

# Examining Emotional Labor in COVID-19

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Self-efficacy not only had a significant positive impact on employees' job- and life-related well-being but also played a fully mediating role between deep acting and life satisfaction, with a partial mediating role between deep acting and job satisfaction. Job-related well-being also played a fully mediating role between deep acting and life satisfaction, with a partial mediating role between deep acting and job satisfaction. It is important for restaurant employees to develop deep acting skills and improve self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Restaurant managers must establish a healthy working environment by providing better job support and creating a more relaxed working atmosphere.

COVID-19

self-efficacy

job satisfaction

## 1. Emotional Labor

Emotional labor includes the management of emotions and expressions to comply with organizational display rules, which include two emotional labor strategies: surface acting and deep acting [1]. Many researchers have enriched and improved this topic, especially in the service industry. Two emotional labor strategies have been identified: (1) surface acting refers to employees' modification of only their observable expressions to adhere to expectations about emotional expression and (2) deep acting involves the modification of both felt and underlying emotions to adhere to rules about emotional expression [2].

Emotional labor is particularly important for interactive service jobs [3] because of the mismatch between customer expectations and staff behaviors. Judge et al. and Scott and Barnes found that employee mood was an important mechanism that could explain the relationship between emotional labor and its consequences [4][5]. Customers, especially in chain restaurants, tend to expect high-quality service from the staff, much more than surface service behaviors. Emotional labor performance has been found to be positively related to work stress [6][7]. Emotive dissonance can have negative outcomes such as low self-esteem, depression, work alienation, and burnout [8][9]. Because of its negative impact, emotional labor has been compared to "surrendering one's heart" [7]. Hence, "hypocrisy pay" for employees performing emotional labor has been advocated [10]. Employees can thus develop skills that enable both surface and deep acting [11]. Compared to surface acting, deep acting leads to a reduction in stress because the degree of emotive dissonance is forced to become lower [12]. Therefore, it is possible that training a deep acting ability can diminish the negative consequences of emotional labor on an employee's psychological health.

## 2. Conceptualizing the Construct of Well-Being

Well-being is a psychological state that may lead to a pleasure-filled life. The construct of well-being includes: (1) individual well-being that relates to job satisfaction and burnout and (2) organizational well-being that relates to performance and withdrawal behaviors [13]. Our study was focused on individual well-being, which reflects the level of individual psychological arousal and is thus an effective index to measure mental health.

Well-being also reflects a person's job and life satisfaction that helps maintain an effective functioning in the workplace. In this sense, well-being contributes to more than just one's state of health [14]. First, job satisfaction relies on a person's cognitive evaluation of a job's quality based on pay, coworkers, and/or supervisors. A good job, for most individuals, can fulfill many basic needs (e.g., economic needs and relationships). Second, life satisfaction reflects an individuals' appraisal of his/her quality of life regardless of how it is achieved [15], which is a cognitive component of subjective well-being (SWB) [16]. In addition, individual motivation affects well-being, and different tasks relate to different types of well-being [17]. Individuals' pursuit of goals that are in line with their internal motives can generate higher life satisfaction.

Existing research has heavily focused on the effects of emotional labor on employees. For example, Grandey argued that emotional labor was positively related to employee burnout, dissatisfaction, and withdrawal behaviors [18]. Surface acting was found to engender emotional dissonance, an internal state of uncomfortable tension resulting from experiencing a psychological discrepancy between genuine inner feelings and feigned emotions displayed [18]. In contrast, employees who engage in deep acting consciously strive to sincerely understand their customers and empathize with them [19]. Transforming one's emotional state can involve focusing on the positive aspects of a situation, thinking about events that conjure up a desired emotion, and cognitively reappraising a situation more positively. All of these activities reflect deep-acting emotional labor [18], which could make employees increase their perception of job and life satisfaction. Employees who use a surface-acting strategy could modify their emotion expression with work pressure while their inner psychological state remained unchanged. However, employees using a deep acting strategy could make cognitive and emotional changes.

Employees have been evidenced to work for 8 hours per workday on average, with about 35% additional work during weekends and holidays. It is obvious that work has been filling large parts of our lives by playing a significant role, and job satisfaction thus directly influences life satisfaction. As Steve Jobs said, "...the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work".

### **3. Social Cognitive Theory and Self-Efficacy**

SCT is one of the most common behavioral change theories used to explain human behavior. It does so in terms of a three-way, dynamic, and reciprocal model in which personal factors, environmental influences, and behaviors continually interact [20][21]. People learn through both experience and by observing the actions of others and the respective results [22].

