in the workplace. The individual's personal experiences and the influence those can have on the organization demonstrate the complex interplay of factors that influence the

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individual's relationship with the organization and vice versa. Whether an individual's job is obviously emotionally intense, such as working in emergency medicine where lives are often on the line, or not so much, such as sanitation disposal, the individual will have emotional experiences.

Most jobs have an emotional component to them, particularly those jobs which require interaction with other people. As Chen (2012) notes in her study of the emotional labor of librarians, employees who work with customers on the front line are expected to smile, possess good manners, and practice good customer service behaviors; those behaviors are a critical part of the service or product that the employees are selling or providing. One might say the behavior of the front-line employee is part of the package. Furthermore, at least in America, phrases such as "the customer is always right" and "service with a smile" have permeated cultural practices and "underscore expectations between customers and employees in a variety of business settings" (Billingsley, 2016, p. 641).

These expectations are often both explicit – as directed by one's manager, for example – and implicit, especially on the part of customers; they expect to be treated well and fairly, regardless of their own behaviors. This requires the self-monitoring of one's own emotions and behaviors – especially if the customer is upset or obviously not in control of their emotions and behaviors. This self-monitoring behavior is known as *emotional labor*. In jobs and fields where there is high emotional labor, especially the customer-service industry – with which librarianship shares many elements in common – there is the risk of *emotional exhaustion*. This chapter will explore these two concepts, *emotional labor* and *emotional exhaustion*, to provide a better understanding of the impact - one might even say the toll or cost – of emotion in work.

EMOTIONAL LABOR

The word *labor* undoubtedly creates some very definite pictures in some people's minds. A certain association is made regarding labor if one is a parent or knows others who have gone through the process of labor and delivery. Recalling that punishment in this country and others used to include being sentenced to hard labor likely also creates a certain association. The phrase *manual labor* likewise evokes clear images. In all of these associations it is

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