According to Bandura, self-efficacy is "an individual's conviction (or confidence) about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a

given context” [23]. SCT implies that self-efficacy is a crucial and proximal predictor of behavior. Self-efficacy beliefs indirectly affect behaviors through their impact on goal intentions. In recent years, self-efficacy has gained considerable attention in the field of organizational behavior [24]. By expanding the behavioral management approach with SCT and self-efficacy, it is expected that a more comprehensive understanding and effective management of human resources will be possible. Empirical studies have reported that self-efficacious employees are more self-confident and have positive attitudes toward their work even in difficult work situations [25][26]. Self-efficacious employees typically deliver favorable work-related performance [27][28] and are more proactive with their career choices, more effective in the decision-making process [29], and better at job attendance [30]. In contrast, employees who are not self-efficacious are more passive with their work, slackening their efforts prematurely with a higher likelihood of failure with their assigned tasks [27][31]. Meanwhile, because self-efficacious employees tend to have a more positive attitude toward their lives and work, they experience lower stress and anxiety. They are consequently less likely to be plagued by negative environmental and psychological situations. Xanthopoulou et al. reported that the negative impact of emotional demands/emotion-rule dissonance on work engagement was stronger for individuals with low self-efficacy [32].

Studies have shown that self-efficacy is an important source of happiness, and it has a strong relationship with well-being [33][34]. It differs from self-concept or self-esteem and is not meant to be a fixed ability. It can be viewed as a generative capability of organizing sub-skills in a way that makes effective action possible. Therefore, beliefs about personal efficacy and not just skills are key factors in determining how a person performs in a given situation [35]. People with low self-efficacy might believe that accidents and incidents are more complicated and dire than they really are. This aspect can lead to anxiety, depression, helplessness, reduced academic performance, or low motivation. Rodebaugh and Goldin et al. showed that in socially anxious individuals, lower self-efficacy predicts poorer behavioral performance of speech tasks and interactions with others [36][37]. However, high self-efficacy is related, for example, to the regulation of stress, higher self-esteem, better well-being, good physical conditioning, and adaptation to and recovery from acute and chronic diseases [38][39]. Moreover, a high sense of self-efficacy is associated with positive feelings about one’s self, which facilitate cognitive processes, academic achievements, confidence, and motivation [40]. Raggi et al. revealed that having a sense of control over events and high self-efficacy leads to higher levels of psychological well-being and life satisfaction [41]. People possessing feelings of high control over their lives and those who have achieved self-recognition have greater confidence in their abilities, better health, good well-being, and high satisfaction [34].

In summary, self-efficacy can effectively predict SWB. Salami’s finding represented a significant relationship between self-efficacy, happiness, and well-being [42].

## 4. Self-Efficacy and Its Mediating Role

According to Hochschild, emotional labor can cause feelings of estrangement, alienation, and inauthenticity due to the gap between felt and feigned emotions [1]. Thus, stress is likely to emerge. According to SCT, self-efficacy is built on the experience of self-mastery, implying that personal successes can instill perceptions of self-efficacy [26].

Following this logic, a good understanding of display rules and successful emotive acting can help employees see themselves as efficacious on the job because service interactions become more predictable and unpleasant service encounters can be averted [43].

Although individuals can perform under unfavorable circumstances due to self-mastery, it is less likely for those employees to create and maintain a positive psychological status toward the self [44]. According to the job demand–resources model of occupational stress, which explains how job resources decrease the likelihood of employee disengagement even after employees encounter overload [45] when perceiving negative display rules and surface acting are embodied in work roles, the provision of job resources can subdue negative reactions to self-estrangement, alienation, and inauthenticity. Self-efficacy is thus deemed an important personal resource with which one can cope with job stress. Therefore, an increase in perceived self-efficacy may enable employees to view emotional labor as a means to an end (i.e., rewards and recognition) rather than a stressful act [46][47].

Self-efficacy affects the relationship between emotional labor and employees' well-being [46][48]. Emotional labor requires employees to suppress their inner feelings in order to display appropriate emotions, which may make employees feel inauthentic. However, employees may offset the costs of false emotional displays in a goal of achieving a successful emotional management [46][48]. According to Hsieh and Guy, emotional labor is a double-edged sword [49], and self-efficacy could be the mechanism used to help employees effectively wield it [43]. Hsieh examined the role of job resources in explaining the effects of emotional labor requirements on burnout and found that social support successfully mediates the deleterious effect of negative display rules [50]. Self-efficacy is an important personal resource to deal with the drawbacks of emotional labor.

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